



# SARE

Nos. 6 & 7

June/December 1983

KDN 1122/83

southeast asian review of english

Cover: "The Lotus" by Sharifah Zuriah Aljeffri

*Southeast Asian Review of English* is published twice a year in June and December. Contributions are welcome: articles, reviews, review articles, essay reviews, checklists relating to Commonwealth or Third World literatures in English, poems, stories and other creative work, English translations of poems and stories written in any of the Southeast Asian languages (submitted together with the originals), English-language studies, and commentary on the cultural and intellectual aspects of the Southeast Asian world. Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced on quarto paper. These should follow the MLA Style Sheet. Great care will be taken with manuscripts submitted. The Editorial Board cannot undertake to return any manuscript unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope and return postage.

Single copy: local M\$8.00, abroad US\$6.00.  
Subscription: M\$8.00 local, US\$6.00 abroad;  
Institution: M\$15.00 local, US\$10.00 abroad.

Copyright: No part of *Southeast Asian Review of English* may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission from the publisher.

Copyright © 1983 by Maclals

MACLALS

SOUTHEAST ASIAN REVIEW OF ENGLISH

No. 6 & 7 June/December 1983

Editors

Irene Wong  
Margaret Yong  
Wong Phui Nam

Department of English  
University of Malaya  
Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia



## CONTENTS

The Case of English in Malaysian Fiction: A Look at K.S. Maniam's <i>The Return</i> Irene F.H. Wong & Margaret Yong	1
Poems Robert Yeo	23
Prefixes and Suffixes in Advertising Language Su Soon Peng	26
<i>Short Story</i> : Project: Graft Man K.S. Maniam	37
Judith Wright on Man-Nature Kinship and Creativity Alur Janakiram	52
"Up Against Tradition" — Themes in Recent Singapore Short Stories Alice Samuel Pillay	69
Reading the Stage Directions, not the Dialogue: S. Kon's Unconventional Theatre Margaret Yong	75
Some Observations on the Phenomenon of Code- Mixing in Malaysia Irene F.H. Wong	81
Improving Language Skills Through the Study of Literature Carmel Heah	90
Maclal's English Language Project	95

The English Language Learning Situation: Some Observations Victoria Yan	96
Review: Howe & Doraisamy's <i>New Guided English</i> , Books 4 & 5 Saratha Param	100
Poems Dilip K. Sen	104
Maclals Forum: Writers, Critics and Performers— Malaysian Writing in English	105

THE CASE OF ENGLISH IN MALAYSIAN FICTION:  
A LOOK AT K.S. MANIAM'S *THE RETURN*\*

by

Irene F.H. Wong and Margaret Yong

English was first introduced into Malaysia in the 19th century, as a result of British intervention and control in the country. From being a foreign language, it spread rapidly, especially in the urban areas and with the establishment of English-medium education, and created an elite class of English-speaking Malaysians, many of whom looked upon English as their dominant language. They were eager to learn the language and the culture associated with it, and to learn it well. The highest compliment one could pay them, as far as their use of English was concerned, was to say that they spoke and wrote like native speakers of British English. This tendency of modelling their language on that of the educated British speaker, who came to Malaysia in considerable numbers to take up highly visible and influential positions in the administration of the country, continued for a long time. English was the prestigious language, and it gave one extra prestige if one could speak and write it well.

However, the multi-racial and multi-lingual composition of the country could not be overlooked for too long. The different conditions under which English was used in the country began to exert their influence on the English-speaking Malaysians. As much as English was their dominant language (and for some the only language they were literate in), they still lived in an environment where home languages continued to be spoken and needed to be used in their appropriate situations. These home languages gradually began to shape and modify the English used by Malaysians to a variety that was noticeably different from that of standard British English and which



has by now come to be known by the label 'Malaysian English'.

This localized variety of English was probably first formed in the playgrounds of the English-medium schools. As Platt and Weber note (1980:20), English, although an alien language, was also a unifying force and served as the lingua franca in these schools between the various language groups represented. It probably began as a pidginized variety of English, used by school children who had not yet had sufficient exposure to the language to use it with any degree of competence. But this pidginized variety of English, often supplemented by transfer features from the children's vernaculars, was adequate for the limited functions it was made to serve. It was reserved for very informal use among peer groups, standard English being aimed at for all other occasions.

While the students improved in their competence in English, due to greater exposure to and practice in the language, so also did this localized variety of English expand to serve a wider range of communicative functions. However, for reasons not too clear to linguists at the moment, their localized variety of English was not allowed to reach the level of their proficiency in standard English. English-speaking Malaysians seemed to enjoy having two varieties of English to use — standard English for most occasions when English was to be used, and the localized variety of English for a small range of intimate situations. Thus, as Platt and Weber point out (1980:20):

... although the student might continue to the highest level of secondary school and even continue to tertiary education, there would be a familiar form of English appropriate for use with friends, a form where the copula (forms of 'to be') did not always occur where it would in standard English, where one used the particle *la*, where one emphasized by juggling the word order, e.g. *This kind cannot get*



instead of *We (or You) cannot get this kind,* where one used expressions based on the locally used languages such as: *This one can wear with many thing one from Chinese,* or 'Sri Delima's' example (New Straits Times, 22 August 1975) *You wait here, I will go and come from Indian or Not good like that, afterwards people talk from Malay.* 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.

Tongue (1974:11) describes the use of these two varieties of English in the following way:

In fact, formal and informal speech in Singapore and Malaysia are so different as almost to warrant being treated as two *dialects*. Anyone who has been only a short time in these countries will have had the remarkable experience of listening to a speaker who has been conversing in near-native discourse suddenly switch to very informal ESM /his term for the English of Singapore and Malaysia/ when he speaks to someone familiar only with the sub-standard form, or chats on the telephone with an intimate friend. This is a dramatic incident - everything seems to change, including grammar, vocabulary, voice quality, pace of utterance, and even gestures. The sub-standard forms, it is interesting to note, are also picked up by foreigners who have been in the region for some time and used as 'intimacy signals' when conversing with their local friends.

Political independence in 1957 gave a further impetus to the use and development of this localized

variety of English, often at the expense of standard English. The British administrators who had provided the model for educated native-speaker English gradually left the country as qualified Malaysians replaced them in their jobs. Soon it was left to the English-speaking Malaysians themselves to set their own standards for the use of English. Moreover, Bahasa Malaysia, the national language, soon took over all official functions from English, and English began to lose some of the prestige it had had. The gap between standard English and Malaysian English began to narrow as the latter increased in use and range of functions. It is now Malaysian English which most English-speaking Malaysians identify with and see as a symbol of their identity as English-speaking Malaysians. This variety of the language continues to grow, supplemented by features from the local languages and from the local context, and also by the creativity of its users.

It was only after about a century and a half of English in the country that Malaysians began to venture into the field of creative writing in the language. Previously it had been left to the expatriate Britisher who had been in the region for some time, but what may properly be called local writing in English did not begin until the mid 20th century. It had taken well over a century for Malaysians to look upon their adopted language, English, as their own, to use for the expression of their creative instincts.

In the early stages of this local writing in English, writers wanted to show the Malaysianness of their works not only by using local characters placed in local settings, but also by manipulating the language to show this local colouring. Perhaps the most extreme attempts in this direction were made by the earlier poets to consciously evolve a localized idiom in English, called ENGMALCHIN (a combination of English, Malay and Chinese). One example is Wang Gungwu's 'Ahmad', which uses a mixture of Malay and English:



Allah has been kind,  
 Orang puteh has been kind.  
 Only yesterday his brother said,  
 Can get lagi satu wife, lah!

(Thumboo 1970)

In drama, too, the playwrights had to make a choice between using standard English at one extreme, or the localized variety of English at the other, or go for some type of compromise between the two. Edward Dorall's 'A Tiger is Loose in Our Community' is well known for its extensive use of this localized variety of English, for the author maintained that the playwright's dialogue should be a faithful record of the language as it is spoken in real life.

This paper focuses on prose writing, where there is both narrative and dialogue. In *22 Malaysian Stories*, edited by Lloyd Fernando, we have a group of writers with varying representations of this Malaysian English in their works. The story with the most extensive use of this localized variety of English is 'Everything's Arranged' by Siew Yue Killingley, who carried out research on Malaysian English for her M.A. dissertation. Notice the following excerpt from it:

Rukumani asked Devanayagam, 'This time you think you can write or not? Can send to Amy's house, what. My mother likes her mother. I can easily go there to get your letters. But I think better you don't put my name outside. Can just put 'Miss Amy Wong'. She knows your writing and won't open.'

'I think so can,' replied Devanayagam, 'but helluva difficult man. See ah, my sisters brothers all, running all over the house and if I write they all ask if I'm learning and want to look. Also ah, if I go to post letter that clerk at the post office can see me. He's a

joker, so sure tell my father I send love letters. But still, try lah!'

(Fernando 1968:186)

There are several very interesting features of this localized variety of English to be found in the above excerpt. Firstly, there is the use of particles, so commonly heard in this colloquial variety of English in Malaysia. They seem to have no denotative or referential function, but mainly serve emotive purposes. The examples to be found in the excerpt above are *what* in "Can send to Amy's house, what", *ah* in "See ah, my sisters brothers all, running all over the house ..." and "Also ah, if I go to post letter ...", and *lah* at the very end of the passage. Then there is the feature of the omission of constituents which are considered redundant since they are easily 'understood' from the context. There is the omission of the object of the sentence in "Can send the letter to Amy's house, what" and in "She knows your writing and won't open it". There is the omission of the subject in "You can send to Amy's house, what", in "You can just put 'Miss Amy Wong'", in "He's a joker, so he's sure tell my father I send love letters", and in "But still, I try lah!". There are also omissions of minor constituents which would be grammatically required in standard English but which carry little or no meaning, for example the article in "... if I go to post the letter ...", the *to* in "... so sure to tell my father I send love letters", and the auxiliary *will* or *can* in "But still, I will/can try lah!". In addition, there are expressions which are typical of this localized variety of English in "... better you don't ...", "I think so can", "my sisters brothers all", "they all", and "I'm learning".

Another two excerpts from the same story are given below, to further illustrate the use of this localized variety of English in Malaysian prose fiction:

'Suppose you tell them you want to go for shows. Then can simply go somewhere and just



scribble a note to me. Don't think I'm so hard up ah, but since I suffer for you, at least should write to me when you're free.'

'Okay, okay, lah! Not that I don't want ah, but very difficult. Also, if you know I love, then should be enough, what; what for want to write the whole time?'

(Fernando 1968:186-7)

'Better you don't put ideas into young people's heads', advised the man, who was probably the husband of the woman. 'When we were young our mother never mentioned the word "marriage" to any of my seven sisters until two days before they were to be married. Everything fix first, then talk. If not, all the young people think of is girl friends, boy friends, what for?'

'Ah,' sighed the wife, 'but nowadays different. Especially when someone like Girlie, so pretty, going to get university degree and all, better to fix everything while still possible to control. Once they grow older, just try to control and see.'

(Fernando 1968:192)

Lloyd Fernando's novel, *Scorpion Orchid*, also endeavours to capture this Malaysian idiom in some of the dialogues, as exemplified below:

"What for to love you? You got no money."  
(1976:19)

"... The holy man gave me something to drink, and a small packet for me to keep and said to me to go back to my husband. I spent five dollars just to hear only that! I came

to my father and told him no, no, I'll never go back..."

(1976:25)

"Ay, it's bloody hot, man."

(1976:33)

I know what happened. Just sign here. Get up man! Don't kiss my feet, I'll hammer you.

(1976:108)

"... I tell you she's Chinese, lah — cannot be *rojak*, her Cantonese so good, you know."

"Can I speak with her?"

"Can, why not? ..."

(1976:109)

There is the use of particles in *man* and *lah*, the use of common Malaysian slang expressions in *bloody* and *hammer* (the latter meaning "to give a good beating"), a lexical borrowing from Malay in *rojak* (which is used to mean "a mixture" here), the omission of the copula in "her Cantonese so good", and the use of the modal auxiliary *can* as an affirmative reply in "Can, why not?". Other common colloquial Malaysianisms are *said to me* for "told me", *what for* for "why", *got* for "have", and *came* for "went".

Wherever the localized idiom has been used in prose writing, it has been confined to the dialogue sections only, and even then it is usually only sparingly used. For the narrative, standard English is used. However, it is also interesting to note that some features of language which are peculiarly Malaysian and thus not part of standard English seem to have crept into some narrative, Tongue (1974:12) has made the point that "... many Singaporeans and Malaysians who are highly articulate and entirely fluent in spoken and written English are not always aware that some features of their speech and writing do in fact differ from standard British usage".

This is probably why we find the following examples in the narrative portions of Malaysian prose fiction:

He had gone there to learn, to be enlightened,  
as they say.

(Fernando 1968:24)

It had come to her ears, in hushed undertones,  
that her son was 'a sort of Communist'. What  
a terrible knowledge that was!

(Fernando 1968:25)

I was attached with many Domei men to the army  
propaganda branch.

(Fernando 1968:43)

Being the last day together they were also  
tempted to do rather dangerous things, such  
as walking back to the Third College and  
sitting in the very public lounge where fellow  
students who were remotely related to them and  
Ceylonese parents who came to fetch their off-  
spring home would see them.

(Fernando 1968:185)

It would be a match that his father would  
approve.

(Fernando 1976:72)

The bells would ring as soon as we entered a  
lane, and other bells would take it up as we  
drove.

(Fernando 1976:108)

The first excerpt above shows the Malaysian tendency to use the verb *learn* for "study", while the second shows the use of an uncountable noun, *knowledge*, as a countable noun in the phrase "a terrible knowledge". In the third excerpt there is the use of the phrase *attached ... to* used in the sense of "working ... at", and in the fourth



there is the use of the verb *fetch* for "take". The fifth and sixth examples above illustrate the Malaysian characteristic of leaving out prepositions which have very little semantic function but which are nevertheless required by the grammar of standard English.

Coming specifically to K.S. Maniam's novel, *The Return*, we also notice some use of the localized variety of English in some of the dialogues. One of the Tamil children is made to say of his teacher, "She no backside ah?" (p.25), featuring the omission of a verb and the use of the question particle *ah?*. A longer stretch of colloquial Malaysian English occurs when Ravi goes with his father to buy toothpaste from a Chinese shopkeeper:

"What you wang, *Ayah?*" he said politely to my father.

"My son, he goes to English school", my father said.

"Yes, yes. Very good. So going to be great scholar?" he said, running a finger through my hair.

"He wants medicine for the teeth," my father said.

The man laughed and shook his hand. "You Indian got strong, white teeth. Ha! Ha! This joke!"

My father pushed me forward.

"Gibbs," I said.

The man rubbed his stomach, beneath the rolled-up fold of the singlet, thoughtfully. He dug into a pile of the flat, toothpaste tins, then scratched his head.

"Got everything," he mumbled, his eyes travelling over the dusty, less used shelves. "This 'Kipps', what colour outside?"



"Blue," I said. "Pink inside."

My father smiled. He hadn't heard me speak so many words of English.

"Ah, so," the man said. "High class thing. Few people use."

He stepped over the rice sacks, piles of crepe paper, rusty kerosine tins, to a cobwebbed corner of the shop. He rummaged among the bric-a-brac on an ever dirtier shelf behind a thickly encrusted glass door. He blew on the gray object, then wiped it with his singlet. The compact, concave lid gleamed though the surface was scratched.

"Lucky boy, your son," he said. "Price a little more. But he be a real Englishman now."

(p.35)

Another lengthy passage which contains many features of this localized variety of English is that describing the Tamil children at play:

"Long time you no catch us," one of them said.

The language grated on my ear — it was the English we lapsed into after school hours.

"Long time no play," I said, reluctantly.

The day, a dim, red glow behind the blind-fold, suddenly frightened me. A hostile tone had crept into the boys' voices. They dragged me away from the rain tree around which we usually played.

"Why you pull me away?" I asked in panic.

"You not man to play some other place?" Ganesh said.

The ground wobbled under my feet; this was the patch we avoided when playing football.

It tripped us even when we had our eyes open.

"I play anywhere," I said.

"This body got words! See got action!"  
Ganesh jeered.

(p.44)

The conversation between the children continues:

"Why you standing there like monkey?"

"He white monkey! No know what we think!"

"Who you call white monkey?" I shouted.

"You! You!" they chorused.

"Reading, writing more than us! You try to  
better teacher?" Ganesh asked.

While the novel reflects many characteristics of the localized variety of English, the work as a whole is not written in a distinctly Malaysian 'dialect', although the author has said /personal communication/ of his novel that it is "a bit off standard English". There is sufficient evidence to say that Malaysian English features as an aspect of style and as a socio-linguistic indicator for the cultural communities of the novel — in particular, of the Kedah Tamil community. What makes *The Return* especially interesting, however, is that it attempts to discover the thematic equivalent to the linguistic issue. Malaysian English exists not only as a surface feature of style for, at a deeper level, these linguistic pressures are felt as a thematic transmutation.

*The Return* attempts to concretize a whole history of immigrant attitudes, and it does this by rendering the immigrant culture through the changing consciousness of the protagonist — in fact, through a consciousness affected by linguistic change. In this way, Tamil culture is mediated through the narrative presence of the protagonist, Ravi. The assumption being made is that



language is seen as a kind of mental discipline experienced by those using or learning that particular language.

*The Return* records a historical epoch in Malaysia when grammatically correct and well-taught English was the norm. Ravi and his friends learn standard English in The English School, but outside the school situation they revert to the localized variety, as illustrated in the excerpt given above. These lapses into the pidginized form of English function as a psychological release from the cultural pressures of English in school. The psychological dichotomy is felt most keenly in Ravi, who is pulled in opposite directions by the two languages, Tamil and English. *The Return* treats this thematic conflict with some levity at first, a humour focused on Karupi's lack of co-operation in preparing Ravi for the Tamil school:

When my father began preparing me for the Tamil school, she had sulked.... Karupi almost succeeded in blocking my entry into the Tamil school. She would hunt out even the most secret of hiding places where my father put away the money for the initiation ceremony.... Then she turned her attention to the goat being fattened for the occasion.

"Chase it around until it gets tired," she said....

I would harrass the animal, pushing and poking it on, past the laughing neighbourhood.

(p.17-18)

The whole episode of Karupi's rudeness to Ravi's father and her disingenuous interruptions of Murugesu's Tamil lessons takes on the air of liveliness associated with the Tamil language popular cinema. Ravi is willing enough to go along with this fun. A serious note is injected into the theme of Tamil language education when Ravi finally has to perform his *puja* at the house shrine:

The Tamil Primer was placed before the picture of Saraswathi, the goddess of learning. The incense-brazier trembled in my hands as I waved it three times round the shrine and the book.

(p.19)

The mood of awe inspired by the *puja* persists into Ravi's subsequent contacts with the Tamil Primer:

The Primer I took off the shelf-shrine every Friday evening, after the *puja*, had the gloss of a mysterious, rich world. The ornamental oil lamp, with leaf motifs, the back domed, threw a cool band of yellow light on the cover and my hands. The incense filled me with a sense of comfort and wonder. On such nights my voice deepened as I reeled off the alphabet.

(p.20)

Ravi's formal learning of the Tamil language is bound inextricably with the absorption of a complete culture, a deeply religious world. The *puja* episode, in fact, deliberately extends the metaphor of Periathai's mystic immersion in worship before Nataraja, the cosmic dancer. The light emanating from Ravi's learning of Tamil bathes his whole world, imparting to the landscape of Bedong a transforming power:

The night seemed like a chamber whose walls would suddenly fall apart and reveal a more radiant landscape. I carried some of this light into my excursions into the land beyond....

(p.20)

In Ravi himself, the same transforming power derives from the instinctual, affective sources of life and endows him with a sense of harmonious well-being:



... with Murugesu officiating as priest, the ceremony began. The gestures came from me with a deep sureness. Murugesu's Sanskrit chanting covered me with a vibrant sensitivity.

(pp.20-21)

It is against such a background that the parallel experience of learning the English language is narrated. The smooth harmony of Ravi's Tamil world is interrupted by Karupi's destructive laughter and her dream intrudes upon the cohesive celebration of life that had hitherto been Ravi's lot. With his father's capitulation in the face of Karupi's determination to send Ravi to English school, the known, sane world crumbles and becomes "intolerable", an estranged and incomprehensible environment in which

The Chinese constable at the railway gates,  
the sweet, rotting smells from the fruit  
stalls, the reeking drains at shop corners,  
all turned foreign. The thought that the sky  
I had known also domed over other towns,  
frightened me.

(p.21)

In Ravi's experience of alienation, coming at the thought of the English school ahead of him, there is a buried sense of an expanding world (implied by "other towns"). However, it is the safe, known (felt rather), small world (the Tamil community of Bedong) that remains the source of value, though now it is a value distanced and made strange. Moreover, the expanding horizon is mainly fearful. That other world, when it arrives in the shape of The English School in Sungai Petani, is a definite diminishment — a closing in of the walls, or a closing off of the well-springs, the sources of sensual, affective being, which *The Return* identifies so closely with the Tamil language world.

Ravi's introduction to the English language world makes a sharp contrast with the Tamil world. Where learning

had been a religious, even a mythic, experience, in that Tamil world, now it has become part of an aseptic, efficient discipline. In Ravi's words:

It was truly another sphere altogether. Several men waited, like male nurses, on the white-coated Englishman who occupied a high, rattan chair.... The Englishman spoke all the time through the upper row of yellow and glistening teeth. Then he shuffled the papers and I was released from the confining chair.

Abruptly I found myself seated in a very silent room, at a desk, facing a square-lined exercise book.

(p.23)

The image of the hospital ward (or concentration camp) contributes to the caricature of the English administrator. It also looks ahead to the sickness of the "heart that will not serve" (p.183) that afflicts Ravi by the close of the novel.

*The Return* ends with a poem entitled "Full Circle", a play upon the title of the novel. The poem fills in the emotional gap in Ravi's life — the value of the Tamil world that is felt to be lost from the rationality achieved through the English language world. "Full Circle" serves as a reminder that, for this writer, the journey of self-discovery has effectively brought him back to the painful recognition that the "vague knots" which bind him to his past are twisted tightly by "words". The meta-physical voyage enacted in *The Return* takes the configuration of an exploration into language. As the novel discloses the consciousness of its narrator-protagonist, we look into not only the psychological dimensions but also the linguistic dimensions of change.

The potent psychological force of language is identified early in the life of the protagonist:



We were a gentle people guided and ruled by dreams. Some of these were innocent, others as violent as the thunder and lightning that ripped the sky and destroyed a calm evening. One such bolt fell on me when I had been attending the Tamil school in Bedong for a year. My father suddenly decided to take me out of the school and enrol me in The English School, later renamed Tengku Mahkota, in Sungai Petani.

(pp.15-16)

The "violent" "dream" of English Language education is to haunt the mind and being of the protagonist for the rest of the narrative. The narrative unfolds the process of this dreaming until the painful recognition reached in the poem "Full Circle" that ends the story of linguistic exile through which Ravi has lived:

Words will not serve.

You'll be twisted by them  
 into nameless little impulses  
 that roam dark city roads, raging.  
 They will be vague knots  
 of feelings, lustreless, cultureless,  
 buried in a heart that will not serve.

(p.183)

With these words (ostensibly Ravi's "poem, containing an immature and tormenting recognition" /p.182/), the novel records the "lustreless, cultureless" condition of statelessness. The blank face of the "return" thus is attributed to the stranglehold of alien and alienating "words". In this manner, "Full Circle" contains a repudiation of the very process through which the "return" journey is made — a process which, thematically, is seen as language acquisition or the learning of strange, unmeaning words. *The Return* may be read as the relentless pursuit of the reasons for such loss. Ravi recognizes,



finally, that he has never left his origins. He has merely travelled the ironic circle of exile to rediscover that the sensuous sources of life have been distanced by the cool web of language:

Have you been lost  
for words?

Have you been lost  
for words when  
you had them stacked  
like images in a dream?

(p.182)

The terms of linguistic culture recalled here (i.e. "like images in a dream") echo the violent dream of youth, when Ravi's father had let fall the thunderbolt of The English School (p.15). One at least of these symbolic dreams is a literal and metaphoric event: Karupi's dream.

Karupi's "terrible dream" (p.16) introduces the young Ravi into the terrors of the English language; or rather it is a prefigurement of the cultural exile that the new language will bring. Karupi (Ravi's "stepmother") tells the dream in her own words:

I had a terrible dream....

Suddenly there's an ear-deafening noise — a cry in a foreign voice.... A white man, wearing a coat and tie, rushes at us. There's an axe in his hand. He says terrible things in a language we don't understand. Then he starts hacking away at the things we've just acquired. We try to stop him, talking in our language. But he shakes his head and the axe splinters the beds; the cotton flies and we're almost drowned. Out of this mist the white man's face appears.

He says, 'Send the boy to English School!'  
He points at Ravi.

(p.16)

Narrated on this farcical level, Karupi's dream is met with laughter. Nevertheless, it is a "dream" in deadly earnest, and one to be pitted against the "dreams" of Ravi's father, who is at first determined "to cling to the Tamil tongue and Indian religious practices ... tenaciously" (pp.19-20). Significantly, in Karupi's dream, Ravi "drinks out of a golden cup" (p.16), the only one in the family so honoured.

The original title for this paper was "Nationalism and the long road beyond". *The Return* has travelled a long way down this road, only to find that it has gone in a full circle. For writers in English in Malaysia, political independence has brought greater, not less, linguistic confusion. The fathers of Ravi's friends "doubted his father's political loyalties" because of "his need to cling to the Tamil tongue" (p.19). *The Return* assumes that the pressure generated by such a question needs to be faced with courage by the writer in English. Its answer seems bleak indeed, when seen from the point of view of the loss of roots. Thus the novel creates yet another metaphor of returning by the parallel between Periathai and Naina in the first chapter and the last. "Naina's last action" is a symbolic devaluation of Periathai's ritual prayers. Periathai, in prayer, "assumed an absorbed, impenetrable air" (p.5). Under her devotions the objects reverently laid out around Nataraja "the cosmic dancer ringed by a circle of flame" — "the sari, the jewelry and the idol" take on a glow "creating a kind of eternity around them" (pp.5-6). Periathai is absorbed, entranced because she has returned in spirit to:

... the home she had left behind. It was a re-immersion, a recreating of the thick spiritual and domestic air she must have breathed there, back in some remote district in India.

(p.6)



Periathai, then, returns to the Indian world to find meaning. The same ritual repeated by Naina tells of the failure of this same meaning. Naina puts aside "Periathai's lamps and ritual vessels" because, as he says, "they are useless now" (p.180). In their place he substitutes lamps and statues of his own fashioning, wrought "out of the clay he brought from the river" (p.180). As offerings to the cosmic dancer, his substitutes for the sari and the jewelry are:

A tree trunk, swathes of lallang, clumps of  
grass, /river/ bank clay shaped into a hut....  
(p.180)

But instead of the irradiated glow of eternity surrounding Periathai's gift of herself, Naina's offerings "were presented to Nataraja under thick incense smoke" (p.180).

The attempt to transfer ritual meaning fails — in terms of its overt symbols — the brightness of Periathai's offering being dimmed and obscured. Yet the real meaning of Periathai's prayer is to be sought in a "secret language" (p.180) that apparently is struggling to be born:

Sitting on the mat he had woven from lallang  
and wild reeds that grew near the river, he  
began to chant in a garbled language. It  
embarrassed me to hear him recite a rhythm  
mounted on Tamil, Malay and even Chinese  
words. It was a secret language....  
(p.180)

Naina's linguistic code mirrors the transmutation of English into a richer language of enablement, desired but despaired of by Ravi the narrator. *The Return* ends disconsolately, reduced by the awareness of the cost of linguistic consciousness. The "vague knots of feelings ... buried in a heart that will not serve" (p.183) can only twist tighter the frustrated rage of Ravi's sense of ironic impoverishment.



In conclusion, then, we have seen that although Malaysian English as such does not seem to play a prominent role in this novel, it is important to note that the author has relied on his Tamil background to focus on the dilemma of the English-speaking Malaysian. This paper has sketched the use made of this localized variety of English in some representative works of Malaysian fiction, culminating in K.S. Maniam's *The Return*, in which we see an interesting experiment in the exploration of the novelistic possibilities of the language question. *The Return* offers us a formula for understanding the divided personality in terms of an obsession with language. As Ravi the narrator says:

Language was inadequate. Young as I was, I recognised that words were merely a medium; that they externalised a tiny fraction of what we felt. In our community they formed only the surface. The speech, often staccato, coarse, unending and seemingly unnecessary, sounded rich. They came from an imagination that had withered because that clutter I was later to identify as culture wasn't there.

(p.75)

Department of English  
University of Malaya

## References

- Fernando, Lloyd (ed.). *22 Malaysian Stories*. Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd. 1968.
- Fernando, Lloyd. *Scorpion Orchid*. Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd. 1976.
- Maniam, K.S. *The Return*. Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd. 1981.
- Platt, John & Heidi Weber. *English in Singapore and Malaysia*. Oxford University Press. 1980.
- Thumboo, Edwin. *The Flowering Tree*. Singapore, Educational Publications Bureau, Ministry of Education. 1970.
- Tongue, Ray. *The English of Singapore and Malaysia*. Eastern Universities Press. 1974.

\* This paper was presented at the Sixth Triennial Conference of ACLALS, "Beyond Nationalism: The Literary Context", held at the University of Guelph, Canada, August 10-17, 1983.

## FIGHTING OUR DAUGHTER

We fought our daughter one night,  
pitching our wills, my wife's and mine,  
against our crying two-and-a-half-year-old  
crying for her amah  
Asam, asam . . .

We separated her from her asam  
lifted her downstairs  
dumped her in her playpen.  
She continued wailing  
Asam, asam  
and for nearly an hour  
in the dark  
we sat and waited  
for her to stop  
or to cry for one of us.  
My mother squatted on top of the stairs  
her silent eyes fighting ours.

Were we fighting our girl  
or merely ourselves?  
Were we jealous  
of the amah's influence  
that we sought  
deliberately, desperately  
to deflect  
her cry,  
deflect  
their affection?



But she did not stop.  
She would not stop.

In the end  
she nearly separated  
us from ourselves.

A baby's cry  
can be deflected  
but for how long?

A ricochet  
can still be lethal.

Robert Yeo

## FOR MY SECOND DAUGHTER

And there's your name, of course, left, till  
you cried.

The struggle, then, with the appropriate sound,  
we, who were playing (names) by ear and forgot  
that what rings so English right (Sharon)  
could sound so wrong (Sha-ren) in Chinese.

Your wish to remain upright enabled us  
to choose (we'd rather not) when you would  
arrive.

Therefore unhushed, or perhaps not hushed,  
as your sister had come before. Also  
I am too morpheme-full — but for these words.

Robert Yeo

## PREFIXES AND SUFFIXES IN ADVERTISING LANGUAGE\*

by

Su Soon Peng

Apart from the use of pictorial aids, the basic unit of any printed advertisement is words. Words combined, collocated, emphasised or modified in a certain manner can produce the desired effect in the hands of a skilful copywriter. One of the primary aims of advertising is to capture the reader's attention and one of the ways of doing so is through the innovative use of words by means of prefixation or suffixation.

Prefixation is the attachment of a prefix (e.g. *mis-*, *un-*, *sub-*) to a word, and suffixation is the attachment of a suffix (e.g. *-y*, *-ful*, *-ness*) to a word. These two processes can be jointly termed affixation. The English language is loaded with affixed words: *unbend*, *misprint*, *prenatal*, *disobey*, *bewitch*, *action*, *photographic*, *loudness*, *handful*, and so on. The affix can bring about a change in the grammatical class of a word (e.g. adjective *rich* becomes verb *enrich* and noun *richness*) or a modification in the meaning of a word (e.g. *professor* carries the features of /+human/ and /+concrete/ while *professorship* is non-human and abstract). Of these two properties, the latter, i.e. semantic modification, is more heavily made use of in the occurrence of affixation in advertisements.

---

\*This paper is based on my M.A. thesis entitled "Compounding and Other Word-Formation Processes in the English of Malaysian Newspaper Advertisements", University of Malaya, 1983.



In advertising language, prefixes are characteristically used as indicators of degree, i.e. as devices that scale a quality. Four prefixes that are much employed by copywriters to perform this function are *super-*, *extra-*, *ultra-* and *multi-*. *Super-* originates from Latin and has the meaning "above, over" (Jespersen 1942:492 and Marchand 1969:196), and can be prefixed to nouns, verbs and adjectives. In advertising language, *super-* is used mainly as an intensifier, a usage that is peculiar to advertising; cf. the use of this prefix in other registers such as medicine and science where *super-* designates location, e.g. *superglottal*: "situated above the glottis", or is semantically neutral or without any emotive attachment, e.g. *supersaturate*: "saturate beyond a certain point". On the other hand, *super-* as a degree marker has become part of the jargon of advertising language, as can be seen from its various combinations with a noun: *supercooking*, *supercomfort*, *super-accuracy*, *supertone*, *superstar*, *superbonder*; with an adjective: *superfine*, *superclose*, *super smooth*, *super fast*, *supersportic*, *super-refined*, *supercool*, *super-efficient*, *super-automatic*; and with a verb: *superwashed* ("washed over and over again").

*Extra-* first came into the English language as a prefix from Latin, meaning "outside, outside the scope of" (Marchand 1969: 165). Used in advertisements, this prefix also carries a semantic nuance of "more than", "exceptionally" and "especially". This function as an intensifier can be seen in the collocation of *extra-* with nouns: *extra satisfaction*, *extra mild* (the adjective *mild* is used as a noun in an advertisement on cigarettes: "The world's fastest growing extra mild"), and with adjectives: *extra-convenient* (way to mend), *extra special* (car), *extra-light* (feeling), *extra-long* (guarantee), *extra-wide* (profile).

*Ultra-* is another prefix that is used as an intensifier by copywriters. As in the case of *super-*, *ultra-* can be stripped of any semantic nuances when used in certain registers like science: cf. *ultra-violet* and

*ultra-microscopic*, where the prefix carries the detached meaning of "situated beyond". Although *ultra-* is frequently employed by copywriters, it is not as frequently used as *super-*, probably because there is a danger of reading the sense "over much" or "overly so" into its meanings of "beyond" and "extremely". Another reason is the more limited scope of the base that *ultra-* can take: it is attached only to adjectives while *super-* can be attached to adjectives, nouns, as well as verbs. Some examples of the use of *ultra-* in advertisements are: *ultra-sensitive* (cell), *ultra-modern* (instrumentation), *ultra-low* (profile).

*Multi-* is used as an intensifier in a quantitative sense. Often, the specific number referred to in *multi-* is just two or three, but the vagueness of the quantity in the prefix is exploited by copywriters as a means of exaggeration. Thus, the use of "multi-course lunch box" is preferred to "lunch box in which you can pack two courses", or even "two-course lunch box" where the specification is a form of limitation, whereas there is a hint of a promise of the unmeasurable in the use of *multi-*. There is also, perhaps, a tendency to use *multi-* with the kind of intensification found in the three preceding prefixes discussed. This is seen, for instance, in *multiquick* (food chopper). Such a use of *multi-* can be classed together with the other prefixes referred to as "boosters" (Bolinger 1972:17).

In advertisements, *multi-* is most often prefixed to nouns, but the combination is invariably placed in an attributive position so that *multi-* acts as an adjectivalising device as well, as shown below:

- 1a. multi-function timepieces
- 1b. \*function timepieces
- 2a. multi-purpose timepiece
- 2b. \*purpose timepiece



## 3a. multi-use levers

## 3b. \*use levers

This is not to say that "multi- + noun" does not occupy a nominal position at all; it does, as seen in "multi-nationalization makes sense". However, it seems a feature of advertising language that the "multi- + noun" combination is used attributively.

Apart from the above prefixes which function as indicators of degree in advertising language, prefixes which indicate size are also used. Such prefixes include *mini*, *micro* and *macro*-. The last two prefixes are not used in any way particular to advertising; they are prefixed to scientific terms, which is usual in the use of such prefixes. Thus, prefixations like *microelectronics*, *microimagery* and *macro-photography* are scientific descriptions for some electronic product. The prefix *mini*-, however, is used as more than an indicator of size. It also carries a sense of "cuteness" and "manageability": *mini-cabins* (for travellers), *mini-tours* (where fun is played up as the essential quality in the advertisement), *mini-bus*, *mini-printers* and *mini-genius* (referring to a calculator).

Leech (1963:3) observes that the textbook principle of advertising is "be positive", which "carries by implication the meaning 'be laudatory'". This principle is reflected in the choice of prefixes such as *super*-, *extra*-, and *ultra*-, which function as intensifiers. However, there are two prefixes which occur quite frequently in advertising language but which express what seems to be the opposite of the principle "be positive". These are the negative prefixes *anti*- and *non*-. In effect, these prefixes perform the function of negating unwanted qualities so that the sum result is still that of giving an overall positive connotation to the product or subject. Thus, in a collocation *anti-cancer* (drug), the base *cancer* has a strong negative suggestion which is itself



negated by the prefix *anti-*, so that the product (drug) takes on a positive value.

These prefixes are also most frequently used for negating unwanted qualities that are embodied in words familiar to the reader. Sometimes, the copywriter makes use of this as a psychological play on the reader's fear. Thus, cancer is a disease feared by people, and by describing a drug as *anti-cancer*, the copywriter seems to promise that cancer will not afflict those who use that drug. Likewise, *anti-theft* (cap of a car) hints at a promise that the cap will prevent the car from being stolen. Yet these "promises" are not explicit so that, should theft or cancer occur even when the product is used, the copywriter cannot be accused of making false claims. Other similar examples are *anti-dandruff* (agent), *anti-crease* (wash), *anti-slip* (rubber sole), *anti-bacterial* (agents) and *anti-crumpling* (cycle).

The other negative prefix that is generously employed is *non-*, which is used in a similar way as *anti-* to negate a negative quality. Unlike *anti-*, however, *non-* expresses not so much an attitude as a binary contrast: for example, something is either washable or not washable for the prefixation *non-washable* (prints). However, there is a use of *non-* which is distinctive to the advertising register. Usually, *non-* is prefixed to nouns and adjectives, but hardly to verbs. But in advertisements, formations interpretable as "*non-* + verb" combinations are found: *non-skid* (tyres), *non-stick* (layer), *non-stop* (flights) and *non-iron* (bedsheet). Marchand terms such formations "commercial jargon" (1969:180). Copywriters also make use of *no* in much the same way as *non-*: *no-spin* (cycle), *no-smudge* (cartridge ribbon), *no-strain* (visibility) and *no-tear* (drafting film).

Advertising also plays on our streak of laziness through the use of the prefix *auto-*, which means "self", "by itself", "self-acting", "automatic". (This prefix must not be confused with the clipped form *auto*, which

stands for "automobile", a form that appears often in advertisements dealing with cars or car products.) Examples of words carrying this prefix are: *auto-calendar*, *auto-door*, *auto-colour* (TV), *auto-relocking* (device), *autoflash* (camera) and *autofocus* (system). The use of *auto-* in advertising is suggestive of the idea of "free from effort or work" and also of science which, as Leech observes, "serves to impress" (1966:101).

Like prefixation, suffixation can modify the meaning of a word. One suffix that is frequently used in the English language as well as in advertising is *-er/-or*. Grammatically, this suffix nominalises, and is mainly attached to verbs; as Quirk et al observe, it is "an extremely productive affix, potentially affixable to any verb in the language" (1972:998). However, of more interest is its ability to create a shift in the semantic class of the base word, as in, for instance, *love* which is a State, to *lover* which is a Person. This principle is exploited by copywriters in their creation of forms such as *Weekender*, which involves a shift from Time to Object (a bag), and *tensioner*, which has a shift from State to Agent which causes that state.

The *-er* also comes in handy when the copywriter wishes to pick out a specified group of readers, for example, *dieters*, *golfers* and *drinkers* in the advertisements of a weight-reducing drink, golf equipment and beer respectively, or when he does not wish to draw attention to the advertisers, in which case the agentive nouns are often less specific: *manufacturer*, *makers*, *designers* and *brewers*. The use of the *-er* to create such agentive animate nouns also carries a tinge of "professional" overtone. Where the nouns formed through the suffixation of *-er* are inanimate, they usually refer to the products advertised: *refresher* (referring to a drink), *lighters*, *containers*, *grippers* (referring to zips) and *bumpers* (part of a car).



The role played by suffixation for achieving emotive effects can be seen in the choice of *fitment* in place of the more usual gerund *fitting* in: "It is an SR-rated tyre suitable for *fitment* to cars". The suffix *-ment* calls to mind the means or result of the action (cf. *settlement*, *achievement*) which is absent in *-ing*. Moreover, being an unusual formation, it also helps to draw attention to what is said in the advertisement. Similarly, *floatability* is preferred to *floatage* in: "The six large wheels with independent suspension produces excellent 'floatability'". Since the emphasis is on the "lightness" in a heavy vehicle, the use of *floatage*, which refers to the buoyancy of an object on water, would be inapplicable. In addition, the use of *-ability* suggests both the senses of State and "able to". The sense of "able to" is shared by *trackability*, *driveability* and *operability*. There is also an overtone of an action done with ease.

Further examples of the use of suffixation for emotive purposes can be seen in *brewmanship* and *seascapes*. Although the suffix *-ship* bears the meaning of "state" or "condition", the idea of "skill" present in the formation *craftsmanship* (a word which occurs most frequently with the suffix *-ship* in advertisements) is intended: "The Anchor-Heineken Brewmasters use those very same international standards of brewmanship..." In a similar manner, the suffix *-scape* in *seascapes* is derived from the word *landscape*, but carrying the sense of "scenery" or "the scenic": "The Philippines ... blessed with spectacular landscapes and iridescent seascapes".

One of the most highly productive suffixes used in advertisements is the adjective suffix *-y*. It is no coincidence that this same suffix is common in colloquial English too; in fact, the generous use of *-y* in advertising copies has lent them the general impression of being colloquial: "Snazzy satin jeans that fit like a second skin..." and "Get the Biggie Souvenir of the year". Added to that, "Their special value in copywriting seems to derive from a directness of appeal due to their



reference to the sensible properties of a product, either of flavour or texture" (Leech 1966:141), as instanced by descriptive words found especially in advertisements on food: *fruity, tasty, crispy, chocolatey, creamy, gassy*, and so on. The affixation of *-y* to nouns especially carries a sensuous sense of fullness: "full of chocolate/cream/fruits...." With the addition of the suffix *-y*, these words communicate on an evocative rather than a cognitive level. Because of that, a whole advertisement can be infused with the affixation of *-y*:

So malty! So chocolatey! So munchy!  
It could only be CRISPY!

The high productiveness of *-y* is also attributable to the ease with which it can be attached to a wide range of base: noun (e.g. *silky*), verb (e.g. *crunchy*) or adjective (e.g. *crispy*). It can even be attached to names: *Krafty* (which reduces a proper noun to an adjective).

Diverse senses underlie the suffix *-y*. It can be interpreted as "full of", as mentioned above, or "resembling", as in *silky* and *blousy*, or "covered with", as in *hairy*, or "follow" or "according to", as in *trendy*. Some are idiosyncratic: *cheeky* ("mischievous"), *nosy* ("inquisitive"), *mooney* ("lunatic"), *handy* ("convenient"), and others. Combinations of *-y* with other parts of speech too give different readings: *munchy* and *crunchy* -- "easy to munch/crunch", *crumbly* -- "inclined to crumble" and *crispy* -- "having the quality of being crisp".

Apart from the denotative meaning, the words affixed with *-y* are also evocative: take for instance the words *crunchy* and *munchy*, which carry a further sense of delight involved in the action of crunching and munching. Such evocativeness is an emotive quality which is exploited by copywriters who are what Vance Packard (1957:Ch.3) calls "depth men", since they probe the consumer's/reader's subconscious needs and desires.

Another productive adjective suffix in the English language as well as the language of advertising is *-ful*. Many words suffixed with *-ful* in advertisements are hardly attention-catching mainly because they are conventional items common in the vocabulary of most readers: *successful*, *beautiful*, *wonderful*, *delightful* and *powerful* are some examples. These can be compared to the more innovative use of *-ful* which connotes abundance and which, coupled with its position in the sentence and the stress that falls on the word, tends to be more noticed:

... you get the first *tankful* of petrol, free.

The New GR-31EG

With a *fridge-ful* of extras.

(This occurred in the headline and so would draw even greater attention to the suffixed word).

Now that's an *eyeful* of service for you.

(Product advertised -- spectacles).

Maltova is *choc-ful* of natural goodness.

A *car-ful* of perfectly balanced sound reproduction.

Other suffixed words which are interesting in themselves and which help to capture the reader's attention are: *huggable*, *lockable* and *foldable*, which are interpreted as "can be/able to be hugged/locked/folded"; *exactly* in "Each part is exactly engineered to last longer", where a sense of precision (*exact*) as well as a demand for precision (*exacting*) is present; *waisted* in "The waisted look is given a new treatment with a straight torso ending in a semi-peplum flounce" and *masterkeyed* in "Like all Abloy locks, it can be masterkeyed into your Abloy existing systems", where the addition of an *-ed* to the nouns *waist* and *masterkey* changes the former to an adjective and the latter to a verb; *wheeling* which is used as a noun in "Daihatsu Charmant-LE. Wheeling in



stylish elegance"; and *problemsome* which is very likely formed through analogy with *troublesome*.

Another interesting way in which words are coined in advertisements is the attachment of affixes to proper names. This is, of course, not exclusive to the advertising register; it has long been used by English speakers who usually adjectivalise the names of well-known figures, for instance, "Dickensian humour" or "Shakespearian tragedy". However, the affixation of brand names is a feature that is distinctive of the advertising language. These "affixed names" will show a change in grammatical word-class status and a modification of meaning. The most frequently used method is suffixation with an *-ed* or *-ing*, as in the adjectivalised *Sassooning*: "The Sassooning essentials", and the verbs *Koolerkrafting* and *Sandtixed*: "Insist on Koolerkrafting your home for a cooler and cozier living" and "This house has been Sandtixed" respectively. These affixed names are used as equivalents to *shampooing* (*Sassoon* is a brand of shampoo), *air-conditioning* and *painted* respectively. The idea of something special about the product or brand is conveyed. This is seen especially in the last example, where the verb *Sandtixed* is actually contrasted against the verb *painted*:

This house has been painted.

This house has been Sandtixed.

(A picture of two differently painted houses is given).

The use of other affixes with brands is also possible: *Kraft* is adjectivalised with *-y* in "Krafty ways with cheese" and in *unBetable* the affixes *un-* and *-able* are attached to the base *Beta*, which is a clipped form from the name *Betamax*.

The numerous examples given above show that through the skilful use of the prefixes and suffixes that are



familiar to most of us, word-coinages are created. Given that man is basically curious, his attention will be claimed by words that are unusual in one way or another, especially if such words are highlighted through typography or layout or other means. Catching the public's attention is important to advertising as a prerequisite to the fulfilling of its other aims of being readable, being memorisable and being able to sell (see Leech 1966:27). Moreover, the coining of words is a creative activity that is an intrinsic part of a creative register such as advertising.

Department of English  
University of Malaya

#### References

- Bolinger, Dwight L. 1972. *Degree Words*. *Janua Linguarum, Series Maior* 53. The Hague: Mouton.
- Jespersen, Otto. 1942. *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, Part 6. Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard.
- Leech, Geoffrey N. 1963. "The Language of Commercial Television Advertisements: A Brief Report of Interpretative Conclusions". London: Communication Research Centre, University College London.
- Leech, Geoffrey N. 1966. *English in Advertising: A Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain*. London: Longman.
- Marchand, Hans. 1969. *The Categories and Types of Present-Day English Word-Formation*, 2nd ed. Munchen: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung.
- Quirk, Randolph, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech & S. Svartnik, 1972. *A Grammar of Contemporary English*. London: Longman.

PROJECT: GRAFT MAN

by

K.S. Maniam

This experiment was carried out over a period of fifty years. The data, collected through various means, has been assembled in a readable form so as to enable future researchers not to make the mistakes that delayed and ineffectualized this project. The purpose was to test the impact of power, subtly developed through the years, on the production of a new breed of men, called here the 'graft man'. It must be stated at the outset that the concept of 'graft man' was the brainchild of different administrators. Consequently there was no clear transition from one stereotype of the species to the next.

The present Director of the centre was appointed by coincidence of the senate's vision of the end product and the candidate's complete lack of leadership. It was thought that such a man would have no self-interest and would possess the impartiality necessary for the success of the project. In fact, the first Director was dismissed because he aligned himself too much with the people. The second tendered his resignation, frustrated with the domination-role that the senate insisted on. He held strong views on 'graft man'.

This brief history of the development of the concept should be sufficient at this point. The image of 'graft man' becomes clearer as the locale of the experiment is described. It will also crystalize the purpose of the experiment.

LOCATION: A wing of Pasir Panjang, centrally sited in Malaysia. The choice of the site was deliberate. It was hoped that Centre 1, commonly called the

township, would represent the ideal development of a community. Bordered on one side by a jungle and on the other by an urban spread, the inhabitants would be continually reminded of their natural past and of the kind of future being planned for them.

The citizens of the township were, if unobtrusively, carefully selected. A number of factors guided the selection:

1. Originally they must have led a life totally dependent on the land, river and sea;
2. they must have a strong cultural background;
3. their personalities had to be of a susceptible kind;
4. they must be trusting, friendly and obedient;
5. they must represent geographical regions of the country.

They they were pedigree for a new breed of humanity was carefully disguised. The age-old belief that they were being chosen above and over the others helped in the camouflage. Gullible people will believe anything. The original group for the township believed that they were already a superior batch of people! In their naive way, of course!

Time was another important factor. It was a variable that would, if handled carefully, produce the best results. Time, in this project, was linked with a sense of achievement, with progress. The shift from their former homes to a larger, more centralized locale succeeded in giving the migrants the impression that they had moved up at least one rung in the social ladder.



The administration, however, treated time as an illusion. It was simply a scaffolding into which were built the components of the experiment. Coupled with the first shift was the modification of the dwellings of the inhabitants. Though these structures resembled the kampung-style attap huts, they were really simplified versions of the present units.

The lay-out of the kampung -- Centre 1 was originally called this in its sociological context -- seemed unplanned so as not to disturb the feelings of the people too much. There were plenty of trees. Broad laterite trails linked the rows of huts to the main square and the administrative buildings. The administration made sure that the reality the people were accustomed to was not radically disrupted or destroyed.

With the departure of the first Director, the kampung came to be called a township. By then the inhabitants felt they were really different from the other citizens of the country. The trails were paved, trees cut down, and the plank walls of the huts replaced with scientifically treated material. The intention was to minimize the labour needed to maintain one's living units. The penetration of the old reality by a new one was thus begun.

The houses were there, the trees were there, the square was there, but nothing was quite the same -- exactly what the administration wanted. Though the houses had electricity, no one saw the cables that brought it to them. If a fuse blew, the administration had to be informed. A squad of men in blue uniforms fiddled with metal boxes built deep into the walls and power was restored. If the men had been naive, they now looked amazed. They had been used to oil lamps and nylon gauzes that gave them just that extra bit of brightness. But now, right under their noses, a miracle had been performed.

All this while they had been allowed to pursue their former livelihoods. The Director often had them

assembled on the grounds of *The Tower*, the administrative building in those days. Using an old-fashioned PA system, he emphasized that man must be productive. He flattered them into deceiving themselves that they were the most efficient community in the country.

'Man is the most productive species on earth,' the Director said and this was echoed down the line.

The Director meant it differently, of course, but the enthusiasm was welcome. The Director also made it quite clear how and under what conditions this productivity was to be achieved. In the first phase they were to use traditional methods. If fishing was taken as an example, then nets and oar-propelled boats were part of the facilities. There was no restriction on time, but even the Director let his concept seep through.

'It's better not to catch any fish in two hours than to bring in only two in twenty-four,' he said.

In the second phase, when mechanical methods were employed, the Director was stricter with time. He would not allow them more than ten hours within which to bring in their hauls.

'Better not go to work at all if a man can't return with the maximum yield within a stipulated time!' the Director said.

Thus time began to turn the population of the township upon themselves. If they feared, due to some superstitious calculations, that there would be no fish in the river or sea, they stayed home. If they went out they returned in a short time, anxious that figures might get the better of them. The desired effect was achieved through logistics and fear. The citizens of the township ceased to venture out. Consequently there was a build-up in self-pride.



The administration had all this while bought whatever they had brought home at an inflated price. Besides the administrative block, a factory had been started. As the men stayed back they were absorbed into its workforce. Preservation techniques were taught them and whatever their fellow citizens netted soon disappeared into containers.

Meanwhile the third phase was initiated -- the process of depletion. The inhabitants were given substances, called 'subsidies', which when allowed to dissolve in waters soon brought up the fish. There was wild celebration in the township, almost a relapse into past ways. The administration accelerated the depletion process so that such incidents would not recur. The third phase ended when natural resources yielded negligible returns.

The township plant had expanded and the morning queues at its clock-in entrances grew longer. The citizens of the township entered the perimeter of greater administrative control. The routine they observed was simple and rigid: work from 8.30 to 4.30, rest for an hour, games or other recreation until 7.30, dinner at 8 and TV entertainment until 10.30. A gentle but insistent set of chimes indicated bedtime. There was no crime, gossip, hunger or anxiety. Thought, as a phenomenon in their lives, disappeared.

Their behaviour in the plant was totally controlled. They might have been robots but for the fact that they breathed, grew, ate and reproduced. Traditional habits of thinking and feeling removed, memory almost expunged, they responded to the administration's programming without inhibition. The Centre had acquired a reputation -- in the heavily guarded books of some overseas institutions -- for certain materials that the rest of the world hesitated to produce. The administration had cordoned off a security-tight area in which 'crudes' were generated. These were then brought to the plant and prepared for export. These 'crudes', forming an initial product in the experiment, looked innocent enough and, since the inhabitants had



ceased thinking, no questions were raised.

By this time the administrative machinery had become complex and sophisticated. To accommodate the complexity of the experiment, a new administrative block, *The Needle*, was built. If *The Tower* had represented the first half of the project, the more passive aspect, *The Needle*, with its completion, signalled a more aggressive thrust.

*The Needle*, as the name implies, was a shaft of a building. It had none of the angularity of *The Tower*. From a distance it could be mistaken for a glass obelisk: the windows, walls and roof looked clean and transparent. A suffused light filled the interior, giving the occasional inhabitant who was called in the impression that there were more corridors, staircases, lifts and lanes than was the case. At the official opening, the Director astounded the inhabitants by speaking without a PA system, yet seeming to be heard right over the shoulder of every man. What the inhabitants did not know was that an implanted transmission set, adjusted to pick up only the Director's voice, broadcast even the tiniest of his whispers.

This report changes its approach at this point. So far the administration's angle has been fairly thoroughly covered. To give balance to the account, the inhabitant's viewpoint must now be followed. This is not an easy task, but with the latest equipment that was installed in *The Needle*, some detail can be attempted. What follows has been extracted from microchip memory banks. *The Needle* served as the monitoring centre recording 'beams' from the thoughts, feelings and dreams of the subjects under scrutiny.

Two subjects emerged from the gray, anonymous crowd that was the township population. Again in the sociological context they were called the Datuk and Hari. By a strange coincidence they were related. The former was the grand-

father of Hari, and both enjoyed some popularity among the citizens of the township.

The Datuk's behaviour appeared in focus only after *The Needle* was officially opened; Hari's was obvious even as its scaffolding went up. There were days when Hari stood marvelling at the building under construction, while other young men sweated it out in the gym. His face appeared, of course, on our makeshift screens in *The Tower*, but they were not sensitive enough to reveal more than an expression of awe. As Hari appeared more frequently on the screens, the Director began to take an interest in him.

The Datuk had already appeared in our records. He was often called into consultation by the previous Directors; with the present the relationship was strained. This became evident on the day *The Needle* was opened. The Datuk was seen shaking his head at the opening address the Director made.

'Logo of this centre ... new men. Adult foetus without skin. To be grafted on later,' the Director had said.

A series of mysterious happenings were organized by the Datuk, Hari's reactions to which were recorded in our memory bank. This came on clearly when he was put through drug-induction. The director had begun to concentrate on Hari; he was being constantly called up for sessions with our researchers. The following are his re-initiated thoughts:

something is happening to me ... strange incidents come into my mind. Caused by my grandfather's behaviour. Four cockerels are tied to the house pillar. Remember only seeing such birds long time ago. Now only featherless chicken in the mini-market. Grandfather slaughtered the cockerels the other evening. A lot of people present.



Excited expressions. The cockerels fell quickly to their long, sharp blades. Frightening.

When Hari came out of the induction we gave him a pep-talk on plant procedure. He was not aware, at that stage, that we had probed into his thoughts and feelings. The later details revealed a split psyche. Since the drug left no side-effects, Hari resumed his usual behaviour as if he had just come out of a refreshing sleep.

During each of the drug-induction sessions, the researchers implanted a further behaviour reflex so that Hari could eventually become the model 'graft man' in the community. His sense of values was hinged to a graduated scale of divergence. His people worked on him as much as we did because his personality was susceptible to all kinds of influences. His grandfather, the Datuk, took him under his wing and then the real conflict began.

This phase in Hari's development was also signalled by the quantity and quality of dreams that disturbed his sleep. Dream interposed between reality and acceptance. In many cases these dreams were extensions of the present into the future, and sometimes a reversion into the past. One dream, taking off from reality, seemed to reach into events yet to come.

Hari was recorded saying:

Dream this time. So like the real incidents. The four cockerels again. Now they are headless, but stumbling on, falling, rising. Where from the strained neck sound came there is now a spray of blood! In the middle of these collapsing cockerels Grandfather's face hangs, grim and emaciated.

On another occasion he said:



Adult foetus? Grandfather? Why do the two come together?

Nothing issued from him for a few days. Then a reality report:

The people have come in a crowd to Grandfather. A lot of whispered talk. Grandfather's face angry and determined by turns. Told them stories about his childhood. Some of them had nostalgic looks. Men of my age were confused but also excited. Still other young men walked away. I was one of them. Many days later. Grandfather insisted I be with him whenever he commands. He has never been so harsh. He and the others are putting up a structure.

The Director sent another squad of uniformed men, researchers in disguise, who returned with a precise description. It was a rectangular box-like object on stilts that they were building. A curved roof of spine-like leaves sat on the structure, which was open on its four sides. The floor was covered with intricately woven mats, brought out from storage. The Director's men withdrew discreetly and the activities carried on in that old-fashioned hut could only be extracted from Hari through the recall method:

Grandfather is important to the people now. Everything he does is followed carefully. He has put up a screen on the front side of the hut. An old lamp, using oil, is lighted. Grandfather brings out musty, crumpled figures cut out of cardboard and skin-like material. He has taught some of the men to make music out of strange objects. To the accompaniment of the music, he waves the 'puppets' -- so he calls them -- and tells stories!

Though Hari appeared bewildered, the Director and his men brought their critical faculties to bear upon these recent activities. They did not fail to recognize a new spirit moving the inhabitants of the township. More accurately it could be said that an old attitude to reality was being revived. Certainly we found the workers in the plant less cheerful and unusually silent.

Hari's reflections in the next session unsettled us further:

Something is wrong. Grandfather wants me to change my present values. He doesn't say it in so many words. But stirring the people through stories about courage must be intentional. Why am I called to *The Needle* so often? There seems to be some sort of a mind blackout.

The Director called an emergency meeting. The upshot was that the process of dehumanizing was to be accelerated. If the experiment failed on Hari, then no one else would submit to the process. Hari had been a passive, open person. If he was beginning to question, the others would adopt sterner measures. The Director ordered the research unit to take Hari off drug-induction. A more inconspicuous method had to be found.

This was a good opportunity to disarm Hari of any suspicion he may have harboured. The time lapse allowed him to readjust, to recognize that we were not using him as a guinea-pig. We rigged up more innocent forms to draw out his thoughts and feelings and to record his confusions and conflicts.

The administration too became more devious. It approved a raise in the workers' monthly income. More loan systems, under easy repayment schemes, were implemented. The cinema was renovated and exciting films were screened. The video, which had been too expensive to buy,



now became a household possession. The administration-subsidized consumer goods store displayed attractively low-priced sets. A more favourable view of the administration was generated.

Only the Datuk remained indifferent. The Director was anxious that the man be brought round. The research team agreed that Hari could be the foil. The Director had him promoted so that he was closetted in one of the offices in *The Needle*. The township was a little pacified -- one of its own citizens had been taken, so they presumed, into the administrative cells. The Datuk, however, was not deceived.

Hari now spent most of the day in a room watching screens that showed the progress in the plant. If there was a drop in production he was to report it to the main office. The job required minimum attention. His mind often wandered. The computer screens had built-in thought and emotion receiver sets so that we could observe and record what went on in him. A concealed ionizer changed the atmospheric condition at the press of a button. Hari's moods could thus be manipulated: he could be made to feel positive, depressed, hesitant, suspicious or whatever feeling we wanted him to experience.

The Datuk was much in his thoughts. There was a distance now between him and the rest of the inhabitants. Just what the Director wanted. They relapsed into the time frame the administration had set up for them -- time as illusion. Doubt was evident on their faces. The Datuk's recall of the past through his puppetry and stories fell flat.

He closed in on Hari. It was a battle between the Director and the Datuk. Hari was the pawn. As the hostility intensified Hari's mental activity increased. He was chosen, in the first place, for a singular attribute -- his naivety. Thought and action coincided -- what Hari did was his thought and vice-versa. He possessed no



premeditation and no after-regrets. The Director worried over this new development in Hari.

The research unit, enjoying itself on the constantly running screen, reassured him with analysis and comments. They were never known to have failed -- the degree of the end result may have been underestimated, but they were never wrong. The Datuk's rebuttal on the Director's influence on Hari was ludicrous, to say the least, to watch on the screens.

In the paragraphs that follow the writer's presence is removed. Hari's struggles were so precisely transmitted that for the full effect to be felt they must be allowed to come through by themselves:

Grandfather talks and talks. The others avoid him. At first irritated by all that babble, but he creates strong images in the mind. He mumbles on about *The Order*.

.....

*The Needle* is a nice place to work in. Sitting before the screens and only watching for results. Let the mind go away on its own. This hasn't happened to me before. Most days in *The Needle*, I feel deliriously happy.

.....

Sometimes strange happenings on the screens. Not plant scenes. Different place altogether. Can there be faulty transmissions? But they keep coming. Usually a long, black box. Men covered from head to foot in white are putting something inside. Then they pull out long, interminable material from a slit in the hygienic walls.

.....

Grandfather says, 'Only people matter.' So does the Director. I remember him saying, 'Only people themselves can increase productivity. They are the final product.'

.....

Every time the black box appears, I feel cheerful. What's inside it? The men in white are crowded round it. The wall slit sends miles of the velvety material out. It looks alive!

.....

Grandfather goes on about *The Order*. He's talking about life in an abstract way. Life as a pulse. Life as intuition. Life as memory. He gets more urgent, I get unhappier. But he won't give up. He talks as if his life depends on it!

.....

Containers get flashed on the screen. There is a bubbly substance inside. As I watch I see eyes, a tail -- what looks like a face. The men are packing the stuff in special vessels and they are ready for shipment.

.....

I pity Grandfather his loneliness. He suddenly looks old. His friends keep away from him. I hear him talking in his sleep some nights. Wish I could do something for him.

.....

The dreams have begun again. I don't know where they come from. May be it's Grandfather's work. May be the screens in *The*

*Needle* are doing the trick. I'm getting desperate.

.....

I live in two worlds during the day and enter a third in the night. There was a casualty the other day in the plant. The men in white appeared and took away the worker. Warded in isolation. His people waiting for news. Grandfather has changed again. He looks more confident -- as if he knows something I don't. Something violent building up inside me.

.....

The accident victim is out, but he looks different. Grandfather started laughing. 'He's an albino!' he said. 'He has lost his skin. You'll all lose your skins!'

.....

The reaction to the first 'graft man' contradicted the administration's expectations. Even the smooth-shaven Director had difficulty in suppressing his disappointment. The township was first hurt, then angry and then it went beserk. Centre 1 had to be put under emergency conditions. The Director, working under the senate's directives, would accept no breach of any rule. Hari became a hopeless case.

Did the Director and the research unit rush the experiment? Had the administration over-estimated the individual's ability to survive? Hari began to rebel against the subtle suggestions that the administration made through its media.

The strength and the threshold of tolerance for change that we had intensified in him ran down. In the last few weeks we had to increase our surveillance. He



became allergic to the screens and smashed his fist into one! We did not understand him. There we were offering him and ourselves a fantastic future and all we got in return was violence. For a time, we were bewildered. Why is man so resistant to change?

We had to take drastic measures when our technology could not control him. The screens went wild. His mind would not work in a recordable form. Bizarre patterns of colour filled the screens. We had to take the machines off him.

Was it a victory for the Datuk? He became something of a leader again in the township. People flocked to his stories and puppet drama. They were centred on what he superstitiously called 'The Order of Natural Life'. We let them fester on their fantasies. In the mornings they were sober enough to think about feeding their families, their lack of skill, their dependence on the administration, and so returned to work.

Hari was a complete waste. The last impression we had of him, before we 'confined' him, was not of an adult foetus ready for change, but of a babbling still-born. I do not know if future researchers will make sense of what he said, but the following is a recording of his words:

Life is illusion. Headless men in circles of blood. No skin, no identity, terrible childishness. Violence, brutal violence! Heaps of children on blasted mortar. No vision only violence violence violence!

Hari vegetates in one of our cells. He eats and wastes away. He does not know time is an illusion and that man must create the reality.

JUDITH WRIGHT ON MAN-NATURE KINSHIP AND CREATIVITY

by

Alur Janakiram

Judith Wright's reputation as a major Australian poet, made in the mid 40s and 50s, rests securely on eight collections of verse (1946-76), a collected verse edition (1971), a representative verse selection known as *Five Senses* (1963, reprinted with additional poems in 1972) and two books of criticism: *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (1965) and *Because I was Invited* (1975). The first book of criticism deals perceptively with the major figures in Australian poetry, some being her contemporaries, while the latter, *Because I was Invited*, is a collection of essays and lectures on such diverse topics as "The Role of Poetry in Education", "Some Problems of Being an Australian Poet", "Romanticism and the Last Frontier", "Meaning, Value and Poetry", "Science, Value and Meaning" and "Conservation as a Concept". As Leonie Kramer has noted,<sup>1</sup> Judith Wright, A.D. Hope and James McAuley, form a major trinity, who together with R.D. Fitzgerald, Douglas Stewart and David Campbell, "virtually wrote the history of Australian poetry" in the post-war period. "Their work represents not so much a renaissance in Australian poetry as a first full flowering, which established poetry as a form able to challenge what had hitherto been the dominance of fiction."

James McAuley, her distinguished contemporary, has perceptively remarked that many of her poems "make high claims for themselves by the nature of their themes and language: they play for high stakes."<sup>2</sup> He also goes on to note that the personal experience very often becomes a means in her poetry "to a theme which is typically general - concerned with the human condition, with what it is like to be subject to time and change, having and losing,



knowing and feeling, in a world which never ceases to be strange though familiar."<sup>3</sup> Thus her chief concerns as a poet are not only the familiar Australian themes of settlement and adaptation to the Australian landscape but also mutability or time, love and creativity, and man-nature relationship.

An attempt will be made in this paper to read some of her poems defining the nature of the poetic task and relate them to her notions on creativity, and man-nature relationship as expounded in some of her essays in the *Because I was Invited* volume. Going through some of these poems and essays one finds it difficult to ignore the impression that poetry, as human creativity, has been one of her most engaging concerns right from the beginning and that she, like A.D. Hope and other creative writers, has been crusading for reclaiming the desert to which the landscape of poetry has been reduced owing to the increasing material and economic interests of our times. She has the distinction of consistently campaigning, both in her poetry and the prose pieces dealing with the conservation movement, for reviving our decaying capacities for love, vision and imagination and for preserving the beauty of our environment. She believes that because of the growing prestige of science and technology we have in recent years tended to neglect our age-long ties of love and kinship with nature and a reclamation of our basic creative powers and relationship with the vital side of nature would re-establish our identity as human makers of all living forms.

## I

An early essay, "Why Not Do Away with Verse" (originally delivered as a lecture at the University of Queensland in 1967), sets out to explain the perennial charm and relevance of poetry for our age:



We have surrounded ourselves with clocks, time-tables, calendars and innumerable other devices to rule our days, in terms of which we try to live in accordance with rhythms which are not naturally our own. Underneath all this, however, other rhythms, correspondences, harmonies and discords — the real rhythms of our physical and emotional experiences and changes — continue to rule us, however much we may ignore them....

Verse, song, rhythmic utterance, are based on these rhythms and changes; poetry makes use of language not only for its mere signification, but for its emotive significance....

This is why poets think there will always be poets, and people who need poetry, however airconditioned and mind-conditioned our precarious new civilization makes us, and however we try to kill the poetry with prose....

If it were possible to overcome our biological inheritance and become machines, poetry would lose its relevance and power to move us and we could, indeed, do away with verse. But then we would not be human.<sup>4</sup>

The salient aspects of our "biological inheritance", of our basic human identity, are our capacities for loving and making, qualities which form the staple theme of her first two verse volumes — *The Moving Image* and *Woman to Man*. In the title poem of the first collection which brought her immediate recognition, she declared that she was primarily "the maker", the seeker of "love's whole eternity" in the "doomed cell", the affirmer of life going farther than "clock and star" despite "night" riding over her.

I would go farther with you, clock and star,  
 though the earth break under my feet and  
 storm snatch at my breath and night ride  
 over me.

I am the maker. I have made both time and  
 fear knowing that to yield to either is to  
 be dead.

All that is real is to live, to desire, to be,  
 till I say to the child I was, "It is this,  
 it is here.

In the doomed cell I have found love's whole  
 eternity."<sup>5</sup>

'Making' is the necessary ancillary to the primary process of loving which alone defines our human role and saves us from the terrors of nothing and annihilation. The opening poem of the representative verse selection, *Five Senses*, is significantly called "The Company of Lovers" where lovers are projected as the universal seekers of "love's eternity" in a world where "death marshals up his armies round us now" and where the loneliness of "the narrow grave" is an ever threatening menace.

We, the lost company,  
 takes hands together in the night, forget  
 the night in our brief happiness, silently.  
 We, who sought many things, throw all away  
 for this one thing, one only,  
 remembering that in the narrow grave  
 we shall be lonely.

(p.3)

It is interesting to note that love is offered here as the only positive comforting alternative left to us in our confrontation with the overwhelming world of night and desolation of which death is certainly an important aspect. For students of Judith Wright's verse and thought, the implications of the recurring symbols, light and dark, night and day, are only too familiar and the poet as



maker-lover is always on the side of day and light in her battle with the powers of the dark. The opening poem may thus be said to touch on what is, certainly, a cornerstone of Judith Wright's poetic thought: the significance of human love as an affirmation of human purposiveness.<sup>6</sup>

In its procreative aspect, love gives us a sense of fulfilment and perpetuation. This aspect provides the determining philosophy of the "Woman to Man" series. The title poem has deservedly become famous for celebrating love as a force of creativeness and renewal, finding its culminating expression in the child, variously described as "our hunter and our chase", "the question and reply", "the maker and the made". The child is indeed the "blood's wild tree that grows/ the intricate and folded rose" (p.25). Its companion piece, "Woman to Child", rightly extends this view by calling the child the "node and focus of the world". Here, procreativity and creativity are presented as two sides of the same coin: the poet-mother imperceptibly fades into the other figure of the poet-maker. The two roles find themselves epitomised in the organicist metaphors of "the earth", "the root" and "the stem".

I wither and you break from me.  
 Yet though you dance in living light,  
 I am the earth, I am the root,  
 I am the stem that fed the fruit,  
 the link that joins you to the night.

(p.27)

Another poem, "The Maker", also belonging to this volume, clarifies the conceptual nexus of loving and making through a series of primordial images. The maker persona of the poem projects herself as enacting all at once the complex functions of "the soil", the "lake", and the "crystal" of light: functions always traditionally associated with mother "Nature" before she became the object of scientific study and exploitation.



I hold the crimson fruit  
 and plumage of the palm;  
 flame-tree, that scarlet spirit,  
 in my soul takes root.

(p.29)

The synchronisation of the poet's and nature's vitalist roles is emphasised through three basic equations: the maker = the earth; the maker = the crystal (prism); the maker = the tranquil lake. These expressive elemental images of soil, sunlight, and water convey the twin notions of generation and reflection, creation and mirroring, and emphasise that the poet and nature are generally concerned with living forms, with the things that "glow and move":

All things that glow and move,  
 all things that change and pass,  
 I gather their delight  
 as in a burning glass;

all things I focus in  
 the crystal of my sense.  
 I give them breath and life  
 and set them free in the dance.

I am a tranquil lake  
 to mirror their joy and pains  
 and all their pain and joy  
 I from my own heart make,

since love, who cancels fear  
 with his fixed will,  
 burned my vision clear  
 and bid my sense be still.

(p.29)

Admittedly, nature and the poet-maker have shared sympathies and concerns: the joys of living and loving are effective counterchecks on the inhibiting fears of the dark.

The poet as the chief agent of affirmation in the face of death has to reckon with, at some stage of his quest, the basic paradoxes of our life: our very condition as embodying the dual principles of time and star, of mortality and "love's whole eternity". These well-known antinomies are at the very centre of the short poem. "Myth", belonging to the volume *The Gateway* (1953), which seeks to portray what the Renaissance called the middle status of man, a microcosm curiously blending the godlike creative powers and the fleshly creaturely attributes:

A blind and sucking fish, a huddled worm,  
 he crouches here until his time shall come,  
 all the dimensions of his glory furred  
 into the blood and clay of the night's womb.  
 Eternity is locked in time and form.

(p.63)

If man is hamstrung by the very "blood and clay of the night's womb" that is in his inheritance, how is it that he is at the same time called upon to be the spokesman of divine love?

Within those mole-dark corridors of earth  
 how can his love be born and how unfold?  
 Eternal knowledge in an atom's span  
 is bound by its own strength with its own chain.

....

Sunk in his brittle prison-cell of mud,  
 the god who once chose to become a man  
 is now a man who must become a god.

(p.63)

This is, strangely enough, the predicament of the poet in the modern world, none too hospitable to bardic notes; that he is cast in the unenviable role of being the mouth-piece of unearthly visitations and intimations while at the same time "sunk in his brittle prison-cell of mud".

The old myth that man must realise his godly heritage needs to be supplemented by the new myth that the inmate of the prison-cell of mud

is now a man who must become a god.

Only an awareness of this kind would make the modern man more humanly creative and real.

The preoccupation with man-nature kinship in the realm of creative regeneration continues to inform even the later poems of such selections as *The Forest* and *The Other Half* (1966). The more notable of these poems that merit our attention are "The Lake", "Five Senses", "Interplay", "Naming the Stars", and "The New Guinea Legend".

The poem, "The Lake", of *The Forest* series is an interesting variation on, and extension of, an earlier motif: the maker = the tranquil lake which formed part of "The Maker", a poem we have already considered. The element of mirroring forms the basis of comparison between the lake and the bard:

Faithful to cloud and leaf, not knowing leaf  
nor cloud,  
it spreads its smooth eye wide for something's  
sake.  
All daylight is there; and all the night at  
last....

(p.140)

But it is not just mirroring alone; it is the search for "something's sake", the search beyond "tree" or "cloud", that provides the groundwork for the analogical comparison between the poetic mirroring and tranquil lake's reflective-generative powers:

Eye of the earth, my meaning is what you are.  
You see no tree nor cloud. That's what I take



out of your waters in this net I cast—  
 the net where Time is knotted by the word,  
 that flying needle. Lakes and eyes at last  
 drain dry, but the net-maker still must make.

(p.140)

The methodology of the "net-maker" who seeks to knot time "by the word" is elucidated in the key title poem "Five Senses" preceding "The Lake". Here again, the earlier motif of the natural-human transformative-generative roles is played up with some variation. The net-maker needs all the help his five senses can provide in weaving a pure design of words making "all acts, all presences", and "all shapes" springing from nothing cohere into a pattern of meaning:

Now my five senses  
 gather into a meaning  
 all acts, all presences;  
 and as a lily gathers  
 the elements together,  
 in me this dark and shining

....

these shapes that spring from nothing,  
 become a rhythm that dances  
 a pure design.

(p.136)

The second stanza of the poem stresses the non-cognitive aspect of the creative process: the rhythm and pattern that the weaver within is able to spin out owe their origin to some mysterious external source ("they"):

While I'm in my five senses  
 they send me spinning  
 all sounds and silences,

....

a rhythm that dances  
and is not mine.

(p.136)

However, it is later pieces like "Interplay", "Naming the Stars" and "New Guinea Legend" that attempt earnestly to define the nature of the bardic mission and the goals of the poetic quest.

With its deeper metaphysical intimations, "Interplay" represents all poetic attempts as a kind of deciphering of the signs and codes with which the creation is replete. To that extent, the poetic quest becomes a kind of "interplay" or engagement between the human agent and the non-human universe. All poetic discourse is a kind of visioned expression of mysterious meanings. The poet declares in an oracular voice:

Yet I am not the seer, nor world the sight;  
I am transcended by a single word—  
Let there be light—and all creation stirred.  
I am that cry alone, that visioned light,  
its voice and focus. It's the word that's  
strange.

(p.141)

"Naming the Stars" depicts the creative interplay or dialogue as operating at two levels: between us, the human agents, and the earth on the one hand, and between the humans and the non-human nothing or night at another level. The poetic quest, in the context of the poem, becomes a kind of setting of "her /earth's/ language on the map of night", a kind of bringing together of the named and the unnamed for the purpose of illumination.<sup>7</sup>

Earth watches through our eyes, and as we stare  
she greets, by us, her far compatriots there,  
the wildhaired Suns and the calm wanderers.  
Her ancient thought is marked in every name;

....

On her dark breast we spring like points of light  
and set her language on the map of night.

(p.159)

"The New Guinea Legend", which is the key poem of *The Other Half* (1966), takes up the purport of the poetic mission and deals with it in terms of a mythical language. The chief protagonist of this poem is again the bardic figure, Aurako, who is shunned by everyone of his tribal village as a strange and cranky person. Moved by their scorn, Aurako wanders in a bemused manner in the forest and engages himself in a dialogue with the modern earth in order to unfurl the mysteries of his being and the world. His questioning indeed goes deeper, deeper beyond sleep and death and birth:

Or is there nothing at last? Do sun and  
earth engender  
nothing between them but the mock shadows  
of men,  
generation dying into generation, death  
treading on death?  
If you hold no light, dark mother, to light  
me, then deep in your body bury me

....

But, if, beyond birth and death and sleep,  
you hold some answer, give it. Let my question  
thrust, thrust deep  
beyond sleep, beyond death, beyond birth.  
I look for night's meaning, earth.

(p.185)

Clearly the poet here is sought to be presented in the simplest of his roles as a seeker of the infinite, as an unfolders of the folded meanings in this world. At times he might seem "the moon's lunatic mate" but he remains, essentially, a bold questioner or seeker "of night's meaning". The note on which the poem concludes is indeed significant; the illumination that the poet-figure



finally achieves is this insight:

We invent both light and dark; that is man's  
fate.

And I the chosen one, the moon's lunatic mate,  
know well what currents in you drove me apart  
to dig from my depths the image of man's  
unfinished heart.

(p.187)

"The image of man's unfinished heart", although richly ambiguous, means, in terms of this particular poem, the moon or the dream-girl of the poet Aurako's restless musings. Elsewhere, it seems to tie up closely with another key image that Judith Wright presented in her earlier poem, "The Moving Image" — the "doomed cell" strangely housing "love's whole eternity" (p.19). This seems to be the crucial truth that the creative quest is leading up to; for she had affirmed there in that earlier piece:

All that is real is to live, to desire, to be,  
till I say to the child I was, "It is this;  
it is here.  
In the doomed cell I have found love's whole  
eternity."

(p.19)

## II

What emerges from the foregoing discussion of a few selected poems dealing with the poetic task is the notion that the poet, as "maker" and interpreter of meanings, resembles nature in her much misunderstood creative functions, and that both nature and poet have shared sympathies and concerns in responding positively to the hidden presences and rhythms of a vaster design. In a

world getting increasingly dehumanised by scientism and economic materialism, nature shorn of her earlier vitalist personality has come to mean an inert mechanism, and man a mere cog or automaton. The need of the hour is to regain and revitalise the creative aspects of our humanity and of nature if we are to stay alive on this planet as human creators and agents of evolution. This, in brief, is the drift of her poetic thought, also expounded in some of her discursive essays and lectures.

The essay, "Romanticism and the Last Frontier", which sets out to trace the background of thought behind a few poetic movements in the history of British and Australian poetry, has a few crucial passages which define what nature meant for the earlier Romantics:

... to early Romanticisms at least, nature was a living whole which could communicate with man, a guide and guardian, a continuing source of comfort and inspiration. The poet, as interpreter of nature and as creator of new forms, had seemed for a time a king among men.<sup>8</sup>

It was the strident materialism brought about by the new developments in science and technology in the latter half of the nineteenth century that heralded a significant change in our attitudes towards nature and poetry:

This shift from a Nature to which man was connected by bonds of sympathy and shared life, to a Nature separate from man and of which he could be no more than an observer and a user, was of great import for poetry .... Meaning and divinity had withdrawn from the outer world; man was now its master and manipulator, needing to pray to no gods, since he had taken their place.<sup>9</sup>



It is evident that Judith Wright's poetic credo has certain shades of meaning which the earlier British Romantics shared in their attitudes towards Nature. These shades of meaning emerge more clearly and systematically in a later essay, "The Individual in a New Environmental Age" (1972). In the context of defining the governing philosophy of the Conservation movement, of preserving the beauty and cleanliness of our larger home, the earth — the source of all language and creativity — she elaborates on what kind of ideal relationship should obtain between "nature" and homosapiens. She has no doubt that the modern "psychic crisis" has largely resulted from "the picture of 'nature' and the picture of 'man' we hold, and have held for centuries since the idea of 'nature' emerged as something separate from ourselves".<sup>10</sup> This artificial separation created by technological developments has been crucial for poetry and the arts:

This essential separation of man and nature is not, after all, basic to humanity, however inevitable it seems to us today. The old totemic societies, for instance, did not have this picture at all. They saw themselves as interacting with and dependent on 'nature', as supported by it and supporting it. They saw nature as a living force, not merely material to be acted upon but as itself active, as something to be co-operated with in a totality of living interdependence. We now see nature as something external to us, neutral, without active meaning or value; and we think of 'man' as essentially an observer and manipulator of this inert material, as an analysing intellect plus a technological power.

Such a world-view, the poet laments, has given rise to a materialistic-utilitarian perspective undermining the older relationship based on the values of vision and feeling between man and nature. If a radical revaluation



of the current man-nature relationship is ever to take place, we will have to give up our utilitarian perspective and establish our relation with our environment on a new basis, "thereby becoming another kind of man". The significant shift from economic priorities to ecological values will restore the old poetry of life and the necessary sense of "living interdependence" between man and nature. This essay outlines the need for cultivating a new sense of reverence for life and nature and concludes with a plea for restoring the values of "serenity, intelligence and personal creativeness":

We have chosen, so far, to multiply and cultivate our economic and physical needs in an ever-increasing attack on our living environment. We can choose also, if we wish, to diminish these needs in favour of others that we have so far neglected: the needs of feeling, of human and humane cooperation and creativity, both with the so-called natural world and among ourselves. A society based on such needs would look very different, perhaps, to ours today. But it would be both one of far more personal fulfilment— aesthetically, morally and ethically— and one far more likely to survive than our own. It would not be enriching in the sense of economic growth, but rather in that of serenity, intelligence and personal creativeness. It would not technologize, but humanize, the earth.<sup>11</sup>

These are indeed profound ideals that merit an earnest consideration by all the lovers of poetry, particularly when a leading poet of our times has spoken, with a sense of authority and responsibility, on the need for preserving the beauty and cleanliness of our world, and for turning away from the outward exploitation of our ecological resources towards our inward capacities for

vision and serenity. "Humanise", and not just "technologise", is what we must try doing more and more for the sake of a more meaningful, life-creating future.

University of Rajasthan  
India

#### NOTES

1. "Judith Wright, Hope, McAuley," *Literary Criterion*, XV, 3 & 4 (1980) (Special number on Australian Literature), 83.
2. *A Map of Australian Verse* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.160.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Because I Was Invited* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp.12-13.
5. All verse citations in this paper refer to the *Five Senses* volume (Sidney: Angus and Robertson, 1963, rpt. 1972). In the subsequent citations, page numbers are given in brackets in the text itself. Here the reference is to p.19, 'The Moving Image'.
6. Even the epigraph poem of the *Five Senses* has the same insistent message about love as a basic prop of an "equal heart and mind" for one "lost in a desolate country". The 'you' in the poem seems to be the Muse or Poetic Power.
7. See the essay, "The Writer and the Crisis", in *Because I Was Invited*, p.176, where "the extension from the named to the unnamed" is recognised as part of the poetic process.

8. *Because I was Invited*, p.64; originally a lecture delivered in 1958 at the University of Sydney.
9. *Ibid.*, p.66.
10. *Ibid.*, p.251; the subsequent long quotation is also on the same page.
11. *Ibid.*, p.256.



"UP AGAINST TRADITION" - THEMES IN RECENT  
SINGAPORE SHORT STORIES

by

Alice Samuel Pillay

*Stories From Singapore* (1983)\* is a motley collection of short stories representing the works of fairly established or should I say "popular" writers like Rebecca Chua, Catherine Lim, Dr Kirpal Singh, Lim Thean Soo and relative new comers such as Jeevarajah Yasotha and Philip Wee. It also boasts of having for the English language reader, for the first time two Chinese, two Tamil and one Malaysian writers in translation.

The stories are arranged in loosely thematic groups varying in mood and content and cater to a wide range of interests. Some of the stories contained in this anthology are relatively brief while others are much longer and thereby require to be scrutinized in greater detail. Punctuated with a typical Singaporean flavour, these stories essentially depict the changes that have taken place in Singapore and their appeal lies perhaps in the simplicity with which the writers tell their tales.

One of the recurring themes in this anthology is the theme of change and the gradual erosion of all that is traditional. While the feel is almost totally Singaporean there is a variation in the treatment of this theme. Dr Kirpal Singh's vignette of university life is a telling one, for it reveals through its narrative the nurturing of the new intellectual, independent university student whose utilitarian view of life and code of behaviour go against the eastern tradition of love and marriage. "Julie" in spite of its brevity, sheds light on the changes taking place among the educated ethnic Chinese in Singapore.

Racial prejudice or the fact that "the Chinese don't particularly like their girls getting mixed up with Eurasians" (p.13) does not prevent Julie's liaison with the narrator. Morality is only secondary to the greater need for survival and her quest for the best "bargain" (p.15) leads to her association with Dick (representative of the wealthy expatriate community) with whom she is able to relate intellectually and who satisfies her material needs. She violates not only tradition but the love ethic when she becomes Dick's companion "because it's all a very practical arrangement" (p.16).

The unhurried pace of the narrative reflects the gradual insight that we gain into Julie's character as the forces motivating her into shedding all values that were previously considered to be conventional, traditional and therefore acceptable, are revealed. The writer uses dialogue in order to explicate character and we become involved with Andrew as he attempts to find out for personal reasons why Julie suffers from a bad image on campus. And it is from Andrew's frank exchange with campus mates Barbara and Sue that Julie's character begins to take form. We are never introduced to Julie apart from the fact that she is the main subject of conversation between the narrator and his two informants. She is merely spoken about and yet we learn of her aspirations and her motivations in life. In spite of our lack of direct involvement with Julie, the writer is able not only to excite our curiosity but to satisfy it as well. While Julie is individualized, she may perhaps represent the emergence of a new type of Singaporean, a woman emancipated through education and who previously was repressed by the role imposed on her by tradition.

While Julie succeeds in liberating herself from tradition in order to find self-fulfilment, Tony in Philip Wee's "Is Marriage a Sacrifice?" imposes upon himself the traditional values of honour and the sanctity of marriage. Briefly, the story centres around Tony's faithfulness towards his girlfriend Pat after she becomes



scarred as a result of a bomb attack meant for Tony. He marries her in spite of her permanent disfigurement because he feels compelled by honour as she had risked her life for him. There is a marked contrast between the Tony that the narrator previously knew and the Tony that he now meets. Gone is the flamboyant man of yesteryear who "had scant respect for the establishment" and who "changed cars as quickly as he replaced his female companions" (p.25). Along with Johnny we hear Tony's story.

Philip Wee's attempt to frame a story within a story does not quite succeed. The writer's casual treatment of his subject and his moralistic overtone are somewhat trite and amateurish. While its theme of "conjugal love" and the sanctity of the "marriage bond" (p.24) is upheld, the writer is unable to sustain the interest of the reader as the pace of the narrative is pedantic. The writer's effort to accelerate the story through a recollection of past events is seemingly passive and unconvincing. Although he tries to arouse our interest indirectly through Johnny, he fails and even when the moment of revelation comes, we are not unduly stirred. The moralizing that comes at the end detracts from rather than impresses upon the reader the nobility of Tony's sacrifice and perhaps even leaves one wondering about the "genuineness" of his act.

Compassion of a different nature is explored in Dr Woo Keng Thye's "Adulteress". The writer's style is descriptive rather than dramatic as he exposes the humanity of one man as against the inhumanity of the mob of villagers. Written in the third person narrative, the story is an example of simple story-telling in a language that is lucid. The narrative centres around the mysterious circumstances under which Ma-Li arrives at the farmer's house and takes refuge not only from the storm but from the fury of her village whose code of ethics she has violated by her act of adultery. Our interest in her develops because like the farmer, we too are hesitant to believe her story about the Communist attack on her village.



Like him we are kept wondering about her pregnancy and her real predicament until she reveals the truth at the point of death. There is little character development, the narrative being essentially of a descriptive nature. The tempo of the story is much too slow and the revelation that comes at the end does not have the expected climactic pitch. While the title promises much, the content itself is less than satisfying.

The conflict between tradition and modernity is however, most successfully rendered in Catherine Lim's powerful evocation of "A Mother-in-Law's Curse". It is one of the more interesting stories in the anthology. Like Julie in Dr Kirpal Singh's story, Margaret attempts to break free from tradition. Emancipated, independent and extremely forthright in manner, she refuses to be intimidated by her over-bearing mother-in-law. Her unwillingness to conform to the "old breed who trembled in the presence of a mother-in-law and sought to please all the time" (p.135) sets her apart from her traditional and filial sister-in-law Mee Lian. Margaret's inability to tolerate the idiosyncracies of her mother-in-law the "dowager" or "antique" (p.132) as he disrespectfully calls her, climaxes in the confrontation between the two women, the curse and the mother-in-law's subsequent departure.

The situation is typically local and Catherine Lim handles the story-line adeptly. In his story we have the omniscient author expounding the significant details and generalities of Margaret's thought, character and milieu. The story is told from Margaret's point of view and while the plot is initially submerged, if one pays attention to the dialogue one will see its firm structure under the fluid surface.

Catherine Lime's ability to hold her reader lies perhaps not only in her effortless style but in the way that she renders little details and observations and reveals the changes of mood and circumstances through which Margaret passes. For instance, Margaret's

recollection of her mother-in-law's "solicitous anxiety" when Mee Lian was pregnant, how she "fussed" and "recommended this food and that food" and "made bird's nest soup with expensive rare herbs," further intensifies her antagonism for the old lady (p.135). The disparity in values and practice between the mother-in-law and her unorthodox daughter-in-law is continually emphasized.

There is a sense of concreteness, a sense of evoked reality from mere words as Catherine Lim develops her story. The fictional requirement of concreteness is satisfied here by dialogue because the reader hears the characters in the story in their own voices, and revealing the most delicate shades of personality in their gossipy accounts of each other's lives. In keeping with the tone of realism, the writer develops her theme mostly through Margaret's dialogue not only with her mother and mother-in-law but with her friend and office-mate Suan Choo, who perhaps represents an objective viewpoint. Margaret's mother-in-law meanwhile finds a ready ear in her neighbour's washerwoman.

Dialogue in this story is a useful technical device which Catherine Lim uses to advantage for Margaret's dialogue conforms to character and therefore seems very natural. For instance, her denouncement of the Kitchen God and the Lightning God - that "they all died a long time ago" (p.137) is dramatic and keeping very much in tone with the story. The tempo rises characteristically too with the articulation of the curse and Margaret's impending pregnancy as the story is propelled onward to its conclusion.

The language is crisp yet forceful as Catherine Lim gradually unravels the power of suggestion. From being a self-willed, forceful personality, Margaret slowly regresses as she hallucinates and is convinced that her unborn child has been affected by her mother-in-law's curse. Rendered dramatically, this has its echo in Margaret's mother's earlier warning when she reminds her



that "the young must respect the old ... or else they will be punished" (.137).

Catherine Lim's style is effective for it fulfills every necessity of the story. The sometimes short, declarative sentences give the tone of clinical detachment until we note the very highly emotional nature of the subject matter. The denouement comes only when Margaret, for the sake of her unborn child and her mental health humbles herself before the old lady and for a brief moment tradition seems to triumph over all else.

Briefly, this anthology contains thematic elements that may be of interest to the Malaysian or Singaporean reader as it deals with aspects of life familiar to him. Its appeal may lie in this sphere as it is a subject of considerable interest in a society caught amidst a flux of change and the erosion of old world values. Some of the twenty-four stories in the anthology exhibit finer craftsmanship than the others. On the whole, the anthology is a very readable one if not always exhilarating. It is within the comprehensive scope of the popular reader and it should be read, if at all, for a sampling of Singaporean literature.

Department of English  
University of Malaya

#### NOTE

\**Stories from Singapore*, ed. George Fernandez, (Singapore: Society of Singapore Writers, 1983). All references are from this edition.



READING THE STAGE DIRECTIONS, NOT THE DIALOGUE:  
S. KON'S UNCONVENTIONAL THEATRE

by

Margaret Yong

*The Bridge* (1981) is S. Kon's first full length play to be published,\* though she is well known for her earlier work, "Z for for Zygote" and "To Hatch a Swan". Acquiring the status of a printed text confers on *The Bridge* a strange immobility, as though (to risk an exaggeration) a play whose life depends on motion itself were suddenly to be seen as a series of friezes. Yet paradoxically, that is what *The Bridge* consists of - a series of impressionistic sketches, linked together by its theme of drug dependency.

The playwright herself calls the play "a musical drama", for besides the "usual" dialogue, there are also music "provided by a pop band ... traditional gongs, as well as an electric organ /which/ help provide the right background sound effects" (p.3), songs (with original lyrics), dance and mime, including the striking introductory sections of each Act where an episode from the Ramayana is reinterpreted for modern times. The confluence of these different kinds of theatre is itself an unusual phenomenon in English language drama of this region, although there has also been Lee Joo For's example (*Son of Zen*, "The Propitious Kidnapping of the Cultured Daughter") in experimentation with this mode, though not in this precise configuration. *The Bridge* is the first significant work to blend pop music with traditional music, as Robert Yeo's note to the volume points out:

The music, however, is not traditional but modern pop as written by Bacharach/David or as sung by *The Hollies*. The result of this attempt at integration is something

that is probably unique to the ASEAN region and certainly unprecedented in Singapore and Malaysia.

(p.ix)

However, the experimental mode represented by *The Bridge* is not new to modern Malay language drama, in which there are numerous instances of cross-cultural influences. In the 1970s, Noordin Hassan, Syed Alwi and Tone Brulin, for instance, opened up the canon of conventional drama by creating theatre in strange new ways.

The decade of the seventies evolved a new theatrical idiom for Malaysian drama, and *The Bridge* can be seen as part of this development, though it can be considered unusual in the Singapore tradition, which on the whole, has not been part of the frenzied new style of its neighbour. The genesis of *The Bridge* may explain why S. Kon's work has shown many of the characteristic features of Malaysian (rather than Singaporean) English language drama. *The Bridge* was conceived as a play for (and by) "the inmates" of the Batu Gajah drug rehabilitation centre. The strong thrust of didacticism in the play lies behind its basic iconoclasm, its desire to break down the illusionism of the conventional theatre of "realism". Simply put, the play attempts to dis-illusion us about addiction, whether our illusions are drug-induced "highs" or social attitudes that allow us to turn a blind eye on the problem; this didactic objective being in turn a reflection of its theme:

A junkie is not aware of reality. A  
junkie does not look at reality.

(p.11)

The play achieves its didactic aim in theatrical terms by inventing a confrontational means of performance. In this way, the normal, comfortable illusion of watching a play in a proscenium space is obliterated, and the "audience" is drawn directly into the "action". S. Kon



makes this didactic function of the play clear in her introduction to the play:

... this play is constructed to undermine this defence, this complacency, and to keep the audience always off-balance....

/They/ find themselves unexpectedly involved, by the boy's shrewd comments on the attitudes of the audience.

(pp.4-5)

The playwright's instructions for performance (i.e. her stage directions) achieve an intimate relationship between audience and cast, if *The Bridge* is played in the unconventional style it demands. This it does primarily by continuous direct appeals to the audience to be "involved". Thus, the "boys" (inmates/characters) often make use of a simple device, speaking to the audience and breaking the sense of narrative continuity in the play. The usual formula is merely a conventional greeting:

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, good evening, brother

— this being addressed to the audience, then the cast.

Other unconventional devices include methods of dispelling any notion that in watching this "play", we are escaping into an autonomous, self-enclosed world of make-belief. By making us conscious of the conventionally hidden machinery of theatre, *The Bridge* sets up an ambiguous relationship between the play and its audience. The play as artifice has become the metaphor for the creation of new meaning and new ways of seeing. The world of art as illusion and/or artefact is thus destabilized.

The process of destabilization is sustained through the entire work and takes many forms. It is initiated briefly at the start of the play, when the

"general workers enter and sit on their benches" (p.7) in full view of the audience. The whole crew, in fact, is kept in front of the audience while the play is in progress, as the Production Notes inform us, so that there is no illusion about entrances and exits:

... from here /i.e. before the audience/  
the actors get up to take some part in the  
action or to help in scene-shifting, here  
they put on and take off costumes....

(p.6)

S. Kon handles costume design for the play in the same manner. There is a nice contrast between the first Ramayana episode of Act I, where Rama appears splendidly garbed in "brilliant traditional costume" (p.7) and the Act 3 Scene I Ramayana episode, where the players are patently playing a part:

Hanu ... alone has a funny cap that  
frames his face and narrows his cheeks  
like a monkey's jowls; ... the other  
'monkeys' wear no special costumes -  
they are the Junior Boys in their tee-  
shirts and slacks.

(p.45)

The scene, entitled "Build a Bridge", also forms the "bridge" between the classical Ramayana and its "more human level" of implication for the theme of drug addiction.

The use of masks in the play opens a channel of communication between the mythological and the human worlds of meaning. It also reinforces the sense of "putting on a face to meet the faces", of paradoxical isolation in the psychological states in which we are trapped, and which the masks project, as in the Masked Sketch of Act 2 Scene 4:



The masks for this sketch indicate that the roles are symbolic, not realistic.

(p. 39)

On the whole, the play costumes its players in no special dress, for the identity of the "boys" (they are "inmates" and "actors" as well as the children of people in the audience) should not be disguised, since the play is not interested in being a play "about" drug addiction. There is here a deliberate confusion between reality and illusion; and those involved in *The Bridge* (both cast and audience) should be doubly aware, for the play operates on two levels, in that we are witnessing a *play* which is *for real*. To sustain this essential ambiguity, the short sketches are presented in the same manner ("the roles ... are taken by the ... Family").

The performance method of *The Bridge* is, of course, post-modern. What is more significant is that it also rehabilitates Asian theatre practice for modern English language drama in the region. The style of the play is derived consistently from the improvisation normally associated with many Asian theatres, the most well-known to Malaysian and Singaporean audiences being *wayang kulit*. The quality of improvisation is hard to ascertain from a printed text, for the very essence of improvisation is its fluidity and impermanence, its responsiveness to performance conditions of the moment. A quick run-through of the dialogue, though, suggests that the lines -- that is, the permanent form of dialogue -- are eminently forgettable. The following excerpt, taken at random from the "Family" scenes of the play, is typical of the sort of improvisational aura I have in mind:

*Christopher*: I was in the toilet.

*Leslie*: Didn't you tell your Section Head that you were going to the toilet?

*Christopher*: No ... I went earlier. I had a stomach-ache.

*Leslie* (with real concern): You had a stomach-ache ... do you feel better now?

*Christopher* (nodding ... not very convincingly): Yes.

*Rickie* (rising, sternly): Why were you in the toilet for so long?

*Christopher*: I had stomach-ache.

*Rickie*: Why didn't you tell your Section Head if you had a stomach-ache? What were you doing in the toilet? (*No answer.*)  
Were you getting a jab?

(pp.37-38)

Clearly, the situation (the seniors grilling Christopher), rather than the exact words of the dialogue, is significant. Indeed, the Production Notes emphasize this aspect of the text:

This is not to be rehearsed according to the script. The dialogue given here represents only what might be spoken on one evening ... the therapy sessions are to be conducted off-the-cuff, just as in the Centre itself.

(p.6)

In other words: read the stage directions, not the dialogue, in *The Bridge*.

Department of English  
University of Malaya

#### NOTES

\*In Robert Yeo, ed., *Prize-Winning Plays*, Vol.3, Singapore: Ministry of Culture.



SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE PHENOMENON OF CODE-MIXING  
IN MALAYSIA

by

Irene F.H. Wong

Hong Kong has its 'Chinglish', France its 'Français', Belgium its 'Belgish', Singapore its 'Singlish', the Philippines its 'mix-mix', Malaysia its 'Malglish', and so on. What these are are language mixtures, resulting from what is known in linguistic circles as code-mixing (the term 'code' referring to a distinct language or variety of it). Code-mixing can be defined as the juxtaposition of constituents from at least two different languages or varieties of a language within one and the same sentence, to form a meaningful utterance. This phenomenon of code-mixing is probably as old as bilingualism itself: in other words, it probably began to exist almost as soon as there were people who could speak more than one language, and has since grown from strength to strength, in spite of censures from purists through the years.

While code-mixing is mainly an oral phenomenon, to be found in speech rather than in writing, it has nevertheless also made an appearance in literature in this country, albeit a very brief one. Probably the best instance of this was in what was known as the Engmalchin movement in Singapore/Malayan poetry in the early 1950s, when poets were deliberately searching for a synthetic idiom that would be distinctively local. The basis was English, the language they had their education in, but it was to be supplemented with constituents from Chinese and Malay - hence the name Engmalchin (the Indian languages were conspicuously unrepresented). One of the better poems which arose from this movement was Wang Gungwu's "Ahmad was educated", which, however, seems to rely solely

on English and Malay, but no Chinese (one can see the problem of orthography being a reason for its exclusion, as with the Indian languages). The third stanza of the poem goes like this:

Thoughts of Camford fading,  
Contentment creeping in;  
*Allah* has been kind;  
*Orang puteh* has been kind.  
Only yesterday his brother said,  
'Can get *lagi satu* wife, *lah!*'

This movement never got beyond the experimental stage, as poets realised how restricted it would have been in terms of communication. However, the situation in real-life conversation is totally different. Code-mixing is very much a fact of life in a multilingual independent country like Malaysia today, freed politically from an almost slavish following of native-speaker English to revel in the possibilities offered in such a linguistically rich background as exists in the country. Therefore anybody who knows more than one language (and nearly all Malaysians do) will enjoy interspersing his sentences which are basically in one language with words and phrases from another. And so we have English items in Malay, Chinese, Tamil and so on, as well as vice versa. Of course this can only be done with participants in a conversation who can be reasonably assumed to know the languages used, or else communication will be hindered.

The point to ask, perhaps, is why people choose to mix codes in their speech. Code-mixing may be either deliberate or subconscious, and it is easier to suggest reasons for the former than for the latter. One possible reason for conscious and deliberate code-mixing may be when an individual is not fully proficient in the language which he is using. In such a case he would need to resort to another language to fill in the gaps, especially in vocabulary, but of course this must be a language which his interlocutors understand, or else he will have to use some



other means to convey his meaning. The second possible reason for deliberate code-mixing is perhaps more widespread, and this is when the speaker intentionally mixes codes not because he has to, but because he wants to, as an act to establish rapport with his audience and as a mark of camaraderie.

The reasons for involuntary and subconscious code-mixing are more difficult to isolate and identify. Often the speaker himself is the last person to be able to explain just why he mixed codes and at those particular points. The reasons are probably many, and complex, one of which may have to do with circumstances of familiarity. Individuals get used to associating particular topics with particular languages, this familiarity sometimes being culture-based. For example, the Chinese have different lexical items for describing the various textures, smells and tastes of different kinds of food, and although there are English equivalents, like 'rubbery', 'crisp', 'fishy', etc., they do not appear as natural usage and as appropriate in the context of Malaysia, even while one is speaking in English. And so even a fluent speaker of English would tend to switch to using Chinese words at such points when he knows that his audience will understand the meanings of these words.

At this point it would be useful to stress that there is but a thin line between what has been termed code-mixing in this paper and what is known as word borrowing. The latter is acceptable even in more formal uses of the language, as in written language. The following loan words are well-known and well accepted in written English within the context of the country, the strongest marker of their status as borrowings being the fact that they have been incorporated into the grammatical system of the borrowing language, in this case English, as seen in the *-s* suffix to indicate the plural form of nouns, and in the use of determiners like *a*, *the* and *two*, again as markers of nouns:

*mukims*  
*ang paws*  
*padi land*  
 a roll of *ganja*  
*satay*  
*kueh teow*  
 a *dakwah* **workshop**  
 a *gotong-royong*  
 the *Haj*  
**anti-dadah officers**  
 two suspected *dadah* **pushers**  
*roti canai*

Such grammatical markers are most useful only when the languages involved are highly inflected languages. In languages which have very few inflectional markers, however, as with many of the local languages of the Southeast Asian region, the distinction between borrowing and code-mixing is not always clear-cut. For example, when the English personal pronouns 'I' and 'you' are used in colloquial Malay, as in the following sentences, is this to be classified as code-mixing or borrowing?

You mahu beli ini, kah?  
 I nak pergi dulu.

Malay has no grammatical markers to indicate subjects of sentences and so there are no formal signals of whether code-mixing or borrowing has taken place. I would tend to suggest that it is borrowing, however, based on the fact that these two pronouns are frequently used by many different speakers and almost always consistently so. The point that is made is that it is not always possible to tell with certainty whether some utterances are examples of code-mixing or of borrowing.

There are other examples where the entire utterance is in one language but tagged on at the end is a 'marker' from another language, as exemplified below:



I can slide down backwards, *tahu*?  
 You need this for tomorrow, 'kan?

While markers such as *tahu* and *bukan* are readily identifiable as belonging to Malay and have their lexical equivalents in English, there are other markers used which pose greater problems of identification. The question is to decide which linguistic code, if any in particular, such markers belong to. Some examples of these are the markers *lah*, *ah*, *what*, *man* and *one*, as in the examples below:

Come here, *lah*.  
 I tell you what, *ah*, you need a hair cut *man*.  
 You have too many *what*.  
 I don't like it *one*.

If such markers are identified as part and parcel of English, then there has been no code-mixing at all. However, as with *tahu* and *bukan*, there is a strong possibility that a number of these at least belong to some linguistic code other than English. For example, *lah* may be identified with the *lah* so commonly found in Malay, and the *ah* may be said to be from one of the Chinese dialects. If this is correct, then code-mixing has taken place, with the second language coming in only to provide a type of 'filler', without much lexical meaning of its own but important nevertheless especially for emotional colouring in Malaysian conversational speech.

Apart from the cases mentioned when it is difficult to distinguish code-mixing from word borrowing, there are many other clear-cut examples of the former. And so we have utterances like those given below:

I got *satu set*.  
 Saya 'nak *tahu*, what are you going to do about it?  
 Ini sangat *expensive*.  
 This food very *sedap*.  
 Dia suka mengekspreskan *idea-ideanya*.

*Dia pergi picnic.*

They are all *kwailos* ('foreign devils' in Cantonese).  
 Throw the *lap sap* over there ('rubbish' in Cantonese).  
 Henry-*ke* (particle indicating possession in  
 Cantonese) house.

The point to notice is that code-mixing can take place at any part of the utterance, with the mixture being from any two or more languages known to the participants in a discourse. However, sometimes infelicitous results arise, as in the following example:

You enjoy *meeting* me, eh? ('to pinch' in  
 Cantonese).

This infelicity probably arises because of the ambiguity caused by the word 'meeting', which is also an English word.

This leads to the point that code-mixing should be marked as such, or else misunderstandings will arise when the receiver does not switch channels, as it were, at the right times, but continues to receive in the dominant language when the speaker has actually switched to a second language. This happened to me when a young child spoke to me in English which contained a word that I could not place. Only after asking her to repeat herself several times did I realise that the word I could not understand was actually in Cantonese and not in English. As soon as I realised this there was no longer any difficulty in my understanding what she had said. However, when I brought out this same example to a colleague of mine, she had no trouble at all in identifying the fact that I had switched codes at that particular point although, not being a Cantonese speaker, she could not understand its meaning. This leads me to hypothesise that the addressee's expectations have a lot to do with how easily he understands an utterance. When his expectations are met with, there is ease of understanding, but when they are not, then further clarification needs to be sought. When I gave the example, my addressee must have realised that I had switched codes



when she heard a word that was not recognisably English, since she knew me well enough to expect that she would understand my pronunciation of words in English. For the child, on the other hand, I did not have the same expectation that if she said anything in English I could be sure of understanding it. Hence, when an unfamiliar word occurred, I continued to identify it as English at first, believing that the failure in communication lay in her inaccurate pronunciation. Only after several repetitions did it finally dawn on me that she had switched codes at that point and was using a Cantonese word and pronouncing it properly too. The failure in communication thus actually lay in the fact that the switch in codes was not sufficiently marked for me as such.

Having said the above, though, I must stress that there are no tangible markers that one has switched codes in speech. In writing there is the use of quote marks to indicate this, but there is no equivalent in speech, and one does not use any facial expressions or gestures for this purpose. What markers there are are based on intangibles of understanding and fulfilled or unfulfilled expectations.

It would be interesting to attempt to decide whether or not code-mixing interferes with the level of one's proficiency in each of the languages involved. It is generally accepted that exposure to a language is one of the main factors in one's proficiency in it. Consequently, if one's exposure is mainly to a code-mixed variety of that language, would this not be likely to affect one's proficiency in the standard form of that same language? This may pose a problem especially for English in many countries of Southeast Asia, where it is a non-native language and learnt mainly for purposes of wider communication. The question to be asked is whether constant code-mixing in English particularly, since it is a second or foreign language in these regions, has tended to hinder progress towards greater proficiency in the standard form of the language. At the same time, one

should also ask whether there are any likely benefits which can be said to be due to code-mixing in particular. As I see it now, the gains are not in the educational field, but more sociolinguistic in nature, for code-mixing can be seen as a consequence of one's linguistic inheritance in a multi-lingual country, a heritage one need never feel ashamed of, whereas the losses, if there are any, will be linguistic or educational, in the matter of proficiency in the language.

Finally, what should the stand of the teacher be towards this phenomenon of code-mixing? Should he condemn or encourage it? Definitely not the former, I think, and possibly not the latter too, for code-mixing will continue to flourish with or without it. Perhaps what is needed is a better understanding and appreciation of what the phenomenon is, and what should be the restrictions on its use, for restrictions there certainly are. It must be emphasised that code-mixing occurs generally in informal use, and the teacher has to realise that he cannot ban such a use of it since he would otherwise be open to the accusation of divorcing the language of the classroom from that of real life situations. However, in general, the language that is to be formally taught in the classroom (that is, from a textbook and in formal class periods, as opposed to the use of the language in other class situations like talking to a friend, etc.) should be that of the standard formal variety, for this is what students need the greatest help in. This may be the major factor in any decision to try to keep code-mixing out of the classroom as far as possible, not because it is 'wrong' but because it may tend to impede the learning of the language taught. For example, the teacher should not encourage the mixing of codes which occurs as a 'crutch' when the learning of the dominant language has been inadequate, as when a student cannot find the English word for a certain concept and resorts to switching to another language he has greater competence in, for it is mainly through constant practice and use that the student will acquire greater proficiency and fluency in the language to be learnt, and



not through the use of crutches which help but for the moment but bring no lasting benefits. However, it should perhaps be added here that constant code-mixing probably does not mar the competence of those already proficient in the languages involved, but it probably does for those who are trying to acquire a little more than minimal competence in one of these languages.

Department of English  
University of Malaya

IMPROVING LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH  
THE STUDY OF LITERATURE\*

by

Carmel Heah

In almost all the situations where English is taught as a second or a foreign language, we encounter the division of English into two quite distinct, often antagonistic parts: language and literature. If a paraphrase is permissible, language is language and literature is literature, and never the twain shall meet.

It is the contention of this paper that the study of literature is as much a study of language use as it is of content and as such it is not a separate activity from language teaching but an aspect of the same activity. This approach which has been referred to as "linguistic" rests on the definition of "English literature" as "literature written in the English Language". On this definition or interpretation of "English Literature",<sup>1</sup> the reason for teaching it would be essentially a linguistic one, that is to say, its basic purpose would be to acquaint students with the manner in which literary works in English use the language to convey special meanings. This approach to the study of literature helps to improve the students' command of the target language in a number of ways.

Learning a language involves not just learning about the language system - the structures and vocabulary of that language - but must also involve learning how to use this system in the actual business of communication. In almost all ESL or EFL situations, the learning of the target language is seen purely in terms of learning the system of rules that operates in that language. Learners



thus see sentences merely as illustrations of grammatical patterns; they are seldom made aware of the communicative value these sentences have in given settings. The study of literary works, however, would show how linguistic elements contribute to create messages. In this way the learning of the language system would be extended into the learning of language use. The awareness of the communicative potential of the language developed through a study of literary works is very important from the point of view of motivation. Unless the student is made aware of the communicative value of the language he is learning he is unlikely to persevere in his learning task.

But why emphasize the study of literary works rather than other kinds of discourse if one's purpose is to show the way the language system is realised for communicative purposes? The reason is that in literary works, the literary messages and their verbal expression form an integral whole, that is to say the linguistic organisation devised by the poet or novelist is an essential part of what he is trying to convey. That is why a summary of a poem or novel ceases to be literature whereas a summary of a scientific report still remains a report. Because of this special characteristic of literary discourse, in the understanding of it, the manner in which linguistic elements function to bring about the desired communicative effect is made more overt.

If we treat the study of literature as, among other things, a study of language use it follows that the procedure to be adopted must necessarily be comparative in nature. This means considering examples of literary discourse alongside conventional uses of language to demonstrate the differences in the way the language system is realised for communicative purposes.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the manner in which the resources of the language system are used in the fashioning of unique literary messages can be compared with other uses of the language so as to make clear by contrast how the system is used in conventional forms of communication. (At the same time, a

comparison with other kinds of discourse will reveal what it is that is peculiar to literary uses of English.)

Even if one's emphasis in the learning of a language is primarily on the mastery of the language system, the teaching of literature can show how the language system is exemplified in literary works. It is recognised, of course, that many literary works deviate from the rules of the language or contain many "curiosities of usage" (for instance, the works of Shakespeare and e.e. cummings). But even when these works do not exemplify the language system, they are still useful in that they can be used to show the student in what respects they deviate from the rules or how the curiosities of usage can be accounted for in grammatical terms (e.g. the violating of selection, restriction or collocation rules in personification).

The study of literature can help learners develop interpretative techniques or procedures which can be applied to a range of language uses, both literary and non-literary, which they encounter inside and outside the formal learning situations. The interpretation of literary (as well as other kinds of) discourse involves correlating the meaning of a linguistic item as an element in the language system with the meaning it takes on in the context in which it occurs.<sup>3</sup> The study of literature thus develops the ability to recognise the manner in which the meaning of linguistic elements is modified by context and thereby to acquire a strategy for ascertaining their value in actual use. This "correlating" technique and other interpretative techniques can be transferred to the comprehension of other types of discourses.

An important part of what we call a person's knowledge of a language is the ability to comprehend and use "non-literal" or metaphorical expressions. The metaphorical uses of language cannot be accounted for by grammar alone. In literary discourse, there is often considerable divergence between the "signification" of linguistic elements and the value they take on from being used in a



particular context, seen most obviously in metaphor. Literature, therefore, can be used to demonstrate the kind of reasoning process which must operate in the understanding of metaphorical uses of language. The ability to use language in a 'non-literal' way is not restricted, of course, to writers of literature but is natural to a competent speaker of the language concerned. The difference as pointed out by Widdowson (1975:36) is that in ordinary discourse 'non-literal' expressions occur randomly whereas in literature they figure as part of a pattern which characterises the literary work as a separate and self-contained whole. This points to the possibility when teaching literature of representing literary works not as totally different ways of using language but as extensions of the way language is used in everyday discourse. This approach would bring home to students the usefulness of literature in enhancing their practical command of the language.

If the teaching of language and the teaching of literature are regarded as aspects of the same activity the selection of literary works to be studied will inevitably be controlled by the learner's capacity to understand the language which is used. To put the matter simply: if literature is taught to improve the student's command of the language, its linguistic features must be such as to relate to what the learner knows of English grammar and vocabulary. Accordingly, the criteria for selecting works will be pedagogic, rather than aesthetic or because they represent different schools and periods.

Language Centre  
University of Malaya

## NOTES

H.G. Widdowson, *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature*, London: Longman, 1975, p.78.

2. Some examples of such exercises are given in Widdowson 1975, pp.85-115.
3. H.G. Widdowson distinguishes between these two kinds of meaning, referring to the first as "signification" and the second as "value" (see *Teaching Language as Communication*, London: Oxford University Press, 1978, ch.1).

\* This paper was presented at the MACLALS Seminar, "A Preliminary Seminar to Identify Problems of Teaching Literature in English in Schools" held at the University of Malaya on 21 August 1982.



## MACLALS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROJECT

In September 1983, Maclals proposed to undertake an English Language Project (ELP), as a follow-up to the Seminar held in August 1982 to identify problems of teaching literature in English in schools. The ELP would provide a continuous review of the state of English in Malaysia, in the form of statements, reports, and results of small field surveys on some aspect of the teaching of English, which would be circulated among those involved in teaching the language, in order to provide some form of practical assistance to them. Maclals then formed an ELP team, which comprised Lloyd Fernando, Irene Wong, See Hong Choo, Teng Su Ching and Victoria Yan.

The first activity in ELP was held on 29 October 1983 in Lloyd Fernando's house, where a small but enthusiastic group gathered for this inaugural event. Firstly the aims of ELP were discussed. It was decided that meetings should be held periodically to discuss specific practical problems of teaching English in schools. Comments, opinions and, where possible, suggestions of solutions to problems, will be compiled and circulated to those who participate in the discussions and to others in the field. Eventually, some of these may be written up and published in SARE.

The following is an account of the discussion which ensued.

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING SITUATION;  
SOME OBSERVATIONS

by

Victoria Yan

'Has "learning English as a second language" been reduced to "learning English as a foreign language" in Malaysian schools today?', a group of concerned senior teachers of English asked with a degree of justified alarm. In an informal dialogue session involving twelve experienced teachers and lecturers of English and literature, frank views and opinions were exchanged, bringing to the fore a series of problems and difficulties associated with teaching and learning English in our country today.

While giving due recognition to the fact that success in learning a second language is dependent on multifarious factors both external and intrinsic to the learner himself, the teachers singled out two basic problems which may have pervasive repercussions on English language learning in schools. It was first pointed out that the situation at grassroots levels involving teacher-education colleges leaves much to be desired. The main problem appears to be low standards of proficiency and achievement in English language learning, even among those who are training to be English language teachers. This, coupled with the lack of motivation among many of them, will undoubtedly lead to even greater problems in the classrooms.

The second fundamental problem involves the formal teaching of the language and the language learning environment in the schools. The failure of students to learn the language even after nine to ten years of regular English lessons is a bitter but inescapable fact. Many felt that this may have its roots in the banal and ineffective



language learning atmosphere in primary schools. A situation in which forty-five to fifty young children are sandwiched into a cramped classroom is definitely not conducive to language learning. In addition, lessons tend to be dull and repetitive and more often than not do not cater for the lively enquiring minds of seven to twelve year olds who need to learn through exploring and exploiting an enriched environment. Consequently, second language learning tends to be stunted even at this early stage. It was noted that at the end of their primary education, most pupils would have acquired very little of the rules of the grammar of the language and hardly anything of the accepted conventions of discourse.

Some teachers also put forward the observation that many of their students are not able to read English language texts even in the fifth year of their secondary school career. This came as a shocking revelation, as these students would have gone through at least nine years of learning English by the time they reached Form Five. Can these students be helped? This is a perplexing question which we hope will stimulate further discussion, which may eventually lead to a partial solution of the problem.

The discussion finally reached what had been selected as ELP's first project - an evaluation of approved Form Five textbooks. On this question of selecting an appropriate textbook from among the nine approved by the Textbook Bureau, the practitioners felt that they were on shaky ground. A quick run-through of the list made it apparent that the level of difficulty ranged very widely between the nine books on the list, and the quality of the exercises given also differed greatly. Except for the fact that these books conformed to the stipulated syllabus, there did not appear to be any clear-cut criteria set for their selection. The teachers felt that what should be stipulated for each text was its suitability for particular populations of students as well as the targets for minimum standards of language acquisition through its use. In

addition, no one text is ideally suited for most classes, since levels of English language proficiency vary widely among the students in each class.

Consequently, the selection of a suitable textbook posed a problem to teachers. Moreover, in the event that an unsuitable text had been chosen, teachers had to continue to go along with it and were not allowed to recommend a change because of policies which dictate that any selected text should be used for a specified number of years once it was selected.

It was suggested that a systematic and objective evaluation of each textbook be made by reference to a number of variables such as the level of difficulty, its suitability for particular groups of students, and the quality of its contents. The views of teachers who have actually used these textbooks in their classrooms should be of paramount importance in such an evaluation exercise.

Finally, another suggestion was put forward that perhaps some non-examinable subjects may be taught in English to widen the base of English language learning. The possibility of gaining official sanction for such a move was explored.

\*\*\*\*\*

Editors' note:

In connection with all the foregoing, we urge teachers to write in about anything at all related to the English language situation in Malaysia. It may be in the form of queries or problems, which we will try to get answers and suggested solutions to, or it may be in the form of a sharing of some idea you have found effective in your experience of teaching the language. It could be only a few lines in length, which we will edit and work



on, or it could be a longer article. We would like to devote a few pages of the journal to such an exchange of ideas among teachers, and encourage you to take this opportunity to communicate with your colleagues in the field in this way.

If you need some more specific guidelines on what to write on, please bear in mind the fact that ELP's present project is the evaluation of approved Form Five textbooks. We invite Form Five teachers to send in their views on the texts they are using, and perhaps give concrete suggestions as to which parts of the texts they found most useful and which most unsuitable, and for what reasons. We realise that different texts will suit different types of students, and it is only through learning from one another that our base of knowledge and experience will be broadened. If sufficient responses come in, they can be compiled to provide a guide or an evaluation in brief which would help teachers in the choice of basic and supplementary texts for their pupils.

To start off this project, we are pleased to publish a review of Howe and Doraisamy's *New Guided English*, Books 4 and 5, by a teacher in Seremban.

101

Book Review: Howe, D.H. and Doraisamy, J., *New Guided English*, Book 4 & Book 5, OUP 1976.

by

Saratha Param

The textbook forms an important part of the total language teaching-learning operation. This is especially so in the formal climate of the classroom where the syllabus determines what, when and how much to teach. The effectiveness of a textbook would then be measured according to whether or not it realises the goals of the syllabus.

The textbook has been described as the concrete realisation of the syllabus. *New Guided English*, Book 4 and Book 5 are part of a series beginning with Book 1 for Form 1, based on the English syllabus for secondary schools. The Preface to the upper secondary texts describes it as a "course in communication", this being the aim of the upper secondary school syllabus. The syllabus seeks to enable students to "utilise the English language in a meaningful and relevant way, both in the pursuit of further knowledge and experiences and in the everyday context of the need to communicate". This the text achieves satisfactorily, providing a variety of content material covering the thirteen syllabus areas in Book 4 and Areas 1 to 15 in Book 5. Except for Area 14, the translation of information from Bahasa Malaysia to English in full detailed or summarised form, all the areas are first introduced in a general manner through a comprehension passage which serves to provide pupils with a frame of reference preparing pupils for the actual teaching of the area which will subsequently be presented in a series of language exercises titled "Language in Situations", followed by guided practice dealing with a variety of situations.



This may be illustrated by the teaching of Area 5 in Book 4. First, a comprehension passage - Unit 8, "Interviewing a Film Star" is presented in dialogue form in the interview format. After comprehension and vocabulary exercises, this is followed by a revision of the basic question forms, questions ending in prepositions, "Wh" questions and the like. The next section consists of a number of situations where pupils are expected to draft questions based on short notes given for a number of situations such as for a survey on spending habits of families. The next Unit deals with material of a similar nature and then proceeds to more advanced question forms, building from and reinforcing the previous section. This format may be discerned throughout both the textbooks. It is felt that such a treatment of the syllabus areas is satisfactory as it provides exposure to a variety of situations, practice in relevant language skills and situations for pupils to apply the drills learnt resulting in relevant "communicative" products such as telephone conversations, letters, summaries and the like.

Ultimately, the yardstick for measuring success in the school situation is the examination. Thus, the upper secondary school language teaching programme will culminate in the SPM 122 English examination. Beginning from 1982, new components have been incorporated in the paper to include cloze exercises, recognition and use of the functions of language and the identification of errors. In assessing the effectiveness of the textbook in preparing pupils for the examination one notes that it would be preferable if exercises covering the above could be included should a revision of the textbook be forthcoming. At present, there are no exercises on these areas.

While the text generally deals with the areas in the syllabus adequately, Area 14, translation from Bahasa Malaysia to English, and Area 15, the making of speeches, should be dealt with in greater depth. A separate section or chapter should be devoted to translation rather than dealing with it incidentally as is the case in this text.

A variety of situations requiring products in various forms, e.g. reports, speeches, letters should be included. A greater range of situations requiring speeches should be included to provide more comprehensive practice.

In order to be effective, the textbook should be matched with the pupils' ability and background. In teaching pupils of low and average proficiency I have found that some of the comprehension passages tend to be too difficult. (I teach in a Chinese school.) As a result, teachers often spend time explaining vocabulary items in an attempt to enable pupils to understand the passage. The lesson becomes stilted and the meaning of the passage as a whole tends to be lost. While a variety of informative topics which could stimulate thought is included, this end is sometimes not achieved as pupils find the passages much too difficult. The language of the passages could perhaps be simplified to enable better comprehension on the part of weaker pupils. Since effective variables such as interest and motivation play a major role in language learning, content which is too difficult may negate motivation as pupils are unable to participate actively. Lessons then become teacher-dominated, limiting the process of communication which is essentially a two-way one. Also, the choice of passages would be more balanced if a few "lighter" passages which would appeal to the interests of Malaysian adolescents were included.

Another problem in using the textbook is that often situations are too "guided" with much of the content provided. This hampers or precludes the need for pupils to draw from their own resources. It would have been preferable if a skeletal outline in the form of only sub-headings or key words were provided so that the teacher could draw from not only the language but experiential resources of the class for the necessary product. This would perhaps have stimulated the thought and participation from the pupils, both of which I feel are vital for effective learning.





## LIFE

Three heads at the window;  
Hunger, fear, and death.  
I turn my face away.

Dilip K. Sen

## TO A TEACHER

Do you know?  
Do you really know,  
Or only think you do?  
You stand there, smug, certain, sure.  
You say that it is so.  
But lo,  
You only see your world -  
And for the rest, you do not know.

Do you care?  
Do you really care?  
Dumb, asleep, we while our time -  
You talk, we scream,  
You go your way.  
Did we really care?  
We do not know.

Dilip K. Sen



A REPORT ON THE  
MACLALS FORUM: WRITERS, CRITICS AND PERFORMERS -  
MALAYSIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

by

Margaret Yong

The MACLALS Forum on the theme "Writers, Critics and Performers: Malaysian Writing in English" was held on October 22nd, 1983 in Petaling Jaya, with Edward Dorall (who is, happily, "writer, critic and performer" himself) in the chair. For the occasion, MACLALS invited a number of local personalities who have made significant contributions in the field of Malaysian writing/theatre in English, including Lloyd Fernando, K.S. Maniam, Chin San Sook, Krishen Jit, K.K. Nair, Kee Thuan Chye and Shanmugalingam. It is clear from this list of resource people that theatre enthusiasts figured prominently, and indeed the discussion soon abandoned its conceived structure, based on the areas of personal roots, working as Malaysians, and projections of the future for Malaysian writing in English. Discussion devolved fairly rapidly upon the specifics of theatre in English in Malaysia, within the larger context of theoretical implications for the whole of English language writing in the region.

Two main themes emerged from the evening's exchange of views: firstly, what Malaysian English language writing/theatre has not achieved (or has yet to achieve); and secondly, what patterns (if any) were to be glimpsed from the last ten years and what these prefigured for the future of Malaysian writing in English. It was felt that Malaysian writing/theatre in English had either slowed down or had suffered from inconsistent bursts of activity during the 1970s, because of a lack of institutional organisation and support. Another area which seemed poorly developed concerned the evolution of a medium which

would reflect a more authentic Malaysian identity. The English language, it was felt, would need to reflect, somehow, the vernaculars (including Bahasa Malaysia) to get "the true essence, the realism of the situation"; otherwise, it would sound stilted and false. Malaysian English, it was suggested, had failed to evolve significantly as an artistic medium, because it has yet to acquire "symbolic power".

At this point, it was noted that in theatre at least, such liabilities have been superseded by the evolution of a new idiom not based on language. The aesthetics of theatre have changed. Beginning with the iconoclastic work of Lee Joo For, Malaysian English language theatre has rebelled against the linear, dialogue controlled plays of its early years, and has moved in the direction of the post-modern or contemporary aesthetics, which may be seen as anti-logocentric.

Three prescriptions to foster Malaysian English language writing/theatre were recommended by the resource people:

- (1) that improved (formalized?) channels of communication between writers and theatre groups be established;
- (2) that regular writing competitions and festivals (of plays) be instituted by local organisations such as MACLALS; and
- (3) that the continuity of the Malaysian tradition be enhanced by the publication of local plays, which were now seen only in performance.

The Forum generally accepted that these proposals were desirable steps in the development of Malaysian writing/theatre in English, but it was noted that they would also involve great financial commitments. However, the Forum agreed that organisations such as MACLALS should look into the feasibility of adopting any or all these proposals.



## WORLD LITERATURE TODAY

An international quarterly review, founded in 1927, sponsored by the University of Oklahoma and published by the University of Oklahoma Press. It is the only international review which regularly provides systematic and comprehensive coverage of current literary activity in all the major and many of the minor languages of the world.

A section of Articles and Commentaries balances the breadth and diversity of the reviews with analyses of important writers, works, movements or trends and with informative surveys of current literary activity in areas as prominent as Paris or as exotic as Kirghizia.

Editor: Ivar Ivask

Contents: 75 pages of articles and 110 pages of reviews per issue

Format: 8½ x 11 inches

Issue dates: February, May, August, November

Circulation: 3000

Subscription:	Individuals	..	\$23.00	one year
		..	\$40.00	two years
	Institutions	..	\$35.00	one year
		..	\$56.00	two years

Single copy .. \$7.00

Outside USA add \$4.00 per year for postage

Address: Editor  
World Literature Today  
630 Parrington Oval, Room 110  
Norman, Oklahoma 73019  
U.S.A.





