

Cultural Options and the Role of Tradition

A Collection of Essays on Modern
Indonesian and Malaysian Literature

Anthony H. Johns

*Menjawab kekasihku, katanya: Bangkitlah sahabatku,
intanku mari!*

*Lihatlah, musim dingin telah lampau, hujan lebat
telah teduh, telah berhenti.*

*Bunga telah memecah kelopak, musim dendang telah
tiba, suara tekukur 'lah terdengar di negeri kita.*

*Pohon ara menjulang buah, junjungan anggur yang
membuai putik, menyerak harum. Bangkitlah saha-
batku, jiwaku, mari!*

*Balamku! walaupun tuan di celah-celah jurang, ter-
sembunyi dalam tempat yang curam, tunjukkanlah
rupamu; dengarkanlah suaramu; karena suaramu
merdu, rupamu permai.*

This book was published by ANU Press between 1965–1991.

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Indonesian and Malaysian Literature

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+ because me!
Ralph!!

To Ralph
With Best Wishes,
Love
18/11/85

Faculty of Asian Studies in association with
the Australian National University Press
Canberra 1979

First published in Australia 1979
Set up and printed at The Australian National
University

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National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Johns, Anthony Hearley, 1928-
Cultural options and the role of tradition

Index
ISBN 0 7081 0341 3

1. Indonesian literature. 2. Malay literature.
I. Australian National University, Canberra. Faculty
of Asian Studies. II. Title.

899.221'2

Library of Congress No. 78-74666

Cover design by ANU Graphic Design
Distributed for the ANU Faculty of Asian Studies by
the Australian National University Press, Canberra
ACT Australia 2600

Southeast Asia: Angus & Robertson (S.E.Asia) Pty
Ltd, Singapore
Japan: United Publishers Services Ltd, Tokyo

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FOREWORD

These essays are the fruit of reflections on some of the personalities in modern Indonesian and to a lesser extent, Malaysian literature. While I would like to see them as contributions to literary criticism in the field of third world 'modernising' literature, it would be imprudent to make any claim of this kind; for I have not been able to bring to them the consistency of approach or the conceptual armoury of the professional critic.

They are very much 'occasional' essays, in large part deriving from reading and discussing with students the works of individual authors. As such they reflect the changing moods and interests of the students with whom they were discussed, the 'atmosphere' of the time when they were discussed, and the uneven way in which my interests have changed and developed.

These authors share the cultural experiences of very many of their contemporaries, also practicing writers. They have, nevertheless, established their individuality to such a degree that they appear to summate the literary achievement of their time. Yet they did not live and work in isolation. The degree to which their less distinguished contemporaries provided for them a foundation on which they might build, and the manner in which they did so, is still an area awaiting exploration.

In reading and re-reading their works, my responses to them have changed. It is always the hope of the student of a literature foreign to him, that his sensitivity and capacity to respond to it will increase as his perceptions of the cultural traditions that gave birth to it deepen. Truth, after all, is the daughter of time. In some cases, this re-reading has revealed new dimensions of a poet's achievement. This came home to me vividly when in 1977 I was writing 'Cultural Options and the Role of Tradition', an essay devoted mainly to Amir Hamzah, and compared it with what I had written on the same poet in 1964 in 'Malay Prince: Indonesian Poet'. A clearer understanding of the elements in his personal development - of the Islamic formation of his childhood and youth, and the window to the great traditions of Asia opened to him by a knowledge of Dutch - added much to my appreciation of

his personality and resulted in an enhanced assessment of his importance and achievement.

Chairil Anwar likewise repays re-reading, although not perhaps in so spectacular a fashion as Amir Hamzah; perhaps because his cultural formation renders his work more accessible to a westerner. There still remains however the 'Malay' element in his work and personality which contributed much to the depth of his poetry and the effective use of his language medium - an aspect of his work that has been largely overlooked.

Sitor Situmorang, on the other hand, I find of less interest than I did in 1965: perhaps his poetic personality is not strong enough to stand apart from the era and the ambience in which he produced his best work. Rendra likewise tends to lose his allure on a closer acquaintance. He is not in the same class as a poet as he is as a show-man. And a study of his verse reveals that there is not in him that gulf between a public personality and poetic inner life that is so striking in Chairil Anwar; his work lacks the tautness of unresolved complexity, the intellectual finesse and fastidious control of language that renders Chairil so fascinating.

I regret that Malaysia is not better represented in the collection. Per head of the population, there is more writing, more reading and study of literature done in Malaysia than in Indonesia, especially at the university level. And I would hazard that Shahnnon Ahmad has done more for prose writing in Malay (whether Indonesian or Malaysian), than any other single novelist since Pramudya Ananta Tur.

The literature we are discussing is still a young literature and an even younger field of study. Although a received body of generalizations have been adumbrated - an orthodoxy almost - which seem to have the field sewn up, this at best is proto-criticism: material out of which genuine traditions of literary criticism may grow in the course of time. At present, however, the field is not yet sufficiently developed to permit the construction of a corpus of critical theory appropriate to it. Indeed, an over-concern with principles of order could be counter-productive for it may be at the expense of an adequate understanding of the literary personalities of individual authors.

This is particularly the case since major names are still few, and the minor ones of little intrinsic interest; so that all too often it appears that a stage has been reached when everything that can be said

has been said. It is, I believe, only personal encounters with the work of individual writers that can generate that variety of responses and range of perspective, analyses and judgements out of which something that may with justice be called literary criticism can grow. After all, in a very real sense they are all mavericks, each exploiting a different cultural option, taking as a point of departure differing levels of contact with, and assimilation to, the outside world, and the predominance of different strands of culture in their formulation. It is a mistake to use terms like 'generation' in attempts to periodize the literary products of this region, and imagine that one is speaking of literary history.

My own temperament and interests have led me, in an unstructured and perhaps individual manner, to attempt to unravel and understand those cultural elements that have contributed to a writer's formation, and taken on a life of their own as symbols or reference points in his work. Only by the recognition of such elements can one perceive the dimensions of an author's capacity to integrate his entire range of experience, and yet avoid errors of identification such as that of the Belgian critic who imagined that Little Gidding was a small boy of whom T.S. Eliot was very fond.

These essays appear largely in the form in which they were first written. Of their limitations, I am well aware. I have attempted to give them a face-lift on a small scale, removing anachronisms and re-phrasing sentences which I found students misunderstood or on the basis of which they quoted back at me views I no longer held. By and large, however, these changes are minor. To attempt to modify every view expressed in the past in terms of one's present standpoint is a Canute-like exercise in attempting to sweep back the waves of time. It is normal that views should change, perspectives shift and - one hopes - insights deepen, as the years pass. Such changes should be the basis for new work, not simply an attempt to protect older efforts from obsolescence.

On one point I must ask the reader's indulgence. Each of the essays was originally set according to different house rules depending on where they were first published. In addition, during the period under discussion, Bahasa Indonesia has had three spelling systems. Although every effort has been made to ensure consistency, at least within each chapter, it is likely that quite a few inconsistencies are

still at large. May they be treated kindly!

The title of the collection is based on that of the essay 'Cultural Options and the Role of Tradition: Fecundation of a New Malay Poetry'. It is the essay in which I feel I came closest to an inchoate ideal, and the form of words that perhaps comes closest to discovering a unity in the collection.

My thanks for permission to reprint are due to:

Angus and Robertson, Australian Outlook, HRAF Publications,
Kementarian Kebudayaan, Belia dan Sukan (Malaysian
Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports), Koninklijk
Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (Royal
Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology), Meantjin,
Oxford University Press, Quadrant, Sydney University
Press, Westerly

under whose auspices the several chapters or articles originally appeared. The date and attribution of each original publication are indicated in a footnote to the title page of each work.

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THE NOVEL AS A GUIDE TO INDONESIAN SOCIAL HISTORY*

In the study of Indonesia's past, it is possible to follow the trails of many kinds of evidence, each of which, if pursued consistently can illuminate wide areas of the life and circumstances of the peoples of the region. Old Javanese inscriptions and poems represent one trail; the study of Islamic documents provides another richly rewarding exploration into the social traditions of the people in whose life they played a significant role; dialect literature, based mainly on oral tradition is a guide to the traditional, and to a varying extent pre-Islamic pattern of social organisation and values in various areas. And in the modern era a great source of information may be found in a literary form which is an innovation for Indonesia, the novel.

Literary sources, of course are not a substitute for history, but they contribute something to our perceptions of a period - of its values, of what it was like to live through, of its ambiance and character. There is something to be gained then, in using them in this way, even at the risk of falling into the dreaded 'literary fallacy'.

It is not easy to define the novel in such a way that earlier fiction is excluded yet everything subsequent that falls into the category is included. Ian Watt suggests that the essential nature of the novel is that it is an art form which attempts to portray all varieties of human experience through the medium of narrative prose, in a way faithful to the norms of formal realism.¹ It focuses on the personal relations of individuals and the circumstances in which they live, and the resulting work as a whole reveals a moral or formal pattern.

Taking formal realism as a basis of our definition, we find that the novel presents to us what a certain situation, or better a complex of situations was like, as effecting and effected by character under the consistent vision of the author. In this way, without making this its formal object, the novel can provide at once a criticism and picture of society.

* First published in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, Vol. 115, pt 3, 1959, pp. 232-48.

Even in Europe the novel is a comparatively recent art form. Its development can be associated with several factors: an increasing importance attached to the individual as opposed to the group or the type which possibly rises out of the Puritan emphasis on self-reliance and individual responsibility; commercial individualism, a sense of nationhood, the development of journalism with its need for a naturalistic prose style, and the growth of a reading public.

It is probably not a coincidence that there is no prose work approximating to this definition of the novel in Bahasa Indonesia before Western education, and a Western sense of individuality began to make their mark on Indies society early in the 20th century. The other conditions mentioned above also began to take shape during this period - the development of journalism requiring a naturalistic prose style, and the gradual formation of a reading public. The basic attitudes of Puritanism, in particular those of self-reliance and individual responsibility were provided not only by modernist Islamic movements, but also by European commercial individualism.

Thus the appearance of the novel, in itself, may reasonably be interpreted as a symptom of quite extensive changes taking place in traditional society. As opposed to older forms of literature, it represents the individual standing against tradition on equal terms, and can even be used as a weapon for a radical attack on the older way of life. In it the elements of social tension in a society in process of change become articulate as the individual writer achieves sufficient self-realisation to see his own system as against other systems of social values in contrast or interaction, and express the predicament of individuals as the working out of the process effects them.

For the purposes of this paper, we are going to consider three Indonesian novels written at fairly widely separate periods: *Sitti Nurbaya*, the name of a girl (written in 1922); *Belenggu* (Bondage) (1938); and *Atheis* (An Atheist) (1949).²

Sitti Nurbaya is usually accepted as the first Indonesian novel. It was written by Marah Rusli, a Minangkabau from Central Sumatra, and this fact is significant, for a large proportion of Indonesian novelists have come from this area. The Minangkabaus have one of the more interesting systems of traditional (or *adat*) law in Indonesia. It is distinguished by the fact that its pattern of social organization is matrilineal, and marriage is matrilineal. This system of social life (law is too narrow a

term) inspires great loyalty among the Minangkabaus, and is felt as something distinguishing them in a special way from other ethnic groups. In such a society the role of the individual is subordinate to the efficient functioning of this system, as the traditional saying indicates:

Ibu tagadai, anak tajua
Asa adaik dipakai juo.

Let mother be pawned and child sold
Provided the *adat* can function well.

Despite this overall and self-sufficient system, it is usual for Minangkabau men to leave home for some period of their life to attempt to make their fortune, usually by some kind of trading in some other part of the Indonesian archipelago. They work to send home money to their families, to take back presents to all their relatives, and to gain sufficient social standing through their success in business to be invited by the family of some eligible young lady to enter their family compound as a son-in-law (*sumando*).³

This self-contained, conservative society, thus contains the seeds of social tension which can become articulate in the novel once the pressure of foreign influence becomes sufficiently strong and an author can remove himself far enough from the tutelage of his own social background to see it in contrast with other systems of social organization.

Marah Rusli was born in Central Sumatra in 1898. He was educated at a Teachers' Training College in Semarang, and then at the Medical School in Jakarta. He was, in short, a Dutch educated expatriate Minangkabau of the upper middle class, probably influenced to some extent by Dutch literature. Just the type of individual who, in the light of our earlier analysis, might be expected to write a novel.

The theme of the story is of a young couple, Sitti Nurbaya and Samsu'l-Bahri who are separated by the cunning of a money-lender, Datuk Maringgih. This money-lender, having ruined Nurbaya's father, Baginda Suleiman, threatens him with prison for debt unless Nurbaya is given to him in marriage. To save her father from prison, Nurbaya marries him, to the distress of Samsu who is in Jakarta studying medicine. After her father's death, she dismisses her husband from her house and goes to Jakarta to visit Samsu. But on arrival in Jakarta the police order her to return to Padang to answer a charge of theft by Datuk Maringgih. Once she is back in Padang, he has her murdered.

When Samsu hears the news of her death, he attempts suicide five

times unsuccessfully (which must be taken as a departure from formal realism) and then joins the Dutch army. He fights recklessly, hoping to be killed, but only succeeds in winning a reputation for courage. Death evades him until he is sent to put down a revolt in Padang against the imposition of a tax. In the fighting he kills Datuk Maringgih, but is mortally wounded himself. He dies two days later, but not before he meets his father again, and has requested that he be buried between his mother and Nurbaya.

This is a brief outline of the plot, and several episodes are omitted. From the standpoint of literary criticism, despite certain flaws, the work is certainly a novel. The characters carry a certain conviction, several scenes are vividly presented and there is some delightful humour. The initiation at the Medical School where a student with weak nerves is made to sit through the night in the anatomy room, and his reactions when a skeleton raises its arm and with eyes glowing red moves towards him, are very well told. There is also a kind of moral pattern imposed on the work, which, if pretentiously put, might be called a dialogue between a man (Samsu) and his fate.

From the standpoint of social history, we can distinguish several themes. One is the tension between Sutan Mahmud Syah (Samsu's father) and his sister Rubiah. Sutan Mahmud's family have been servants of the Dutch for generations, and as an individual he finds himself in conflict with the social norms of the Minangkabau *adat*. He chooses to give his son Samsu a Western type education as a doctor rather than to set aside money for the wedding of his sister's child as the *adat* demands. He pays little regard to hereditary social distinction, and although of royal blood, he has a 'commoner' wife; he keeps one wife, whereas, according to the *adat* values, unless a man is invited to marry many times he is despised. He is, within limits, prepared to take a stand on principle rather than custom. His sister Rubiah, on the other hand, is jealous because her brother has spent all his money on the education of his son, and not left enough to pay for sufficient marriage ceremonial to invite a son-in-law of high rank into the family. For her, rank is of more value than education, and a large number of marriages (and divorces) is important for a man's social standing. She jeers at her brother's views, and accuses him of inclinations to turn Christian. In the end he gives in to her and borrows Rp. 3000 on her behalf from the villain, Datuk Maringgih. Thus later, when he has to choose between

his son and the Datuk, the Datuk has him in his power. He is forced into this step because the social tradition demands:

'ndak kayu, janjang dikapieng,
'ndak wang, ameh dibungkue

which means: if you need wood cut some from your house-steps, if without gold, take some from your ornaments. The idea is that if custom demands a contribution to anything, one should go to all lengths to fulfil it, even at the cost of bankruptcy.

In a later part of the book, the author speaks more clearly of what he disapproves of in his society - criticising under-age marriage, marriage based on considerations of property and rank, and the inferior position of women within marriage in general. But it is important to note that this direct criticism is made through a very religious figure, Ahmad Maulana, of whom the first thing we discover is that after performing the evening prayer (*maghrib*), he prays privately for the following hour and a half until the night prayer (*ishā'*). Presumably only on the basis of religion, in this case of modernist Islam, could any such criticism be tolerated, let alone accepted. These criticisms gain in point when later Ahmad Maulana's daughter, Alimah, tells Nurbaya of her divorce from her husband. Her husband's family incited her husband against her because he gave his wife a portion of his income and persuaded him to marry a second wife, a richly propertied woman. And here it is interesting to compare the treatment traditional literature gives to polygamy, and the presentation of the reality in the novel. Nothing could demonstrate more clearly the revolutionary potentialities of the novel as an art form. The passage from traditional Minangkabau literature is as follows (a mother is explaining to her daughter the duties and responsibilities of marriages):

"One thing more, O my child:
if you are not the only wife,
or he is invited for another,
- what is fine should be used together,
what savours sweet be shared -
that is the practice of the *adat*
and is commanded by religion.
Let him go ungrudgingly,
let him go with a smile
and have no ill-feelings.
There is no need to be quarrelsome,
no need for spite or sharp words:
the Holy Book forbids this.
Don't be like people of nowadays:

once they meet a fellow-wife,
all their better feelings disappear;
they make waspish allusions and complain,
looking proudly from the corner of the eye
till it comes to quarrelling and fighting
and clothes are torn
- they are like dogs fighting for a bone.
If you think carefully
you'll see this something to be ashamed of,
for if people see what is happening
there will be much whispering and gossip".⁴

Alimah tells her story: 'All that night I wept, unable to restrain myself. Whenever I met my husband it was as if I was looking on a wild beast, and I felt loathing and fury alternately. My delight in and love for him had gone. I would have slapped him, I was so furious, had my mother not restrained me. Time and again I asked for a divorce but he would not grant it. I was powerless, for the power of divorce was in his hands. Had I had the right of divorce, I would have divorced him absolutely on the spot, and not looked at him again. From that day on, I ignored him completely paying no attention to his food or clothing, for I could no longer look on him as before. If another man had enticed me I would have gone with him, I felt so bitter. I would have left him had I not feared that I would have been bound to him forever, neither divorced nor provided for.

Then, one evening, as I was out with an aunt, I saw my husband out enjoying himself with my rival wife. At the sight of it I became blind with fury and completely lost control of myself. My mother told me that I rushed at the woman and began tearing at her hair and clothing, shrieking insults in full view of everyone. When we had been separated, I called my husband all the vile names I could think of and said he had no right to call himself a man if he did not dare divorce me - and he divorced me there and then'.⁵ Alimah had been married less than a year. In the novel the Minangkabau woman is able to demand passionately her rights as an individual.

Another important sidelight on Minangkabau social values is revealed in the scene where Sitti Nurbaya dismisses her husband, Datuk Maringgih, from her house. While her father is still alive and Datuk Maringgih has power over him, Sitti Nurbaya submits to all that fate imposes on her. Once her father is dead and cannot suffer shame through her repudiation of her husband, she orders him out as the filth he is. This illustrates rather poignantly the deep dilemma of many of the

younger generation of Minangkabaus who find the older pattern of life intolerable, but through family - and not necessarily (and this should be emphasised) through an inherent lack of determination - and the closely knit social structure in which they have been brought up, have to live out their lives in anguished submission. Only the certainty that no one will suffer disgrace can give the power to decisive action. This scene also shows in practice the security the Minangkabau matrilineal system can give to the wife. According to Islamic law, the power of divorce is in the hands of the man, but since in the Minangkabau system property descends in the female line, the woman cannot be left homeless. It should be noted that, although these scenes are set in 1897 and the book was written in 1922, in 1959 the issues it raises are still living.

An interesting episode of the novel deals with the reaction of the Minangkabau community to the imposition of a levy by the Dutch. We hear in turn the justification of the tax by the Dutch Resident to his own nominees; then the reaction of the village leaders, and finally that of the people themselves. The Resident argues that all the parts of the archipelago under the authority of the Dutch, including West New Guinea, form a single entity, and that each has to contribute to the welfare of the other. He virtually admits that the forced plantation of coffee is unsuccessful as a source of revenue because only the smaller peasants now planted it.⁶ It is only justice to impose the tax since the Dutch Government is doing so much for the country as a whole. The Dutch-appointed officials acquiesce meekly, and express the pious hope that the ordinance will be executed without any disturbances.

With the village officials, the reaction is different, and among their objections comes this rather curious commentary on the degree to which nationalist feeling had permeated Central Sumatra during this period: 'The Resident himself has said that we should not ask others to supply our needs. Why then cannot each town and village fend for itself? Why should it be upon our shoulders to help the people of . . . Celebes, the Timorese and the Papuans? Have we ever seen them? And who is to say that they would help us in return if any difficulty or need arose?'⁷

The people themselves assemble to make their protest in the mosque - and it should be remembered that the mosque is a centre for the organisation of public opinion. It is Datuk Maringgih who opens the

meeting, urging resistance to the Dutch. He does this not out of patriotism, but because, were the tax imposed, he would have the most to pay, and in addition because the police suspect him of criminal activities. The next speaker is a *haji* who has been to Mekka, Medina and Jeddah but never before seen any tax of this type. The *haji* makes his appeal on grounds of religion, remarking acidly that the real aim of the Dutch is to make the Minangkabaus into Christian infidels like themselves so that they would not have the distress of sitting in hell and seeing the Minangkabaus in heaven.⁸ A demand for war against the Dutch develops rapidly, but on the basis of a narrow religious outlook and community self-interest. Datuk Maringgih adds: 'I have never been to their schools, but I am rich enough. What need have we of their schools? And why do they build them? To make our children hate their own people. All we need is our mosque and place of prayer'.⁹

As a further result of the meeting, emissaries are sent to Aceh and Turkey to ask for help. This was a time when the Turkish Sultanate still had a role in pan-Muslim thinking.

There is one scene which approaches pathos in the description of the fighting. At this time (⁺ 1912) the modernist Islamic movement was only beginning, and many of the people belonged to various mystical (*Sufi*) orders, such as the Nakshbandi, which possessed many non-Islamic accretions. Among these accretions was the belief that by practising ascetism and using powerful charms and spells given by their *guru* they could achieve invulnerability. At the beginning of the first clash, the Dutch soldiers fired into the air. Because none of the Minangkabau were wounded they imagined that they really were invulnerable, and advanced chanting rhythmically: *Lā ilāha illa'llāh*, only to be mown down by the next salvo directed at them.

The early 20th century saw the Islamic reform movement of Muhammad Abduh take root in Sumatra. From 1911 onwards there was a movement against the *Sufi* orders as part of an attempt to purify Islam. There are several indications of this attempt at purification in the novel: Samsu was given a funeral procession according to the ancient practice of Minangkabau royalty, but the use of drum and flute were forbidden by the religious leaders. Similarly, the playing of a funeral march and the firing of a salvo were forbidden - small but sure indications of the way in which the reformists were attempting to restore the simplicity of the burial ceremony of orthodox Islam.

The personal attitude of Marah Rusli to his characters is somewhat puzzling, and his own standpoint appears confused. If we have read the book correctly, he appears as a moderate representative of modernist Islam: ready to accept what appears of value from the West, tolerant towards Christians and interested in the reform of marriage. Yet the moral basis of the book is irrational and self-contradictory. We mentioned earlier that the theme of the book could be summed up as a dialogue between a man and his fate. But fate here seems to have no relationship to God. It is fate that warns Samsu in a dream that Datuk Maringgih will destroy him and Nurbaya, fate that tells him in a dream that Nurbaya is dead, and fate that tells him (also in a dream) when he sets out to fight his own people and co-religionists on behalf of the Dutch, that the path traced out for him is nearly complete, and that he will soon rejoin his mother and Nurbaya. The upper levels of Samsu's personality pay lip service to Islam. But he attempts suicide no less than five times and fights for infidels against Islam in the hope of finding death and consequent reunion with his mother and Nurbaya. With his last breath he exclaims *Allahu akbar* - God is Lord of All - as a good Muslim, but there is no mention in the book of his praying or fasting. The God that exists for him is not the burning passionate concept of Islam, but a benign piece of pious self-deception.

The problem of course is in the mind of the author, and illustrates the basic predicament of the reformer whose reforming ideals come largely at second-hand from a foreign source. He has to control the sub-conscious tendencies of his own mind and reduce what he has been brought up to believe as vital in his own way of life to a rational basis. He also has to eradicate from it all that appears irrational or bad in terms of his new ideals and foreign rationalism.

Belenggu (Bondage) is a very different type of novel. The author, Armijn Pane (born 1908), was likewise Dutch educated - for some time at the medical faculty in Jakarta. But later he turned to journalism (in Solo) and became a teacher (at one of the Taman Siswa Schools). In 1936 he began work at Balai Pustaka - the government publishing house - and has since been concerned with literature. He too is an expatriate. Although born in North Sumatra, he received a Dutch education in Java and has since worked there.

Technically *Belenggu* marks a great advance on any previous work,

and with it the Indonesian novel comes to maturity. The theme is simple. It can be reduced to the eternal triangle: a husband, Sukartono, and wife, Tini, who get on each other's nerves, and the other woman who can give Sukartono all the tenderness, love and feminine attention that he is lacking.

When completed it was refused by the government publishing house, and on its appearance in the literary periodical *Pujangga Baru* soon received the necessary qualification for a work of literary innovation: severe criticism from several quarters on the grounds that it was immoral and an imitation of decadent Western literature.

This novel, like *Sitti Nurbaya*, is a tragedy; but the tragic predicament arises not from the pressure of exterior circumstances, but through defects in the characters of the protagonists. The action of the former novel took place against a rural background, presenting the predicaments of essentially village people in a traditional setting. *Belenggu* is set in Jakarta, the metropolis. The characters are representatives of a new type of Indonesian, the successful professional urban couple who possess a car, use a telephone, and both have professional interests. They are free of the traditional restraints of village life; they chose each other, and they have no fear of poverty. Yet something has gone wrong. Perhaps they are both fettered by emotional ties to the past before they met; Sukartono to a school-girl sweetheart, Tini to a certain indiscretion with one she now thinks dead. Their basic problem is that, although they have each achieved their aims - emancipation in the Western sense, and professional success, they are unable to understand each other, and little by little grow apart. It is the telephone (symbol of modernity, perhaps) which plays an important part in the break-down of the marriage. Sukartono's wife is dissatisfied because it is the telephone which keeps Sukartono busy as a doctor, and to show her spite she removes the notebook where telephone messages received for the doctor are written. And ironically, the telephone too provides the entrance for the other woman into Sukartono's life. Tini's own activity in the social life - where her husband's standing as a doctor gives her authority - is, in part, an expression of her unhappiness and disillusion at home.

The problems that occupied the centre of the stage in *Sitti Nurbaya* are still present in the background. The 'other woman' had been forced to marry a man she disliked twenty years older than herself and been

taken to Palembang. She left him, and drifted into prostitution in various of the large cities in Java. This, without doubt, is a contributory element in the problem of prostitution. In the third novel we are going to discuss, the central figure, while at a hotel, is offered a massage (this is an euphemism) by a girl recently divorced from her husband. The old world of *adat* is passing on its problems to the new world of the city; and emancipation from the *adat* presents the new problem of attempting to find an identity and basis of relationship to replace the comprehensive system of relationship which has been lost.

Sukartono thinks that he has found someone who understands him, and whose identity he can grasp when he meets the other woman who shows him the love which Tini does not. But her personality keeps dissolving. First he knows her as Nyonya Eni; then she becomes Rohayah, a school sweetheart, and then Sitti Hayati, a popular singer. And he bursts out in desperation: 'You are not Hayati, you are not Nyonya Eni - who are you? You are making a fool of me'.¹⁰

It is this problem of identity, and a longing for security in an I-thou relationship which leaves Sukartono bewildered and frightened. This is particularly clear in the following extract where the author presents the thoughts running through Sukartono's mind as he drives from the house of his mistress down to the beach close to Jakarta harbour (Tanjung Priuk): 'In his heart of hearts, Sukartono felt, still believed, that, although Tini seemed not to care, put on a frigid exterior, he felt that she still loved him. But what was the proof? Was it conjecture or just feeling. At one time hadn't he felt he had known Nyonya Eni. But would he have known Nyonya Eni was Rohayah if she hadn't told him. Did he know - a momentary wave of sadness engulfed him - the disease that had killed Mar? [a child patient who had died]. The child herself could not tell him, she could only say Ma and Pa, and these words changed their meaning according to the child's whim. But if Tini said hadn't she said that she had a right to happiness? Wasn't she happy. - he smiled - as a doctor's wife? Hadn't that been her ambition? And like the dawn lighting up his mind he remembered the beginning; that night Tini had still been able to communicate with him, to tell him she was angry because he hadn't fetched her. What had she said? 'If you are busy, do I have to wait until you are free?' He didn't have time, but Tini still had to live. But didn't he have to go out? Go to Yah? Yes. But because he had to. Had to?

Because....., because..... he wanted to remember, to return to the past..... because..... his mind groped around in nothingness, his train of thought kept losing itself as if his mind were a radio with uncertain reception.

Somehow or other he reached the beach at Tanjung Priuk safely. He was brought back to himself by the ripple of the waves. There was no moonlight to glisten on the waves. A kind of visible darkness rested over the sea. There was no one else, he was alone. The darkness over it was like a reflection of his own soul. As he sat behind the wheel he gazed towards the water. It was like gazing into his inner self.¹¹

This is Sukartono's problem: he cannot understand his wife, his mistress or himself; he cannot understand the germs of disease that, as a doctor, he has to fight. He is oppressed by the sense of inevitable parting and death. As a background to this goes on the busy round of his wife's committees - of jealousy, gossip and vanity like the vanity of Mrs Sumarjo who was always chosen as chairman of committees, not because of her ability, but because of her husband's position.

Some critics have considered this a European novel transplanted into Bahasa Indonesia. We find it impossible to agree with this judgement. The singularly delicate treatment of the theme and its environment are purely Indonesian, although it concerns Indonesians of the city, not of the country. It is the approach of formal realism applied to a tiny scene of city life (through the key hole, as is said of Richardson's approach). Tini and Sukartono part forever, although in their hearts they still love each other. Tini's uncle, Mangunsucipto, an old Javanese who is a symbol of the traditional wisdom of Java, gives them advice which, if acted upon, would save their marriage. He explains to them the wisdom of gradualness and patience, for patience is not a sign of defeat but equality. He tells them that they think in terms of dynamism, but forget patience; that they make a God out of intellect but forget the value of intuition which can penetrate places inaccessible to reason. But they reject his advice. They each go their own way with none of their basic problems solved.¹²

It would be possible to speak at great length of the literary merits of the novel, on the extraordinarily vivid presentation of two streams of consciousness, each misunderstanding and at odds with the other, of its symmetrical structure and the skilful use of language. But what is important for the purpose of our paper is to see the pre-

dicament of an emancipated couple who, to the world at large, are sure of themselves, but whose inner life is still hollow and confused.

Achdiat Karta Mihardja, the author of *Atheis* (An Atheist), first published in 1949, was born in 1911. Chronologically he belongs to the older generation of writers, but his novel *Atheis* encompasses all the revolutionary developments in Indonesian literary history of subject and treatment since the Japanese war. Thus, he is regarded as belonging at one and the same time to both the older and modern generation of writers, the revolutionary group of the Generation of '45, as they call themselves. He too was Dutch educated, but while at High School he took Oriental literature. Later he studied and attempted to practice Nakshbandi mysticism. In addition, he has studied Thomism and contemporary Western philosophy. Thus, he has unique qualifications for the novel he set out to write, a novel in which one system of thought and way of life, that of Hasan and his family, is set against the revolutionary socialism and anarchism of his friends Kartini, Rusli and Anwar.

Hasan comes from a village in West Java where the traditional pattern of life is still intact. His parents are deeply religious, following the religious practices of the Nakshbandi Order. This means that Hasan was brought up according to the traditional pattern of Indonesian Islam, untouched by the current of modernism, and without the rational sophistication of the modernist. Before leaving home to work in Bandung, he joined his father's Order.

When he first arrived in Bandung he lived isolated from the community where he worked, keeping up all the ascetical practices of his Order: fasting seven days and seven nights; diving into the canal and sitting on the edge until he was dry forty times during one night between the night prayer, *ishā'* and the dawn prayer, *subh*. Once he sat locked in his room three days and three nights without eating, drinking or sleeping.

One day he meets an old friend from his village, Rusli, and a girl, Kartini. He fears they are irreligious and decides it is his duty to attempt to convert them. But it is he whose faith is undermined by the Marxist interpretations of religion. Kartini's beauty attracts him and her face haunts his imagination while at prayer. He cannot but continue meeting them, and with them he meets Anwar, an anarchist - selfish, demanding, and with a reckless vehemence in all he does. Rusli's suave

argumentation, using the technique 'of course you are quite entitled to your own opinions, but...' is too much for the poor simple Hasan, whose faith gradually seeps away.

One can imagine his feelings, envying the freedom and experience of Rusli, instinctively forced to respect him as someone who knows. For when Rusli expounds any theory which amounts to blasphemy, he can only think in terms of Infidel, Retrograde, Traitor. These are his feelings when Rusli remarks that one day it may be possible for man to create life. He objects that this is the equivalent of man making himself equal to God, only to receive the bland, sophisticated reply: 'But why be obscurantist? There is no God'.¹³ And when Rusli explains to him that God and religion are a creation of man himself arising from an imperfect social structure and economic system, he finds himself unable to agree, but unable to prove Rusli wrong. In any case, these are problems that he has never before thought about. His only defence is to finger his rosary reciting as hard as he can: *Lā ilāha illa'llāh*. But Rusli's social analyses are beginning to influence his thinking. As he walks along the street one night and hears the soliciting of the prostitutes he analyses their predicament instinctively in Rusli terms: the victims of Capitalism.

Later he meets Anwar, the anarchist. Anwar is a coarse egalitarian who slaps his servant for kneeling to him in the traditional Javanese manner. To Anwar the servant is perpetuating the feudalistic degradation of humanity. Hasan experiences the following situation while with Rusli, Kartini and Anwar at a restaurant: Anwar accepts a cigarette from Rusli, then adds something to it from a small tube.

'What's that?' asked Rusli finishing a last spoonful of his meal.

'Opium,' replied Anwar, gently smearing some black substance onto the end of the cigarette he was about to smoke.

The three of us watched him. He really is someone extraordinary, I thought - he even smokes opium.

'Why are you all gaping at me? Isn't this God I'm putting onto my cigarette?'

'You're talking like a man out of his mind, Anwar', said Rusli, glancing in my direction for a moment.

'Why out of my mind? Didn't Marx say that? Didn't Marx say that God was the opium of the people?'

'What do you mean?'

'It's very simple - God is opium.'

'God opium?' I repeated.

'Yes, opium - at least according to Marx.' (nudging Rusli's arm).

'Isn't that so?'

Rusli smiled, and sipped his coffee.

'But for me, God is myself.' (pointing to himself with his forefinger). 'And with Kloos I say: 'I am a God within my innermost thoughts'.¹⁴

Through all this blasphemy Hasan can only remain silent, wondering at the opinions of people who know better than he does.

Later among Rusli's circle he meets Bung Parta whose life is a record of the restlessness and ferment among the younger generation of Indonesians from the end of the first world war on.

The earliest politically based Indonesian mass organisation was the Sarékat Islam, or the Islamic Federation, founded in 1912. By 1917 radical Marxist infiltration into the organisation had become heavy. It was this Islamic organisation that Bung Parta joined when he was seventeen. However, a riot broke out while he was addressing a public meeting during the fasting month because he drank a glass of water. The crowd roared with anger, and he jeered back. The police intervened and dissolved the meeting, but not before Bung Parta was so badly beaten up that he had to spend a week in hospital. As a revolutionary socialist, he became an enemy of the Sarékat. This may have some historical reference to the situation in 1920 when the Communist Party attempted unsuccessfully to gain control of the twenty-two trade unions totalling 77,000 members, which had been united by the Sarékat Islam, and in the following year set up a rival association of trade unions with the name: The Revolutionary Trade Union Central.¹⁵

After taking part in an unsuccessful strike, he became a sailor for Rotterdam Lloyd, visiting Australia, China, Japan, Europe and America. In America he saw the plight of the negroes, and during the depression the misery of millions of unemployed in contrast to the glittering wealth of the big stores. During his travels, he took an active part in international trade unionism strike organisation.

Hasan is overwhelmed: in contrast to this, his little world seems meaningless. And later in the evening he leaves, not to pray as he might have done three months earlier, but to take Kartini to the cinema.

A little later, by some mischance, he takes Anwar with him to visit

his family. One evening they go for a walk, and talk with a couple of watchmen. The watchmen are terrified of a ghost who killed the wife of one of them, the spirit Embah Jambrong. This spirit lives near a certain grave not far off. Anwar tells them that this is nonsense and that the man's wife died of typhus. He gets a torch and insists that he be led to the habitation of the spirit. Unwillingly the two men lead him a part of the way and then refuse to go further. Hasan continues with him until little by little the suspicion creeps into his mind that the man beside him is not Anwar, but an impersonation by the spirit, leading him to destruction. All at once he turns and runs for his life. A few minutes later Anwar returns and says to him: 'What were you afraid of? There is no Si Jambrong, there is no ghost'.

This incident destroys Hasan's faith. He quarrels with his father and leaves home an atheist, although a tormented one. The chapter describing his return home begins: 'The train crawled along, as though unwilling to carry two atheists such as we'.¹⁶ During the journey the scene of the quarrel with his parents is presented in Hasan's memory. He finds consolation with Kartini. They marry, but after three years of rapidly decreasing harmony, have a bitter quarrel and separate. Hasan develops tuberculosis which aggravates his mental misery. He hears that his father is dying and goes to visit him. But his father orders him out of the room, treating him as a temptation from the devil to torment his death bed.

In desperation, Hasan denies he was ever an atheist, convinced by his mental suffering of the existence of hell.

This account of the novel is brief, but the problems it poses are clear. Hasan is crushed between the old world and the new. He joins his father's mystical Order because he is not allowed to marry the girl he would have chosen because of social status; his spiritual exercises wreck his health and sow the seeds of the tuberculosis that is to kill him; his attitude to the ultimate things of life has been one of acceptance; his quarrel with his father is caused directly by his father's attempt to make him marry a girl who had no appeal to him. The world of the village has treated him badly and left him defenceless against the intellectual ferment in the city. The world he comes from is static, the world he is drawn into is full of a furious dynamism, compelling him to ideas he cannot reject: social justice, equality, freedom, but which in the form they are presented demand a complete

rejection of the values of the world he has grown up in. The novel has presented to us very effectively two strands in Indonesian life: the static docility of Hasan and the extraordinary dynamism of Anwar and Bung Parta. It is impossible not to admire the vitality of these two characters, and they provide one answer to the questions: what kind of people was it who brought Marxist and Anarchist ideas into Indonesian life? And how did they effect people? In the novel there is no bridge between the two worlds, there is only the vivid communication of the bewilderment of an individual torn loose from his moorings, and unable to cope with life without the support of his traditional certainties.

It is impossible to do justice to this theme within the limits of a short essay, which in any case cannot be much more than an introduction. None of the novels we have discussed can be called happy, none offers any real solution to the predicaments in which the characters find themselves. But each of them has given some picture of the important currents moving at different levels through Indonesian society, and which are creating problems that it will take many decades to resolve.

References

1. Ian Watt: *The Rise of the Novel*. London 1957, pp. 31-2.
2. The editions referred to in each case are: *Sitti Nurbaja*, 8th reprint. Balai Pustaka 1957. *Belenggu*, 4th reprint, Balai Pustaka 1957. *Atheis*, 3rd reprint, Balai Pustaka 1957.
3. The term *sumando* includes the sense of son-in-law, but more properly signifies the relation of a husband to his wife's matrilineage.
4. See my: *Rantjak di Labuch*, Data paper 32, South East Asia Program, Cornell University, December 1958, p. 62.
5. *Sitti Nurbaja*, pp. 235-6.
6. The compulsory cultivation of coffee in Central Sumatra was abolished in 1908. See Schrieke B. *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, Part I. The Hague, 1955, p. 98.
7. *Sitti Nurbaja*, p. 288.
8. *Ibid*, p. 290.

9. Ibid, p. 291.
10. *Belenggu*, p. 107.
11. Ibid, pp. 69-70.
12. Ibid, p. 111.
13. *Atheis*, p. 68.
14. Ibid, p. 106.
15. See Kahin: *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, p. 75.
16. *Belenggu*, p. 158.

INDONESIAN TENSIONS - THE LITERARY RECORD*

Many of the tensions in contemporary Indonesian society stem from the encounter between a modern and a traditional way of life.

The first writer in Malay whose work expresses this encounter was Abdullah, a Malay of Indian-Arab descent. Born in Malacca in 1797, he became closely associated with the early European visitors to Malacca and Singapore, foremost among them, Raffles. For over forty years, Abdullah was the companion of missionaries, engineers, doctors, merchants and administrators, teaching them Malay, acting as an interpreter, learning from them of the technological and moral standards of European civilization. The conclusions he drew from this prolonged association with foreigners, and his impressions of the various individuals he met, are to be found in his autobiography, published in 1848 - a type of work which at that time was an innovation in the history of Malay letters.

In it we read of his first experience of electric shock, his astonishment at the capacity of an early model camera, and a detailed description of the operation of a printing press. He records his unsuccessful attempts to explain the inventions of the steam age to his friends, who listened with disbelief to his accounts of gas-lighting, railway trains, and the scientific explanation of eclipses. But more important, all through his book, is a continual conscious contrasting of the backwardness of his own people with the high and continually developing standards of European civilization. His association with Raffles, however, had given him a heady dose of liberalism, which dominated his whole outlook, and resulted at times in a certain idealistic naivety. Thus he studies English grammar daily, intending to apply it to the Malay language, so that Malay school children might be taught their own language systematically. He laments the absence of any authoritative guide for the use of Malay, in a tone that reminds us of the Academicians, and exclaims: 'Would to God there might appear a sole arbiter in these matters of language, so that Malay could be arranged in a proper form.'

At times, his accounts of Malay superstition and lack of compre-

* First published in *Quadrant*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1962, pp. 51-60.

hension of the ways of the white man are hilarious. Thus he tells us that when convict labour was set to work to build the present-day St Andrew's Cathedral in Singapore, rumour was rife that demons within the church demanded offerings of human heads, and that the convicts were to collect them. Terror reigned, and no one ventured out of doors at night. Even as far away as Malacca, a man claimed he had seen thirty convicts arrive carrying a large barrel, in search of heads there, for not enough were to be had in Singapore! And in his comments on the bearers of such rumours, Abdullah displays an attitude which is quite un-Asian, referring to one of the rumour-mongers as an old man whose white hairs betrayed his feeble-mindedness and disregard for truth!

Abdullah was a pioneer, a liberal enthusiast, and his labours in translating scientific pamphlets and textbooks, his continual exhortations to his countrymen, comparing them unfavourably with the British, had little effect. Abdullah was very much an Anglophile, and in fact ended one chapter of his book with the exclamation: 'God save Queen Victoria!' Nevertheless he was motivated by a sincere desire to improve the standing of his people in the eyes of the world as he understood it, and thus has an importance greater than that represented by his literary ability.

He foreshadowed and illustrated a process which was only to become apparent some fifty years later, when an increasing number of Indonesians developed the sophistication and detachment necessary to compare Western society with their own, and in doing so became discontented at the backwardness of their own people, the burden traditional society laid on individuals, and in particular, the disabilities it imposed on women.

One of the earliest and most moving expressions of this development is to be found in the letters of Kartini, the daughter of a Javanese regent, written (in Dutch) to her Dutch friends at the turn of the century. Kartini is honoured as the pioneer of feminine emancipation in Indonesia. She was no political nationalist. Her essential plea was that women should receive an education to enable them to play a responsible role in social life. Her ambition was to be a teacher. Yet she was devoted to her father, and loath to cause him suffering.

The following quotations from two of her letters, written in 1899, illustrate movingly her predicament and her aspirations:

For girls to study at school, to leave the house daily, is said to destroy the traditional values of our social life. (When I was twelve, I was confined to my father's home). It was not until I was sixteen that I was able to see the world again - but this is not enough for me. I want to be independent, so that I can never be forced to marry ... but I have to marry, have to, have to, for to remain single is the greatest possible sin for Muslim woman, the greatest disgrace for her family. And to call marriage in our society a torture and a hell is putting it too mildly. How can it be otherwise, when the man has all the rights and the woman all the duties?

In another letter, she complains of the lack of respect with which certain Dutch officials treated even the Javanese aristocracy:

I have frequently met Europeans, by no means stupid, on the contrary highly intelligent, but unbearable in their pride. This is very painful, for only too often it happens that they consider us Javanese as hardly human. At a meeting even the most junior European official has the right to a chair. Whereas any Javanese below the rank of Bupati (Regional Governor), without regard to his age, standing or ability, has to sit on the floor in the presence of a man just out of school.

It was to Europe that she looked for her inspiration, for she had heard from her European friends of women's movements there:

If the traditions of my country would allow me, I would devote myself body and soul to the ideals of the new generation of women in Europe. But these traditions are too old to be broken easily, and they hold us in a grip of steel.

But she also found inspiration in the depths of her own heart:

Even when I was still a child, before the word 'emancipation' had any meaning, and I had never seen any books or articles about it, I had a deeply rooted desire which grew continually stronger to be free, independent. The circumstances in which I found myself, reduced me to tears, and I was filled with compassion for the people around me.

The first thirty years of the twentieth century saw a whole series of important developments in Indonesian social life resulting in an increasing influence of modern ideas on traditional Indonesian life, and the gradual emergence of a concept of nationalism broad enough to include all of the richly variegated regional cultures of the then Dutch East Indies. Elementary education became widely available, and in 1908 a Commission was established to provide cheap and

wholesome reading matter for Indonesians. Thus a modicum of Western education was widely disseminated, and the consequent spread of the reading habit, and the opportunities given to authors by the Commission (later to be known as Balai Pustaka) laid the foundation for the eventual development of Malay into the national language of Indonesia, Bahasa Indonesia.

This development of Malay expressed the determination of the Indonesian elite to assert an Indonesian cultural and national identity over and against that of the Dutch.

Those who had taken up the cause of Malay worked under heavy handicaps: they had to create for the Bahasa Indonesia in the making, a sophisticated and literary content which would equal the attraction of that of a modern literature in any modern language. The measure of their success, however, lies in the fact that independent Indonesia (an area in which are speakers of at least two hundred mutually unintelligible languages) has never had any linguistic problems

The early 'thirties, then, saw the culmination of a whole series of developments which were to influence deeply Indonesian life. In addition to those mentioned must also be noted Islamic reformism and Marxism of various types. Large areas of society were in ferment. There was a proliferation of clubs and associations, both for sport and culture, attempts to develop indigenous cottage industries, and widespread locally-based movements to wipe out illiteracy. Among many of the intellectuals there developed a national and cultural self-awareness which sought to renew the whole fabric of Indonesian social life, to create, in fact, a new nation out of many diverse parts which could take its place as an equal in the community of nations.

The most important source for our knowledge of the development of these ideals is *Pujangga Baru* (The New Poet), a literary periodical founded in 1933, edited by three young writers, Takdir Alisjahbana, Armijn Pane and Amir Hamzah. The area the new periodical set itself to cover expanded rapidly. At birth, it was a monthly magazine devoted to language, literature, culture and the arts. In its third year it became the bearer of a new spirit into literature, the arts, culture and society. And one year later, it set itself the task of fostering that spirit of dynamism which could create a new Indonesian culture. The expression is rather rhetorical for our taste, but although the aims of the periodical sound somewhat high-faluting, there was no detailed

definition of its objectives, and it accepted contributions from any Indonesian of nationalistic convictions and an interest in culture. Thus, the eight or so years of its publication - up to the time of the Japanese occupation - are a really important source of information for the cultural ambitions, literary and social values and theories of education of the pre-war Indonesian intelligentsia.

An important proportion of the articles appearing in this and other periodicals discussed and debated ways and means of creating a new and fecund pan-Indonesian culture in place of the regional cultures which were largely static, if not moribund.

Sutan Alisjahbana, one of the founders of *Pujangga Baru*, was one of the most vital personalities of the 'thirties. In many ways he is reminiscent of Abdullah. Both were of Malay as opposed to Javanese stock, and their relations to traditional Malay society in either case was peripheral. Alisjahbana, although trained in law, and thus far more highly educated than Abdullah, has clearly a personality of similar type, equally an extrovert, enthusiastically pro-European and likewise given to oversimplification in his analysis of the problems to be solved, and his onslaughts on those factors in traditional society which impeded the rationalization of Indonesian society. He saw the golden key to the development of the new Indonesian nation yet to be born in that spirit of dynamism which to him was the source of Western progress. His view of history was simple: the era before the dawn of the twentieth century he called the pre-Indonesian era; after the year 1900, the Indonesian era emerged on to the stage of history. This Indonesian era, as he understood it, was distinguished from the past by an Indonesian spirit, a spirit which he defined as the desire to unite among the various Indonesian peoples, to co-operate for their mutual benefit, and thus enable them to meet the other peoples of the world on equal terms. It was not, therefore, something that could be limited to any geographical region of Indonesia, or any particular ethnic group within its boundaries.

Alisjahbana saw this spirit as a spirit of modernization moving through Indonesian society, transforming it sufficiently to enable Indonesia to take its place as an equal in the community of nations. As for education, he saw Western-type schooling as the most effective way of creating this spirit and furthering the transformation. Indonesians, he said, needed to develop a sense of the rights of the

individual - as over against the corporate group; to develop a thorough-going intellectualism - by which he meant the capacity to look at the world objectively and analytically as something for human exploitation, to eradicate the mystical feeling of unity between man and the world - and to develop a healthy acquisitive attitude to material comforts. He attacked the static pattern of society centred round the *kiyahi*, the village teacher of religion who taught people to live as good-natured goats, and the grip the extended family exercised over social life, which made it virtually impossible for the individual to develop as a personality in his own right.

Alisjahbana's stand provoked strong dissent. And the principles involved are brought most clearly into relief in a discussion centering round a nation-wide congress of Indonesian education held at Solo (Central Java) in 1935. Alisjahbana complained that the tenor of this conference was altogether negative - marked by anti-intellectualism, anti-individualism, anti-egoism and anti-materialism. One of the speakers pointed out the danger of such ideas as knowledge is power; the danger of anarchism introduced by liberal thought, and the danger of a type of education that gave too much prominence to the rights of the individual. In their excessive caution, Alisjahbana claimed, such thinkers were refusing to accept the implements which could be used to bestir a stagnant Indonesian society. For what was the sense of preaching the dangers of intellectualism to a people lacking in any kind of intellectual training, the dangers of egoism to a people who would never act unless a plan had been discussed and approved by a multitude of cousins, uncles and aunts, or the dangers of materialism to people content to live on two cents a day.

Alisjahbana's principal opponent, Raden Sutomo, a Javanese aristocrat, a physician, and a distinguished national leader in his own right, replied that Western education was a poison in Indonesian society, leaving its victims without roots, and contemptuous of their less fortunate brethren - interested only in safe jobs as clerks, minor government officials and the like, and totally destitute of any cultural aspirations. Although it was true that all the nationalist leaders had received a Western education, Sutomo asserted that they had achieved their leadership and influence despite this handicap. Western education, he claimed, provided only instruction; it provided no education in the proper sense of the word, i.e., in moral training, character development,

and a sense of mutual responsibility. His remedy was: Back to the *pesantren*.

The *pesantren* is a kind of cloister which served and serves as a centre of traditional religious learning, as a retreat where a search for mystical enlightenment can be pursued, and as a way-station where religious itinerants and pilgrims can linger. It is a very old institution which has existed in Java for almost two thousand years. At first, Hindu-Buddhist in nature, it was taken over and given a new lease of life by Islam. Thus, Sutomo is right when he says that it represents an indigenous form of Indonesian education. Attendance at a *pesantren* would be a normal stage of a young man's religious education. He would go there at the age of twelve to fifteen, remaining until he was eighteen to twenty. There he would live in absolute obedience to the *kiyahi* (religious preceptor), studying the Quran, Tradition, Law, principally by rote, together with moral instruction and counsel from his teacher which gave him a general view of the world and a set of values by which to guide his conduct. To a few the *kiyahi* might give instruction in mysticism and magical powers of healing.

In an educational system of this type (as Sutomo saw it), high and low, rich and poor, lived in community on equal terms for a few years, afterwards to separate and follow their various avocations: merchant, retainer, headman or peasant, but sharing a common set of values, without which intellectual training was worse than useless. Japan had become a great power not only through the use of Western techniques, but also by preserving its own cultural and historical integrity intact. Once Indonesians returned to the continuity of their own traditions, Indonesia would soon become a great power.

Sutomo exclaims: 'Consider the products of our native educational system, and speak with the *kiyahis*. Their logic, and the knowledge they have acquired from the books they have studied, are astounding.' One need hardly add that there is a certain amount of wishful thinking on Sutomo's part. He denied Alisjahbana's accusation that he objected to a well-trained intellect: only character training had to come first. He did not object to egoism: but egoism was to be subsumed into altruism, and this was manifested in practice, and its continuance ensured by the customary law and traditional usages which controlled almost every aspect of Indonesian village life. Sutomo was not against individualism: rather he wanted the personality to be developed until

it was large enough to feel and encompass the joys and sorrows of all, and thus make his joys and sorrows the joys and sorrows of all. It was in this way that leaders such as Ataturk, Mussolini, Hitler, Gandhi and Lenin, etc., were rebuilding their own countries and the world!

We must remember that we are discussing the year 1935, a date when even in Europe many people were still unaware of the true nature of Hitler and Mussolini, etc! We should not be taken in by the alternating Fascist and Communist overtones this kind of attitude presents to us. The basis of Fascist-Communist thinking is completely absent, and the associations we make are due to quite other factors. Rather, Sutomo is echoing the Buddhist idea of the *bodddhisatva*, whose whole life is dedicated to the abolition of ignorance and sorrow from the world.

Alisjahbana's answer was simple. He described the Solo Educational Conference as negative, he said, because it took as its point of departure the weaknesses, real or alleged of Western education, and not the actual needs of Indonesian society; the Indonesia of the *kiyahi* was torpid, moribund and static; authority and initiative were exclusively in the hands of the *kiyahi*, a man of limited vision, and the people were content to muse on his teachings and then sleep. He quoted the Sumatran educationalist Muhammad Sjafie, who claimed that the principal fault of Indonesians was that they were too passive - passive, because the earth was too generous, because the structure of the Indonesian family gave the opportunity for its idle members to live a parasitic existence, because Indonesians had no part to play in the structure of the government of the country, and because the education they received in schools was principally orientated to the training of reliable clerks. Thus, Alisjahbana welcomed the disruptive effect of Western education, for it smashed the idyll in which the Indonesians were living, and created an opportunity for the diffusion of a more dynamic spirit. Alisjahbana's remedy was simple: Western education, and the more the better. Once illiteracy was abolished and the hold of the *kiyahi* was broken, the consequent spread of knowledge would cause a new wind to blow through every sector of Indonesian society.

The two views are strikingly representative, each sincere and idealistic. The one, Sutomo, looking for support on the rather fusty notion that the West has made materialistic progress, but that the East is truly spiritual; the West pulsates with restless energy, the East enjoys the serenity of spiritual enlightenment - a view which Alisjahbana

vigorously denies:

Here in Indonesia we only mix with European merchants and clerks, we see Western women immodestly dressed, in the restaurants and bars we see drunken sailors, and thus conclude that the West does not have particularly high moral standards. We forget that there is a European society with its religious leaders, philosophers and writers.

Of the two, Alisjahbana is by far the more attractive to us and must be one of the very few, Asians or Westerners, who realise what a short part of recorded human history the Western colonial period is - at the most, two hundred years out of five thousand, but we must not forget that both deserve of our respect and sympathy. Sutomo is in love with his vision of the past, which he idealizes. He feels a need to justify his own customs and traditions over and against those of the Dutch, because of the psychological feeling of inferiority he feels as a consequence of Dutch rule. As we mentioned earlier, Kartini complained that the Javanese, despite their rich cultural traditions, were regarded by some of their masters as hardly human.

Alisjahbana, on the other hand, shows us that enthusiasm does not solve problems. It is surely an oversimplification to suggest that the spread of Western knowledge is sufficient to revitalize Indonesian society.

In these discussions we must admit there is a certain amateurishness, an incapacity for a disciplined and patient use of concepts, and superficial treatment of highly complex problems. Yet this is not surprising. Indonesians receiving a Dutch education would not receive training in these fields, and would rarely reach university - there were no universities in pre-war Indonesia - only a medical school, a law school and a technical school, and the student body of these was only 15-25 per cent ethnic Indonesian. Only a small minority would complete high school. The very idea of a university, with freely intermingling faculties of arts and sciences, giving an adequate training in history, philosophy and the like was absent. And the Dutch high schools laid more stress on conformity and the study of a limited syllabus than on independent thought and initiative.

But we still have to admire the enthusiasm and determination with which these young Indonesians plunged themselves into the literary heritage of the West, referring to and quoting authors, such as Lamarck, Darwin, Spencer, Boas, Hilderbrand, Morgan, Rousseau, Descartes,

Humboldt and Keyserling, either in Dutch translation or the original, no matter how imperfectly they understood them, and attempting to discuss their work in the Indonesian language they were consciously developing. Bahasa Indonesia is so much taken for granted nowadays that it is difficult to recall the days of the 'thirties when it required a great deal of courage to use it as a medium for the discussion of abstract principles. We have also to recall their idealism: Indonesia was a new country they wished to build for themselves, and self-respect and self-improvement were their over-riding motivations.

Do these problems of the 'thirties have any relevance for the 'fifties? Indeed they do. The Sumatran, Alisjahbana, interpreting the nationalist ideal as a technique of modernization and rationalization, and the Javanese, Sutomo, looking to the justification of Javanese traditions, enhancing them with the mystique of former greatness, treating them as the forms and determining features of the new society, are still recognizable types. Sukarno - a real Javanese - was saying much the same as Sutomo when he recently said that Indonesia had a fully developed social system with its own intrinsic cultural values which he would not allow foreign aid or influence to destroy. This may seem an unhelpful attitude to us, but the traditional patterns of Indonesian society are still something it would be perilous to ignore. No one should underestimate the immense power for good and social stability which this traditional social organization represents, or the anarchy which would result if this were suddenly cut off from the roots.

It is not only Indonesia that faces this problem: it is India's too, and Burma's, and Thailand's; and it is a problem of the new African States. But it is in Indonesia - perhaps because of its political difficulties - that the situation appears so anguished. It is largely the solution of this problem and that of economic survival closely related to it, which will determine Indonesia's future. At any rate let us remember the moral courage of Roman Varro, and not despair of the Indonesian Republic during these difficult days through which it is passing.

Note: in its original form this general article did not have footnotes. The principal sources are:

The Hikayat Abdullah, Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, A.H. Hill (trans.) Oxford in Asia paperbacks, Kuala Lumpur 1970.

Letters of a Javanese Princess Raden Adjeng Kartini, Hildred Geertz (ed.). The Norton Library, New York 1964.

Polemik Kebudayaan, Achdiat K. Mihadja (ed.), Balai Pustaka, Jakarta, 1954.

GENESIS OF A MODERN LITERATURE *

The traditional literature of Indonesia is both ancient in origin and widespread in extent, for it includes almost everything written before the beginning of the twentieth century and is still preserved in a variety of forms in many of the regional languages of the archipelago. Of the regional languages Javanese has the richest extant literature, the oldest work of which dates back to the tenth century A.D. This, a version of the Ramayana, reflects such an accomplishment of style and mastery of form that it must be the product of a far older literary tradition, nothing of which, unfortunately, has survived. The loss of Malay literature has been just as great. There are no literary works surviving in that language which can be dated earlier than the fifteenth century; and there is no surviving Malay work in which Arabic loan words are absent and which is not written in the Arabic script. Yet it is unthinkable that a Malay Buddhist empire of the magnitude of Sriwijaya should have been deficient in the arts of literature. Numerous inscriptions in Malay of Sriwijayan origin which have been discovered in South Sumatra, and likewise ninth- and tenth-century Malay inscriptions from central and western Java, bear adequate testimony to the role of Malay even during this early period. Further, certain peculiar features of the oldest examples of the use of the Arabic script for writing Malay (i.e. the doubling of consonants) can only be explained by an older tradition of writing in a syllabic script of Indian derivation, similar to that still used in Java. Everything has been lost, however, apart from a few inscriptions and four lines of a poem written in Indian-type characters carved on a stone found at Minye Tujuh in Aceh.¹

The only extant regional literature able to compare in age with that of the Javanese is that of Bali. Many other regions, however, have literary works of at least two or three hundred years' vintage, the products in turn of more ancient traditions. One can instance the histories of Makassar,² works in Madurese and Sundanese (written, like Javanese, in a script of Indian derivation) and works in Acehnese and

* First published in Ruth T. McVey (ed.), *Indonesia*, HRAF Press, New Haven, 1963, pp. 410-554.

Minangkabau written in the Arabic script. Some of these have been published, but a far greater quantity exists only in manuscript.³

The types of literature subsumed under this general heading 'traditional' are manifold and disparate. In Malay, they include romances (*hikayat*), chronicles (*sejarah*), works on Islamic theology, mysticism, and law, and various types of verse: the *pantun*, in its basic form a quatrain with alternate rhymes, the *sya'ir*, a narrative poem consisting of quatrains, and the *gurindam*, a rhapsodical type of 'free verse'.

All these forms are clearly distinguished from 'modern' literature by certain common characteristics. Few of the traditional works had as their purpose entertainment as an end in itself. A large proportion was devoted to the welfare of the state, to the practice of right religion and right morals. Sophisticated literature being centered on the court, it had necessarily to be dedicated to the king. The myths and legends of Indonesian context, provided entertainment, it is true; but they also had a strong ethical content and presented in figure various aspects of the profoundest and most esoteric doctrines of the nature of God, man, and the universe. Much of the regional 'folk' literature likewise had the end of establishing the mythical genealogy and mores of the group from which it originated.⁴ In none of these works, in fact, do we find the author expressing a standpoint of his own, giving an individual critique and analysis of life around him. He is, in a sense, presenting a view of his culture as it sees itself, and as it would like itself to be. There cannot be for him any of that agonizing sense of doubt, that questioning and criticism of the bases of social life, and the analysis and presentation of the predicaments of individuals out of which Western literature is made.

The type of literature to which we attach the unsatisfactory term 'modern' makes only a fleeting appearance in the Indonesian area in the nineteenth century, in the works of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir 'Munsi (1797-1854). His autobiography, the *Hikayat Abdullah* (The Story of Abdullah),⁵ is quite clearly the work of an individual presenting a personal point of view; it is one of the earliest expressions in the Indonesian world of the encounter between East and West. Abdullah, though he was not a great writer, is thus of major importance, foreshadowing and illustrating a development of literary and social consciousness which was only to become manifest in Indonesia some fifty years later.

In 'traditional' Indonesian society, reading was not a private leisure activity. Leisure tended, in fact, to be not private but public, consisting largely of listening to the recitation of traditional stories on specific social occasions, and of participating in dance or drama - activities which combined both recreational and religious functions. A modern literature, on the other hand, is written to be read in private, so that the author, as an individual, meets the reader as an individual, in the privacy of his own home. Without the habit of private reading, individual authorship is virtually impossible, and thus the development of a modern literature required a change in the social behaviour of the audience as well as a new attitude toward life on the part of the writer.

Both of these prerequisites were met as a result of the Dutch impact on 'traditional' Indonesian society. This encounter not only brought about structural changes in the Indonesian community, but it also introduced Western education and with it a corresponding increase in literacy and the development of the reading habit. The most important single contribution of the Dutch to the development of Indonesian literature was the founding of the organization which made this extension of the reading habit possible. In 1908 the colonial government appointed a commission to advise on the provision of reading matter for 'natives and native schools'. The commission submitted its report in 1911, and the first publications under its auspices included versions of local stories and legends, and translations from European literature of such classics as *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In 1917 the Commission was given the title of Balai Pustaka (The Hall of Good Reading). Balai Pustaka's libraries and agencies expanded rapidly throughout the archipelago, developing a considerable reading public. Further, the foundation gave new life in varying degrees to the traditional literatures of the regional languages, including Malay versions of Hindu legends. More important, it presented real opportunities to new Indonesian writers: any author could submit his work for consideration to Balai Pustaka, and if it were accepted and published it was guaranteed a wide circulation.

The publications of Balai Pustaka would not, by themselves, have been sufficient to transform Malay into Bahasa Indonesia, the language of the modern Indonesian nation. It was rather an emotional, nationalist impulse which achieved this - the determination of the Indonesian

elite to develop a language able to cope with the experiences implicit in the expression 'modern world', and thus to assert an Indonesian cultural and national identity over and against that of the Dutch. It is because it lacked this impetus that neither Malay, as a regional language, nor any other of the regional tongues - not even Javanese, with its radiant literary tradition - has yet been able to establish itself as a language of the modern world.

The formal adoption of Bahasa Indonesia as the language of Indonesian nationalism took place at the All-Indies Youth Congress of 1928, when leaders of the country's future elite pledged themselves to one fatherland, one people, and one Indonesian language. The Malay which they chose as the basis for the new tongue was far from being a national language ready made. Only a minority of the peoples of the Indonesian archipelago speak Malay as their mother tongue. However, the historical circumstances which led to the development of Malay both as the *lingua franca* of commerce and the cultural language of Islam throughout the archipelago had given it a remarkably wide distribution; and this in turn meant that it was not regarded as the prerogative of any particular area.

A second problem in the utilization of Malay was that Malay was not in any sense a modern language. European pedants who had arbitrarily settled on the seventeenth century as the Golden Age of Malay were contemptuously critical of this attempt to develop Malay as a language of the modern world. Anything not 'classical' had, by definition, to be bazaar, and Bousquet, writing in 1939, could speak of 'that preposterous language Malay'.⁶ It was to the formidable task of creating for Bahasa Indonesia a sophisticated, modern literary content that the pioneers of Indonesian literature addressed themselves.

To achieve this aim, three young writers - Takdir Alisjahbana (b. 1908 in Tapanuli), Armiijn Pané (b. 1908 in Tapanuli), and Amir Hamzah (b. 1911 in Binjai) - founded, in 1933, a literary and cultural periodical which they called *Pujangga Baru* (The New Poet). At birth, it was a monthly periodical devoted to language, literature, culture, and the arts. In its third year it declared itself the bearer of a new spirit into literature, the arts, and society; one year later, it set itself the task of fostering that spirit of dynamism which would create a new Indonesian culture. Far-reaching aims indeed! *Pujangga Baru* continued publication until the Japanese occupation in 1942, and during the nine

years of its prewar life it regularly included essays on art and culture, poetry, short stories, and on one occasion a complete novel.

The works in Malay and Bahasa Indonesia published by Balai Pustaka and those appearing in *Pujangga Baru* are the most accessible and probably the most important examples of prewar Indonesian literature. They are not the only ones. There was a mass of reading material in Bahasa Indonesia published in the prewar years: newspapers, magazines, almanacs, novelettes, and works on religion were put out both in Batavia and the provinces. On the whole, however, the works coming from these two main streams - the sophisticated *Pujangga Baru* and the more popular Balai Pustaka - are sufficiently representative for us to form a picture of the early development of Indonesian poetry and prose.

Formal realism, an acute and critical analysis of society, interpreted and presented in prose according to the individual *Weltanschauung* of the author - these are for us the distinguishing features of a novel; and at the same time, as we have seen, they distinguish a modern from a traditional literature. The first efforts on the part of Indonesians to write in this genre were naturally halting and sometimes confused. They were further handicapped by the absence in Bahasa Indonesia of an accepted naturalistic prose style. It will be remembered that the English novel is a comparatively recent development in literary history, and that it did not and could not develop until writers such as Swift and Dryden had established a naturalistic prose style: then, and then only, do Richardson and Fielding appear on the scene.

The first Indonesian work which can properly be described as a novel is *Sitti Nurbaya* (the title is a girl's name) by Marah Rusli (b. 1898 in Minangkabau), which appeared in 1922. It was followed by several others, among the most important of which are *Salah Asuhan* (A Wrong Upbringing) by Abdul Muis (b. 1890 in Minangkabau), which was published in 1928; *Karena Mentua* (Because of the Mother-in-Law), written by Nur Sutan Iskandar (b. 1893 in Minangkabau) and published in 1932; and *Kalau tak Untung* (If Fortune Does Not Favor) by Selasih (b. 1909 in Minangkabau), which appeared in 1933.⁷

These novels, and the group they represent, are similar in theme and treatment, dealing with the predicaments of young people caught between the old world and the new. At home these youngsters are expected to live according to the traditional pattern of life and are at the mercy of all its sanctions if they disobey. At school, and

through their contacts with Europeans and Eurasians, they have learned of the existence of a different world, where the individual can aspire to be economically independent, personally responsible for his actions, and unhampered by the claims of the extended family and clan. The conflict between the two ways of life is brought most sharply into focus when the question of marriage arises: is the choice of a spouse to be a personal or parental responsibility?

Virtually all the novels of this period are characterized by an atmosphere of despair. Death, in fact, is the most favoured plot solution. In *Sitti Nurbaya*, the heroine is murdered and the hero killed in a clash with the Dutch. In *Karena Mentua*, the hero stabs his wife by accident while attacking his mother-in-law, and in despair kills himself. *Salah Asuhan* is similarly a tragedy, written with the didactic purpose of illustrating the disruptive effects of a Western education and the perils of a mixed marriage.

Salah Asuhan has obvious shortcomings: the style is dull and ponderous, the relationship between certain episodes is forced, and the eventual suicide of the hero, Hanafi, may have symbolic value but lacks dramatic effect. Nevertheless its merits are considerable, and it is probably the best prose work to appear in Bahasa Indonesia until 1939.⁸ Abdul Muis possesses to a large degree that breadth of vision which is essential to the novelist. His characterizations, particularly that of the spoiled and impetuous heroine, Corrie, are consistent and credible. Nowhere does he indulge in moral judgments on his characters or preach against a mixed marriage as such; it is fate in the form of the total colonial situation that is responsible for the tragedy.

Some of the author's attitudes to his characters and their predicaments are of special interest. Abdul Muis, it is clear, appreciates the value of a Western education and is obviously influenced by European ideas. Yet why did this Western education have such an appalling effect on Hanafi, who is completely alienated from his own people, and how could this have been avoided? Abdul Muis' only suggestion is that Hanafi's Western education should have been tempered by Islamic religious training. This is all very well, but there is not the least trace of an Islamic ethos in the book. The conduct of the couple is nowhere measured against the moral imperatives of Islam; the author makes no comment on the non-Islamic character of their wedding, and even on his deathbed Hanafi only thinks of the life to come as an opportunity to meet again his beloved

Corrie. Marah Rusli, in *Sitti Nurbaya*, similarly leaves his characters quite unmoved by any element of Islamic teaching. The hero on his death-bed does, it is true, exclaim *Allahu akbar*; but his expectations are of meeting again his beloved and mother, not of appearing before the throne of God. The absence of Islam as an effective mediator or alternative between Westernism and traditionalism is a striking and general feature in the novels of this group.

Kalau tak Untung belongs to the same class of problem novel and has the added distinction that it is the first important contribution to Indonesian literature by a woman. Although it lacks the scope of *Salah Asuhan*, in some respects it marks important advances. One of the most striking features of the book is its excellent construction and the polished and easy style of narrative. Some of the incidental vignettes of the scenes of traditional village life are strikingly vivid, and the presentation of the traditional ethos and its atmosphere highly successful.

As in the previously discussed novels, the theme of *Kalau tak Untung* is one of star-crossed lovers, Masrul and Rasmani. However, while the characters of the other novels tended to lay the responsibility for their troubles on fate, *Kalau tak Untung* makes it clear that it is Masrul's consistently weak and selfish character that is to blame. On the other hand, the heroine, Rasmani, is almost too good to be true; but at times she expresses herself with quite remarkable passion, considering the period when the book was written.

The book is further notable for its effective use of letters in the development of the plot and its skillful symbolic use of dreams to create atmosphere and to express dread and uncertainty on the part of Rasmani. In one such dream, just after Masrul has left home, she sees him dressed in bridal attire, but blindfolded, led by a man with a limp. In another, having walked a long distance and being overcome by thirst, she picks a coconut from a palm with low-hanging fruit but finds it dry; she picks another, likewise dry; eventually she finds one with milk, but on drinking it becomes dizzy and collapses in a faint.

Another novel, quite different in style, is *I Swasta Setahun di Bedahulu* (I Swasta's Year at Bedahulu) by I Gusti Njoman P. Tisna (b. 1908, Bali), which appeared in 1938. It is important for several reasons, not least because it provides an instance of a Balinese, thoroughly versed in his own regional culture, making an original contribution to the

development of the Indonesian national language. The majority of the earlier authors - and all those we have described - had been Sumatran. The atmosphere of their works is somewhat gloomy; that of the Balinese is radiant with sunlight, even though the book could hardly be called happy. Further, it is a historical novel, set in tenth-century Bali. Faults the work certainly has: characterization is not very convincing; the style is simple, even monotonous; and little is made of the historical background, though the book is full of incident. However, the reader is able to savour from its pages something of the richness, the texture and fragrance of Balinese life, as well as its underlying philosophy.

Thus far we have discussed the works of writers publishing through Balai Pustaka. On the whole, the authors associated with the periodical *Pujangga Baru* were more sophisticated, although it would be misleading to suggest that there was always a clear-cut distinction between the two. For example, one of the three founders of *Pujangga Baru*, Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, wrote several novels which were printed by Balai Pustaka in addition to his numerous essays and poems published in *Pujangga Baru*.

Alisjahbana is one of the most exciting personalities in this early period of the development of Indonesian literature. Although trained in law, he was self-educated in many other fields. Like Abdullah, he was a Europophile, and in many other respects he is reminiscent of his fellow writer of a hundred years earlier. Again and again he urged a thorough modernization of Indonesian life through Western education and an inculcation of the dynamism and acceptance of material values that had made Western superiority possible. In his endeavour to promote Indonesia's modernization, he wrote on politics, social questions, linguistics (including a grammar of Bahasa Indonesia), culture, and education, in addition to his novels and poetry.

Today, little of Alisjahbana's writing from this period remains important in its own right. This is not meant to denigrate his remarkably penetrating intellect; but he spread himself over so many fields and led a life of such incessant activity that it was impossible for all his work to have real depth. At one point he suggested that it would be advisable to kill off some of the lesser regional languages and dialects, including his native Minangkabau. His poems are mostly sentimental and his novels of minor literary value, being little more than vehicles for his ideas. When all this has been said, however, there remains the

remarkable virility and even brilliance of his prose style, his wit, breadth of vision, incisiveness and integrity in debate, and his absolute devotion to his cause. Moreover, Alisjahbana gave generous encouragement to new writers: it was he who, when Balai Pustaka's editors were too shocked to admit Armijn Pané's *Belenggu* (Bondage) for publication, accepted it at once and issued it in two numbers of *Pujangga Baru*.

Armijn Pané, who like Alisjahbana was one of the three founding members of *Pujangga Baru*, is the finest prose writer of the colonial period. His single full-length novel, *Belenggu*,⁹ is the only book written in the Dutch colonial era which can be judged as a fully mature novel, without any qualifications as to the time when it was written or the inexperience of its author. The theme is simple: the eternal triangle - a husband, Sukartono, and his wife Tini, who are unable to understand each other, and the other woman who is able and willing to give Sukartono the love and tenderness he does not find at home. Because Armijn dealt with his theme seriously and frankly, the book was attacked from many quarters as immoral and obscene; and an animated correspondence, praising and condemning the work, appeared in the succeeding numbers of *Pujangga Baru*.

The events the novel presents are tragic, but the tragic predicament develops not from the pressure of exterior circumstances but through defects in the characters of the protagonists, and thus the book is in the same line of development as *Kalau tak Untung*. But whereas the action of the earlier novel took place against a rural setting, *Belenggu* is set in Batavia, the metropolis. The characters are representatives of a new type of Indonesian - the successful urban couple who possess a car, use a telephone, and who both have professional interests. The novel has remarkable merits: the dialogue is alive, the style lucid, and the plot construction symmetrical. Further, Armijn has succeeded in presenting with remarkable vividness the streams of consciousness of two individuals, each misunderstanding and at odds with the other. His picture of an emancipated couple, who outwardly appear sure of themselves but whose inner life is still hollow and confused, has quite broad implications for the historian of Indonesian society.

Some of Armijn's short stories in the collection *Kisah antara Manusia* (Stories of People)¹⁰ are striking from the standpoint of

psychological analysis, compactness of construction, and range of social observation and criticism. Where else in Indonesian fiction in 1935 can one find a description of men dressed as women, waiting in dark corners to sell themselves to wealthy perverts, or any allusion to the unemployment that forced them into such degeneracy?

We have already noted that very many of the early writers originated from Sumatra, and in particular from the Minangkabau region. This, in the first instance, is possibly due to the relative ease with which writing in Bahasa Indonesia came to them.¹¹ Writers of Javanese origin wrote in either Dutch or their own regional language (Sundanese or Javanese as the case might be).¹² Attempts were certainly made to introduce modern literary forms into Javanese: Purwadaminta, for example, wrote Javanese sonnets. On the whole, however, the regional languages reflected little of the renewal of literary vigour that was manifest in the development of Bahasa Indonesia, and since independence they have been left even further behind.

The evolution of a modern poetry during the colonial period was as striking as the development of prose. The first author of note to attempt to write Indonesian-language verse which made use of Western poetic forms and concepts was Muhammad Yamin (b. 1903, Minangkabau). One of his earlier and more famous poems is *Tanah Air* (My Fatherland),¹³ which appeared in 1920. In it Yamin, standing on the hills of his native Minangkabau, sings lyrically of the beauty of its forests and gorges, rice terraces and lakes. None of his poetry can be called deathless, but his efforts opened new roads and revealed boundless possibilities for the development of a new poetry. Another pioneer of a new era in poetry was Rustam Effendi (b. 1903, Minangkabau), who declared in one of his poems: 'I repudiate all the old forms and rules, because I write according to the promptings of my spirit.'¹⁴ The thought is clear enough, even though the verse in which it is expressed can hardly be called elegant.

The writers associated with *Pujangga Baru* quite early developed a theory of art which had a profound influence on the poetry of this period. It was by no means original, for it reflected the ideas of the Dutch literary revival of the 1880s, an extreme romanticism whose worship of beauty at times approached the blasphemous. The clearest expression of this concept of poetry occurs in an essay by Armijn Pané in the first issue of the periodical *Pujangga Baru*. Summarized, its

theme is broadly this: an artist is the servant of his spirit (*sukma*) and must follow faithfully the promptings of his psyche in whatever he has to express. He is a child of his time and of his society, more sensitive than others to the nature of his surroundings and accordingly more conscious of the enduring sorrow of the world.¹⁵ J.E. Tatengkeng (b. 1907, Celebes) expressed the same idea more vehemently:

Art is inspiration!
Art is feeling!
Art is the inspiration of the imagination!
Art is the most beautiful possible feeling expressed
in the most beautiful possible form! 16

Perhaps more important, the pervading melancholy of these Dutch poets found an echo in the rootlessness of the pioneers of *Pujangga Baru*, who, as Armijn Pané pointed out, were separated from their traditions by the intrusion of a new type of world. Thus their somewhat lugubrious romanticism was partially to be attributed to their own disillusionment with the colonial society in which they were living.¹⁷

It is perhaps surprising that it should be the poetic ideas of the 1880s rather than of a later Dutch period that had such an influence on Indonesian poetry. The probable answer is that the works of the 'Eightiers', finding their way into high-school textbooks during the 1920s, were the only specimens of recent European verse with which the new generation of Indonesian writers were at all familiar. In any case, the romantic poetry of this Dutch generation was exactly the sort of verse that would influence comparatively young writers without a training in literary criticism.

Not all the early Indonesian poets shared the enthusiastic pro-Westernism of Takdir Alisjahbana, and throughout the issues of *Pujangga Baru* there ran a debate between those who found their inspiration in the achievements of the West and those who looked to the traditional values of Indonesian and Asian civilization.¹⁸ Sanusi Pané (the older brother of Armijn, born in 1905 in Tapanuli) typifies the latter group. True, he used Western verse forms; but the themes and ideas of his work were basically Asian. Indian religious ideas dominated his mental make-up, and the titles of his poems - 'The Taj Mahal', 'To Kresna', and 'Arjuna' - give a fair idea of his interests.

The most outstanding of the colonial poets was Amir Hamzah. He left two small volumes of original verse: *Nyanyi Sunyi* (Songs of Solitude), published in 1937, and *Buah Rindu* (The Fruit of Love), which,

though it was published later, in 1941, comprises poems written at an earlier period than those of the other book. Amir Hamzah was brought up in the literary traditions of a Malay court and thus, more than any other of the new generation of writers was steeped in the Malay literary tradition. He did not begin to write, however, until he went to Java to further his studies at the age of fourteen or fifteen. Although it is frequently noted as his principal distinction that he gave new life to a moribund tradition of Malay poetry, by far the most important influences on his poetry came from Java, both from his years at a Dutch Protestant school in Batavia and as a student of Oriental literature in Solo. There is a significant proportion of Javanese words in his verse, and his complex patterns of alliteration and assonance clearly owe much to Javanese verse forms.

Amir's earliest poems give the impression of melancholy and depression; they have an obvious relation to the various types of traditional Malay verse, notably the quatrain. These early verses are characterized by the tone, imagery, and even some of the basic emotions of the pantun - though little of its wit. Yet there is a difference: even the earliest poems bear the stamp of a personality, and from the very beginning there is a conscious if imperfect adaptation of the form to suit his needs.

The poems of *Nyanyi Sunyi* belong to a different world. Here Amir has passed beyond the stage of conventional adolescent emotions and no longer has any need to rely on the quatrain or the traditional verse forms. In the best of these poems, the intensity of his theme creates its own form, and his mastery of word choice and construction of phrase is magnificent. These poems are a starkly honest communication of his spiritual life: of his trust in God, of his rebellion against Him, of God's hiddenness and mysterious silence, and eventually of Amir's acceptance of that silence. Some of the poems are too one-sided for greatness, but a few have that perfect balance and flawless restraint of expression that is the hallmark of true poetry.

It is sometimes suggested that Amir Hamzah belonged to the 'Indo-centric' group of writers associated with Sanusi Pané. It is true that he translated Asian and not Western verse into Bahasa Indonesia; but unlike his 'Indo-centric' colleagues, he neither used the sonnet form nor showed any other influence of the Dutch generation of the 1880s. Strikingly enough, certain of his finest poems reflect a study of the

Old Testament, and in fact he translated extracts from the Song of Songs into Bahasa Indonesia.¹⁹ It is clear that as a poet Amir Hamzah must be considered not as the representative of a school or tendency but as a distinctive and uncompromising individual.

The Japanese occupation marked a new stage both in the consolidation of Bahasa Indonesia as a national language and in the development of Indonesian literature. It destroyed the presuppositions and complacencies of an entire generation and stimulated a surging feeling of national liberation. The Dutch language was suppressed and Bahasa Indonesia given legal status in its place. The Japanese encouraged literature, the visual arts, singing, drama, and the film, in every case making use of Bahasa Indonesia; but they also introduced a rigid system of censorship and attempted to ensure that every cultural expression served directly the ends of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. For many of the writers, the extreme misery of the Japanese period made it seem that man had been stripped of all pretence and artificiality, left naked in his essential humanity.

Some writers identified themselves with the cause of their Japanese masters and wrote poetry that was in every sense committed. The majority of the sophisticated and intelligent writers, however, resented the oppressive censorship of the Japanese Kulturkammer and attempted to find some way around it; or else they wrote as their minds and hearts dictated, keeping the result until publication was possible. One means of evading the Japanese censor was by the use of symbols. The technique was not always successful, but some writers did succeed in introducing such a degree of ambiguity into their work that it meant one thing to the Japanese and another to the Indonesian readers. Some of the most successful and effective poems which passed the censor were those clearly written with the author's tongue in his cheek. One by Rosihan Anwar (b. 1922, Minangkabau) described in vibrant language the author's feelings as he wakes early in the morning and hears the tramp of youth on the march. Various exalted thoughts pass through his mind, after which he strides whistling cheerfully to the bathroom.²⁰

Two really major literary figures emerged during the Japanese occupation: Chairil Anwar (b. 1922, Medan), who initiated a remarkable efflorescence in Indonesian poetry, and Idrus (b. 1921, Minangkabau), who created a new Indonesian prose style. Together, they established the viability of Bahasa Indonesia as a language of the modern world.

Idrus has not produced any large-scale work and is important, most of all, as a stylist. His most characteristic writings (none of them published until after the Japanese surrender) are short stories and vignettes. As a stylist he is famous as a pioneer of the new simplicity. We have already indicated that one of the problems facing Indonesian prose writers was to develop a prose style emancipated from the cumbersome and involved style of the past, one which could express everyday experience vividly and incisively. It is Idrus' success in this that is his great achievement: his sentences are short and compact, his style pithy, and, even more important, his descriptions of scenes and individuals are utterly convincing. In *Kota-Harmoni* (From Kota to Harmoni) - a bitter commentary on life during the Japanese occupation, embodied in a tram ride through Jakarta - the sharp querulous dialogue, the heat, the smell, the dust are all presented so vividly that to read the story is to experience them.

The same is true of *Och, och, och* (Oh! Oh! Oh!). This time the theme of the story is a train journey from Sukabumi to Jakarta; once again we are struck by the vivid realism, the unconventional and striking metaphor. The story exposes mercilessly the general corruption and loss of morale: the ticket inspector who allows the ticketless onto the train for a consideration of 25 cents; the conductor who allows them to remain for an additional bribe; the callousness of the Japanese at the check point who confiscate all the rice on board; the organized smuggling of cloth, and even drugs - for all the youth of Jakarta have syphilis! These, like the majority of Idrus' sketches, are savage and biting, but the underlying irony leaves the reader with a feeling of pity and disquiet rather than disgust.²¹

What Idrus did for prose, Chairil Anwar did, and very much more, for poetry. Of Minangkabau descent, he was born near Medan but went to Jakarta shortly before the Japanese occupation and achieved a certain importance shortly after with the founding of the Japanese's Central Cultural Office. As a personality he contrasts strikingly with Amir Hamzah. Whereas Amir Hamzah had been prepared to accept in an agonized submission the burdens that fate imposed upon him, Chairil Anwar fought with a demonic vitality to impose his own standards. This is the significance of his poem *Aku* (My Self), in which he described himself as a wild beast, rejected by his peers. He refuses to accept the pattern of life around him, where the bourgeois screen of the neatly

arranged house, the dignified dress, and formal handshake hides a fundamental, ineradicable selfishness. He wishes to live for a thousand years, but in his own way and on his own terms, never surrendering to the dumb crowd.

During the Japanese occupation Chairil Anwar disregarded both censorship and the interests of the Pacific war. Consequently, few of his poems were published until the Japanese surrender. One important exception, however, was *Diponegoro*, which appeared in the Japanese-sponsored newspaper *Asia Raja* and was one of the few poems to pass the censor without sacrificing its integrity as art. Chairil probably knew little about the messianic leader of the Java War; but he called on the name Diponegoro to express his own devotion to liberty and readiness to sacrifice himself for a great cause, his flaming vitality and confidence in the inevitable victory of truth. Every word, every syllable is vibrant with life, expressed with a compression that reaches its climax in the leaping, muscular vigour of the last four lines, each consisting of a single disyllabic word.

Chairil's work reflected the many sides of his personality. He possessed a dedication to art, a relentless passion for artistic truth which was doomed never to reach fulfillment. His works, to use Eliot's words, are a series of raids on the inexpressible in which every attempt is a different kind of failure. This is expressed in various of his poems, particularly in *Cintaku Jauh Dipulau* (My Beloved Is Afar Off, on an Island). The beloved is a symbol for his ideal of perfection; he is never to reach her, for death calls him: 'Direct your barque to my embrace.' Another strand in Chairil's work is his revulsion from life, evident in an early poem headed *1943*, written at the sight of an infant in perfect health but infected beyond redemption by its first sip of life, life which is a deadly poison. There is his patriotism, expressed in *Cerita buat Dien Tamaela* (A Story for a Girl, Dien Tamaela), and in *Krawang Bekasi* (two Javanese place names), a free rendering of Archibald MacLeish's *The Young Dead Soldiers*. There is likewise his religious intuition, which is extraordinary although hardly orthodox Moslem; even though this is rarely expressed, let alone elaborated upon, it reveals itself in such poems as *Doa* (Prayer) and *Isa* (Jesus).

Chairil Anwar died of typhus in 1949 at the age of twenty-seven. In spite of this brief career, it is impossible to overestimate his contribution to modern Indonesian literature. He made Bahasa Indonesia

do things it had never done before, and gave it a heightened capacity for poetic and cultural expression it would never lose.

The new generation of poets which came to prominence with Chairil Anwar in 1945 looked back with something akin to contempt on the literary work of the writers associated with the prewar *Pujangga Baru*. Chairil rejected their preoccupation with a poetic language and their tendency to wait for inspiration instead of draining life to the dregs in search of it. He exclaimed: 'If we look back, we find that *Pujangga Baru*, born in the year that Hitler seized power in Germany, printed only one shallow article on fascism throughout the course of its history. Its founders were dedicated to "renewal", but their use of the word was meaningless because they lacked any foundation of literary knowledge in the broadest sense.'²²

Asrul Sani (b. 1926, Minangkabau) complained of the older generation's attempts to create beauty by the use of a conventional 'poetic' language; Rivai Apin (b. 1927, Minangkabau) considered much of their emotional expression to be empty posturing, indicating such rhetorical expressions in Alisjahbana's poetry as: 'O poinciana!' 'O banyan tree!' 'O hevea fruit!' In the same vein Sitor Situmorang (b. 1924, North Sumatra) asserted, perhaps not quite fairly, that the poets of *Pujangga Baru* may have known what literature was but that they lacked the conviction and élan of the new generation. Sitor added that Takdir Alisjahbana and his contemporaries were rooted in the colonial situation, and that Takdir was virtually obsessed with his comparison of Western progress and Indonesian backwardness.²³

On the side of the older generation, Armijn Pané denied that there had been any cleavage in the development of Indonesian literature resulting from the Japanese occupation, while Takdir Alisjahbana declared that the realism of *Belenggu* was in advance of much of the realist writing produced after the war and that Rustam Effendi was as much an innovator as the postwar writers. He, too, denied any gulf between the two generations and - moving over to the attack - claimed that many of the new writers were more influenced by the books they had read than by life.²⁴

If the younger generation was united in criticizing the old, it was divided as to its own orientation. Two main attitudes emerged, one of them coalescing into Gelanggang (Forum), a cultural organization which had been founded by Chairil Anwar in 1946. Among its members were the

writers Asrul Sani, Rivai Apin, and M. Akbar Djuhana (b. 1925, East Sumatra), and the painters Muchtar Apin, Baharadin, and Henk Ngantung. Its mouthpiece was a supplement to the political and cultural weekly *Siasat* (Scrutiny) likewise called *Gelanggang*. From 1950 onward this supplement was under the direction of Asrul Sani and Rivai Apin, and in it the group published their declaration of faith, which it is worth quoting in full:

We are the legitimate heirs of the culture of the whole world, a culture which is ours to extend and develop in our own way. We are born of the common people; and for us, this term implies the inchoate mass from which new and healthy worlds of thought and expression may be born.

It is not so much our brown skin, black hair and slanting cheek bones that make us Indonesian, but rather what is manifest through our character and way of thinking.

We do not wish to limit by a name this Indonesian culture of ours. On the other hand we do not understand it as the refurbishing of something old to be a source of self-satisfaction; we envisage it as something vigorous and new. For this Indonesian culture will be determined by the manifold responses made on our part to stimuli from every corner of the globe, each one of them true to its own nature. And we will oppose any attempt to restrict or impede a re-examination of our scale of values.

For us, our revolution implies the discarding of old and outmoded values, fit only for obloquy, and their replacement by new ones. Until this is done our revolution is not complete. Our results may not always be original, but our fundamental quest is humanity, and in our study, analyses and quality of vision, we have our own characteristics: further our attitude to the community in which we live is that of men who are aware of the mutual interaction between artist and society.

Their whole emphasis therefore was on the international, intercultural human encounter with reality, echoing the universal humanism proclaimed by Chairil Anwar.

The confession of faith issued by *Gelanggang* was answered a few months later by the prolegomenon of the Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (People's Cultural Institute, popularly referred to as Lekra), which began: 'In cognizance of the fact that the people are the one and only source for the creation of a culture, and that a new Indonesian culture can only be created by the people, the Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat has been founded on the 17th day of August 1950.' It described Lekra's principal cultural aim as 'art for the people', which it explained as a combination of 'critical realism' and 'romantic

revolutionism'. Among the founders of Lekra were the writers A.S. Dharta (its secretary-general, b. 1922, Bandung) and Sobron Aidit (b. 1934, Bangka, the younger brother of the Communist party leader D.N. Aidit).

Although these formal declarations of purpose were made after the ending of the revolution, the origin of the differences they expressed can be traced in part to the circumstances of the struggle against the Dutch. Bujung Saleh (b. 1926, Jakarta) noted that the division of Indonesia into the Republic and a series of Dutch-sponsored federal states between 1946 and 1950 was reflected in the divergent attitudes of writers in the two areas. If in a Dutch-occupied city such as Jakarta slogans like 'universal humanism' were in vogue with the concomitant notion of *l'art pour l'art*, in the area of the Republic, art was as much a weapon as was a rifle, and the dominant literary concept was *l'art engagé*. This cleavage was expressed slightly differently by Sitor Situmorang in his analysis of the difference in meaning between 'human dignity' as understood by Chairil Anwar and 'humanity' as understood by the painter Affandi. For Chairil, human dignity was contained and expressed in the individual; for Affandi, humanity is achieved by man as of a social creature acting in harmony with his environment.²⁵

The conflict between these two groups evidenced itself in complex ways. At one point it was expressed in the debate outlined above; at another it became a revival of the prewar dichotomy between the Europhilism of Takdir Alisjahbana and the 'nativism' of Sanusi Pané. At still another point it assumed a partisan political form, for Lekra became the cultural spokesman of the Communist party, while the loyalties of the Gelanggang writers tended toward the Socialist party (PSI) banned by Sukarno in 1960. Neither the Islamic parties nor the nationalist PNI attracted writers of purely literary ability; and Lekra managed to gather unto itself virtually all those artists who did not fall consciously into the universal humanist, individualist group associated with Gelanggang. It was one of the truly remarkable achievements of the Indonesian Communist party that it largely succeeded - at least among the Javanese - in making itself the exponent of the interests and values of the common man by identifying itself with his culture.

This cleavage of sociopolitical orientation naturally coloured the critical assessment of the literary merits of one group by the other. A principal bone of contention between them was the use of the term 'Generation of '45', which had been popularly employed to designate

those writers who came to prominence with the proclamation of Indonesian independence. The phrase sounds so compelling and inevitable that one tends instinctively to accept it as having arisen concomitantly with a clearly defined group of writers, headed by Chairil Anwar. It was not coined, however, until 1949, when it was employed by Rosihan Anwar; and even at that time there was much acrimonious discussion as to whether it was a meaningful expression or not.²⁶

The term 'Generation of '45' lends itself, in fact, to as much ambiguity as does 'Pujangga Baru', with which it is frequently contrasted. Landmarks of this kind in literary history are labels more of convenience than of fact; in adopting them uncritically one runs the danger of mistaking an undefined part for a complex whole. Clearly the year 1945 did not inaugurate a completely new era in Indonesian literature, although for a small, highly gifted group it did symbolize a major breakthrough. Not all of this limited coterie, however, accepted the phrase as meaningful for themselves: Idrus, for example, rejected any association with it. In addition, Lekra critics, claiming a socio-political content for the term, denied it to Chairil Anwar and the Gelanggang group (who were after all the outstanding writers of the immediate post-1945 years) on the grounds that they were interested in the problems of the individual rather than the promotion of the social good.²⁷

Although Chairil Anwar has remained perhaps the outstanding poet up to the present, several other fine poets have appeared. At the same time, so much has been written, scattered throughout so many periodicals, that it is difficult to form any reliable judgement of the merits and directions of modern Indonesian poetry.²⁸ However, one important collection, appearing in 1950, was *Tiga Menguak Takdir* (Three attempt to Penetrate Fate),²⁹ a selection of their own poems by Chairil Anwar, Asrul Sani, and Rivai Apin, the three founders of Gelanggang.

It may be debated whether the three writers collaborating in this book selected their best or most representative work to be included in it; but it remains undeniable that each spoke with his own highly individual and distinctive voice. We have already discussed Chairil. Of the remaining two, Asrul Sani is, in my view, the more outstanding. There is a certain calmness, steadiness, and even ethereal quality of vision apparent in several of his poems that is highly personal. Although his best poetry does not lack emotional impact, its force is quite

different from that of the urgency and relentlessness of Chairil Anwar. Teeuw finds the key to Asrul Sani's approach in a sentence from one of his essays: 'This [i.e. individuality in literature] is the one means of salvation in a type of democratic society that is bent on stifling all aristocracy of spirit.' Thus, Teeuw declares, Asrul Sani is haunted by the fear of losing his individuality in the mob, and one of his favourite symbols is the solitude of the sea, far from the pressures of everyday life.³⁰ Among the most moving of his poems are *Anak Laut* (A Child of the Sea), *Pengungsi* (Refugees), and *Sebagai Kenangan kepada Amir Hamzah, Penyair yang Terbunuh* (In Memory of Amir Hamzah, the Slain Poet).

One of the most important poets subsequent to Chairil Anwar is Sitor Situmorang, who was born in 1923 of Christian Batak descent. In a special way he is a spokesman for the plight of many Indonesian intellectuals; and from this standpoint he is perhaps even more important than Chairil Anwar. Much of his inspiration and many of his attitudes derive from a sojourn in France and Italy made during 1950. On his homecoming he discovered that the place he returned to was no longer home; and the dominant theme of several of his poems is his bewilderment and sense of loss at this realization. Frequently we find a fugal counterplay of ideas in the development of this theme: how he appears to others and how he knows himself to be. Thus in the poem *Si-anak Hilang* (The Lost Son) he describes in simple quatrains the reactions of his parents and the people of his village on his homecoming from Europe - the traditional idyllic return of the wanderer, as it appears to them. The grievous revelation, however, comes in the last couplet of the poem. When all the family are asleep, the waves murmuring against the shore of Samosir tell the awful truth: the son has not returned home; what was home is home no longer.

Many of Sitor's poems are deeply personal and can only be understood through knowledge of his life. J.U. Nasution, in two most interesting essays,³¹ shows how Sitor's Christian faith has gradually been eroded by Sartrean existentialism. One might add by sensuality, for certain of the poems of *Wajah tak Bernama* (A Nameless Face) are oppressively, even crudely sexual. Yet with or without an explicit faith, Sitor is still profoundly religious in temperament. These tensions between faith and doubt, between Europe and Indonesia, between homelessness and a longing to find a home, are the raw materials of

which great poetry can be made.

Another important collection of poems, *Ketemu di Jalan* (A Chance Meeting), appeared in 1956. Like *Tiga Menguak Takdir*, it consists of a selection of the work of three young poets - in this case A. Rosidi (b. 1938, West Java), Sobron Aidit, and S.M. Ardan (b. 1932, Medan). It is eminently useful as a documentation of the development of Indonesian poetry but is difficult to evaluate. All three authors were at the time of publication very young, either in their late teens or early twenties, and each is likewise still finding his way. My own feeling is that Rosidi is more successful as a short-story writer than as a poet, and several of his poems in this volume are marked by irritating mannerisms. The writer Toto Sudarto Bachtiar (b. 1929, Jakarta), reviewing the volume, commented that of the three it is Sobron Aidit who is the most successful in achieving a valid poetic expression. He added, however, that the fifteen poems which represent each author cannot serve as a basis for any final judgement of the talent of these writers, particularly in view of their youth.³²

Two further poets deserve individual mention, the first of them being the just-cited Toto Sudarto Bachtiar. H.B. Jassin has called him 'the poet of Jakarta at eventide',³³ for his verse reflects his knowledge and love of the metropolis. Some of his poems, such as *Gadis Peminta-minta* (A Beggar Girl) are simple and moving. Others, however, such as *Lagu Orang-orang Malang* (A Song for the Luckless Ones) are difficult to understand because of their compression, symbolism, and ambiguous syntax.

Another younger poet who speaks with a distinctive voice is W.S. Rendra (b. 1935, Solo). His volume *Ballada Orang-orang Tercinta* (Songs of Lovers), published in 1957, is impressive in its capacity for emotional intensity, fine sense of language and atmosphere, and its promise for the future; but the book is still clearly the work of an adolescent. The dominant themes are almost exclusively sex and death, and he overworks puns such as *dara* (hymen, virginity) and *darah* (blood).

Prose development during the postwar period has been equally striking, although full-length novels have been few. Perhaps the most important single novel is *Atheis* (An Atheist) by Achdiat Karta Mihardja (b. 1911, West Java), which was first published in 1949. In it Achdiat delineates one aspect of the confrontation of the Indonesian villager with the modern world. Hasan, the hero of the story, is a

pious youth from the village who, on his first arrival in the city, indulges in heroic asceticism. On meeting an old school friend, Rusli, however, he is confronted first by dialectical materialism, second by the beauty of Rusli's friend Kartini, and thirdly by the aggressive and vituperative independence of the anarchist Anwar, who believes in no God and respects no man. This combined assault is too much for Hasan's faith. He attempts to discard it, but finds his attempt to live as an atheist agonizingly unsuccessful. In the end, dying, he utters the Muslim confession of faith. Of course, the situation presented to us is not wholly representative. Not every village youth is as pious or ascetic as Hasan; neither is the city a hotbed of anarchism and dialectical materialism. Achdiat has in fact focused on certain elements in a general situation and, developed them in such a way as to wring from us pity and dismay at the sufferings of simple folk involved in a world they cannot understand.

Another important book, first published in 1950, is *Jalan tak ada Ujung* (A Road with No End) by Mochtar Lubis (b. 1919, Minangkabau). The hero of the story, Guru Isa, is a coward. When fighting against the Dutch breaks out, he commits himself to the Indonesian side, not because he is a patriot but because he is afraid to do anything else. His comrades, who see only his actions and are unaware of his motives, regard him as a hero; but he does not deceive himself. Yet when arrested he withstands torture where his flamboyantly courageous colleagues are forced into betrayal of their friends. He has become the man his friends thought him to be. He has, in fact, solved the problem that we referred to earlier as central to much of Sitor Situmorang's poetry.

Pramudya Ananta Tur is by far the most prolific of the serious writers in Indonesia. He was born at Blora in 1925; during the revolutionary struggle he served as a war correspondent, was captured by the Dutch, and spent two years in prison. During this period of internment he wrote extensively and gathered an immense amount of material for future work. One of Pramudya's most important novels is *Keluarga Gerilya*, which was first published in 1950. The title literally means A Guerrilla Family, but a rendering such as A Family in Hell would better convey the content of the book. The story focuses on the agony of a family split by the conflict of loyalties - the father to the Dutch-sponsored Federalist state, the sons to the Republic. The sons in a guerrilla plot kill their father; and the action of the novel

takes place in the three days between the sentencing of one son and the time he is shot. In this book, Pramudya goes beyond realism, creating ideal characters to communicate his own vision of human life and values. At the same time, although Pramudya as a man is passionately committed both politically and as a nationalist, he is not writing propaganda. The kernel of his feeling is revealed in the prayer of the second son: 'Perhaps these my sins You do not account for sins, because it is You who have brought to birth this new people. Also because we - because I - am on the weaker side, and am defending myself. Indeed, we are on the weaker side. But all the sins I have committed are for me *still* sins. I have sinned against myself; I have sinned against humanity; I have sinned against the families [of others] - the families of those soldiers that I have killed. I have sinned against their love, which has been in vain.'³⁴ The scene is reminiscent of Arjuna sorrowing over his duty to do battle against his kinsfolk, the Kurawas. Nor is this an accident: Pramudya is an ethnic Javanese and was brought up amid the symbolism, imagery, and motifs of the Mahabharata.

Perburuan (Pursuit), which also appeared in 1950, reveals the same qualities and interests as *Keluarga Gerilya*. The central figure in this novel is an Indonesian officer, Dèn Hardo, who took part in an unsuccessful rising against the Japanese, was pursued, and lived the life of a beggar. This work, too, has specifically Javanese overtones. Like many of Pramudya's heroes, Dèn Hardo is larger than life, and is reminiscent of Arjuna: his long sojourn in the cave echoes Arjuna's asceticism in the grotto on Mount Indrakila, and his disregard for material comforts, broad humanitarianism, and capacity for miraculous escape from the Japanese strengthen this impression.

In addition to his novels Pramudya has written many, very many, short stories. He likewise shows considerable skill as an essayist and critic. In one article appearing in *Kisah*,³⁵ he gives a fascinating account of literary creation as he understands it. Pramudya's art is one of immense power and consummate skill; and perhaps the most striking feature of his style is its immediacy. He has the ability to create overtones and a sense of dimension, combined with remarkable economy. Everything he writes (in his best work) is a living, functioning part of an organic whole; and his studies of the encounters and sufferings of his heroes may perhaps be compared in their intensity

to those of Dostoevski.

Sitor Situmorang has likewise written many short stories. One significant collection is *Pertempuran dan Salju di Parijs* (A Conflict and Snow in Paris), which appeared in 1956. One of the stories in this group, *Ibu Pergi ke Sorga* (Mother Goes to Heaven),³⁶ illustrates a theme we referred to earlier, the loss of the sense of home. The hero of the story returns from Jakarta to his village in north Sumatra. It is Christmas, and his mother is in the last stages of tuberculosis. Everything seems smaller than it once appeared to him, and the intimate cycle of village life no longer has any meaning. The parson's invitation to him to read the lesson strikes him with a dumb and embarrassed dismay. His mother's death gives him no sense of loss, and the parson's assurance that she is in Paradise carries no conviction.

Achdiat Karta Mihardja has published two collections of short stories: *Keretakan dan Ketegangan* (Fissures and Tensions) in 1956, two of which have subsequently appeared in English;³⁷ and *Kesan dan Kenangan* (Impressions and Memories) in 1961, the reminiscences of a round-the-world trip the author made in 1957. At first there appears to be no unity of theme underlying the stories, apart from the fact that almost all Achdiat's characters are unfortunate. However, closer examination reveals a connecting theme in the author's philosophy of life: fate is cruel, providence enigmatic; only love can give life any value or meaning.

The short story, it should now become clear, is the most popular and accomplished prose form in modern Indonesian writing, and at the same time a comparatively new arrival on the Indonesian literary scene.³⁸ It has the merit of permitting the author to deal discreetly with the manifold aspects of the fantastically rich canvas of contemporary Indonesia; the tensions, jealousies, and adventures of rural life; contrasts and conflicts between the city and the village, the new world and the old, reminiscences of adolescence, of the colonial past; satiric evocations of the present situation, of its absurdities and pathos.

The comparative absence of large-scale works, however, aroused disquiet among certain Indonesian intellectuals, and as early as 1949 some of them detected a crisis in Indonesian literature. This was one of the discussion themes at a meeting of the Dutch-sponsored foundation for cultural interchange, Sticusa, held at Amsterdam in 1953, in which

several Indonesians participated, including Asrul Sani and Takdir Alisjahbana. The concept of a crisis, particularly as it was developed at this meeting, was peculiar to the Gelanggang group of writers and was accordingly labelled by Lekra's adherents as the complaint of salon critics who had written themselves out.³⁹

In this controversy, the questions raised by Sudjatmoko in the first issue of *Konfrontasi* (Encounter)⁴⁰ in 1954 are important and well put:

We are bound to the short story, and apparently cannot progress beyond it. There are many works in this form that have merit, and the fluency of their language is evident, but we are still waiting for literary works of major calibre.... It is clear that almost all our short stories develop exclusively within the minor framework of the psychology of the individual; so that the question arises as to whether our incapacity [in this field] is merely a matter of shortness of breath, and a lack of mastery of the major forms of literature, or is caused by our inability to use weightier literary materials that are more difficult to handle.

If this is the case, then we have to admit that our claim to the rank of human beings who have broken loose from the values of their old life, which formed an important element in our revolutionary literary 'renaissance', has foundered in this psychologism [sic?], in minor experiences and slight reverberations of the spirit which are only sufficient to produce our short stories and poems. If this is the case, then we must ask ourselves whether the dramatic element implicit in our revolution, and the questions of humanity and society associated with it have not been plumbed and experienced by our writers. 41

On the other hand, to say that Sudjatmoko's questions are well put is not to suggest that one can accept without reservation his answers. It may well be that he and those he represents are looking for the wrong things in the Indonesian situation, and thus misrepresent the contemporary literary scene. This is perhaps the reason why Takdir Alisjahbana and Asrul Sani were so concerned with the idea of decline in Indonesian literature at Amsterdam in 1953. They looked at the finest contemporary Western writers and wondered why Indonesian literature did not seem to reach an equivalent standard, without considering the view that Indonesian writing would develop in relationship to a society whose concerns are vastly different from those of the individual-oriented West. The critic H.B. Jassin, in fact, dismisses Sudjatmoko's views quite brusquely:

There is nothing we can say... particularly if a person has already defined his standards in a slighting manner, [declaring] that what he calls the psychology of the individual and 'the minor experiences and reverberations of the spirit which are only sufficient to produce our short stories and poems' are of no significance to him. Because *a priori* he turns up his nose at the sight of these shorter works, he is not going to reach the essential life they embody, which may not perhaps fall short of what is portentiously called: 'the dramatic element implicit in our revolution, and the questions of humanity and society associated with it'.⁴²

In an interesting and realistic article, Nugroho Notosusanto summarizes the opinions of those who claim that Indonesian literature is in a state of crisis: the majority of new writers are young, many of them still at school; they are perhaps productive, but do not produce work of real competence or value. To this he adds the pertinent question: is there anything abnormal or regrettable in this; is not this youthful enthusiasm for writing rather a cause for encouragement?⁴³ One might even go further and say that a really effective short story requires as much art as a full-length novel, and that the best short stories of authors as young as Rendra and Rosidi have a maturity of expression, poise, and balance that belies their youthfulness. At the same time, we might also note that in the most recent period there are signs that some of the longer forms of narrative are returning to popularity.⁴⁴

In his Independence Day speech of August 1959, President Sukarno laid down 'National Personality',⁴⁵ as the official Indonesian cultural motif. The implication of the slogan was that writers had a social function, had to be aware of their role as spokesmen of a national identity.⁴⁶ Clearly, part of Sukarno's aim in promulgating this state ideology was to dissolve the internationalist-'nativist' dichotomy by imposing a version of the socially oriented 'nativist' view which would be meaningful for the entire community. It is difficult to say, however, whether by using the concept 'National Personality' as a criterion, it is possible to distinguish between the short stories written in *Kisah* up to 1957, and those which appeared in *Sastra* up to 1963.⁴⁷

On the other hand, it is certainly meaningful to ask whether a modern literature is still an exotic growth in Indonesia; whether the modern Indonesian writer is writing as an Indonesian, with his background and traditions forming an organic and distinctive part of his

work, or whether he is using a European-acquired skill in a European way, with his own background appearing only as local colour. If the first of these two alternatives is the more accurate description of the contemporary Indonesian scene - as I believe it is - then the best Indonesian writers are, and in fact have long been, expressing and developing a national personality.

Not everything that has been produced is of outstanding quality, and not many works have the major and compelling stature of Pramudya's best work; but the cumulative effect of the shorter pieces of good writing in poetry as well as prose is impressive. It is not only the amount of creative writing that is important, but the amount of criticism, discussion, and evaluation going on, particularly among younger writers and students. These critical works, appearing in periodicals and newspapers, must be read to gain any full understanding of Indonesian creative writing.

Indonesian authors still face many difficulties, but so do creative writers anywhere. Their greatest problem even if not all of them have been explicitly aware of it - has been to create a common literary tradition in a new language, appealing to the public of a new nation. Serious literature is unlikely to have a mass market, but with the continued spread of education in Indonesia one has a right to expect a far larger proportion of educated readers than exists at present.⁴⁸ With a larger reading public, writing will certainly become a better economic proposition than it is at present. The vitality of literary enthusiasm is indicated by the number of literary clubs scattered throughout the country,⁴⁹ while an increased emphasis on modern Indonesian writing has resulted from the revision of educational curricula, especially in the literature departments of the universities in Jakarta and Bandung.

The new writers have a complex technique to master. As Edwin Muir remarks: 'To the novelist of fifty or a hundred years ago, life obediently fell into the mould of a story; to the novelist of today, it refuses to do so.'⁵⁰ In another essay Muir adds: 'The writers of this century have certainly been troubled by the problem of an era of transition; but it is clear that they have also been troubled by the desire to convey a new sense of experience.'⁵¹ These are precisely the problems faced by the Indonesian writer, and in particular the novelist. He is confronted with the immense tasks facing the mid-twentieth-century novel-

ist who seeks a new means of individual expression - but without a tradition of two hundred years behind him on which the European novelist can call.

At the same time, the new writers no longer have to face one of the major obstacles to the first Indonesian literary generation - the need to create a language suitable to a modern nation. The area of thought, experience, and expression that present-day Bahasa Indonesia can serve to communicate with subtlety, grace, and exactness - not to mention pungency if required - is wide. Although the development of the language has still a long way to go, nothing could be more misleading than to imagine contemporary Bahasa Indonesia as a kind of superimposed *lingua franca*, without an organic vitality of its own.

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1. For a general introduction to the early history of Malay and Javanese literature, see A. Teeuw, 'The History of the Malay Language', *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde*, 115 (1959), 138-56; R.O. Winstedt, 'A History of Classical Malay Literature' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Malayan Branch*, 31 (1958); J.G. de Casparis, *Prasasti Indonesia* [Indonesian Inscriptions] (2 vols. Bandung, 1950 and 1955); Poerbatjaraka, *Kepustakaan Djawa* [Javanese Literature] (Jakarta, Djambatan, 1952).
2. J. Noorduyn, 'Some Aspects of Macassar-Buginese Historiography' in *Historical Writing on the Peoples of Asia*, 2 (London, Oxford University Press, 1961), 29-36.
3. See the list of manuscript catalogues referred to in Winstedt, pp. 250-51.
4. A.H. Johns, *Rantjak di Labueh: A Minangkabau Kaba* (Ithaca, Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper No. 32, 1958).
5. A.H. Hill, *The Hikayat Abdullah*, an annotated translation in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Malayan Branch*, 28 (1955).
6. G.H. Bousquet, *A French View of the Netherlands East Indies* (London, Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 79.
7. All of these works were published in Balai Pustaka. *Sitti Nurbaja* has gone through eight reprints (most recent 1957), *Salah Asuhan* six (most recent 1956), *Karena Mentua* two (most recent 1958), and *Kalau tak Untung* five (most recent 1956).
8. Teeuw notes that Balai Pustaka refused to accept *Salah Asuhan* in its original form. It is interesting to speculate what parts

the editors found too forthright. A. Teeuw, *Pokok dan Tokoh dalam Kesusasteraan Indonesia Baru* [Themes and Personalities in Modern Indonesian Literature], 1 (Jakarta, Pembangunan, 1958), 156.

9. The work was first published in *Pujangga Baru* in 1940; it has gone through four reprints put out by Pustaka Rakjat, the most recent being 1957.
10. This is a collection of Armijn Pané's short stories written between 1932 and 1952; it was published by Balai Pustaka in 1953. A few of the tales are sketches and experiments for *Belenggu*.
11. There are probably sociological reasons too, which I have touched on briefly elsewhere. A.H. Johns, 'The Novel as a Guide to Indonesian Social History', *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde*, 115 (1959), 323-48.
12. Of the few Indonesians who chose to write in Dutch, the most important were Noto Suroto and Suwarsih Djojopuspito. It is interesting to note that Suwarsih, whose novel *Buiten het Gareel* [Out of Harness] was published in Holland in 1940, had previously submitted it in Sundanese to Balai Pustaka, which had rejected it.
13. Teeuw, *Pokok dan Tokoh*, 1, 71.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
15. Armijn Pané, 'Sifatnja Kesusasteraan Baru' [The Characteristics of the New Literature], *Pujangga Baru*, 1 (1933), reprinted in *Indonesia*, 3 (1952), 18-23.
16. Quoted by R.B. Slametmuljono in *Sari Pustaka Indonesia* [Themes in Indonesian Literature] (Jakarta, Wolters, 1952), p. 152. The *Pujangga Baru* reference is not given.
17. Armijn Pané, *Kort Overzicht van de Moderne Indonesische Literatuur* [Brief Survey of Modern Indonesian Literature] (Jakarta, Balai Pustaka, 1949), pp. 9-10.
18. Achdiat Karta Mihardja, ed., *Polemik Kebudayaan* [Debates on Culture] (Jakarta, Balai Pustaka, 1954); and A.H. Johns, 'Indonesian Tensions: The Literary Record', *Quadrant* (Sydney, 1961), pp. 51-60.
19. A.H. Johns, 'Amir Hamzah: Malay Prince, Indonesian Poet', in *Essays in Honour of Sir Richard Winstedt* (London, Oxford University Press, 1963).
20. H.B. Jassin, *Kesusasteraan Indonesia Dimasa Djepang* [Indonesian Literature during the Japanese Occupation] (Jakarta, Balai Pustaka, 1954), pp. 6-27.
21. His most characteristic works are to be found in the collection: *Dari Ave Maria ke Djalan Lain ke Roma* [From Ave Maria to Another

- Road to Rome] (Jakarta, Balai Pustaka, 1948). A couple of his stories have appeared in English: 'Och, och, och' in 'Perspective of Indonesia', *Atlantic Monthly* (1956), supplement, and his novel-ette *Aki* (Jakarta, Balai Pustaka, 1949) in John M. Echols, ed., *Indonesian Writing in Translation* (Ithaca, Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1956).
22. Quoted by H.B. Jassin in *Chairil Anwar, Pelopor Angkatan '45* (Jakarta, Gunung Agung, 1956), p. 118.
 23. W.A. Braasem, *Moderne Indonesische Literatuur* [Modern Indonesian Literature] (Amsterdam, Van der Peet, 1954), pp. 61-66.
 24. *Pujangga Baru*, Nomor Peringatan Sepuluh Tahun [Ten Year Commemorative Number] (1949), pp. 1-3.
 25. Teeuw, *Pokok dan Tokoh*, 2, 130-31.
 26. Rosihan Anwar introduced the term in an article appearing in the January 9, 1949 issue of *Siasat*. For an example of an early objection to the use of the label, see Achdiat Karta Mihardja's open letter to 'Mr. X', published in *Pujangga Baru* (Nomor Peringatan), 1949, p. 17.
 27. For an example of the Lekra argument, see A.S. Dharta's comment in 'Kepada Seniman "Universil"' [To the "Universal" Artist], in Aoh K. Hadimadja, ed., *Beberapa Paham Angkatan '45* [Views of the Generation of '45] (Jakarta, Tintamas, 1952), pp. 82-91.
 28. For example, see the periodical *Budaya* (Nomor Puisi) [Culture: Poetry Number], 6 (1957), which includes 76 poems by 35 poets. Teeuw notes (*Pokok dan Tokoh*, 2, 47) that it is increasingly difficult to form even a provisional judgement about recent poems, for the majority are characterized by a sameness of form as well as content.
 29. The exact meaning of the title is unsure. *Kuak* can mean (1) bellow at (2) open out, draw aside, penetrate. Lexically *takdir* means fate, but when the book first appeared in 1949, the title was widely understood as 'Three Bellow at Takdir [Alisjahbana]', the leader of the old generation. From the content of the book, however, the idea expressed by the title as I have translated it must have been uppermost in the minds of the authors.
 30. Teeuw, *Pokok dan Tokoh*, 2, 77.
 31. J.U. Nasution, 'Sitor Situmorang sebagai Penjair dan Pengarang Tjerita Pendek' [Sitor Situmorang as a Poet and Short Story Writer], 9, 345-67, 405-24.
 32. *Kisah*, 4 (1956), 27.
 33. Jassin has recently published a substantial essay on his work, in *Kesusasteraan Indonesia Modern dalam Kritik dan Esei* [Modern Indonesian Literature in Criticism and Essay], 2 (Jakarta, Gunung Agung, 1962), 47-66.
 34. *Keluarga Gerilja* (Jakarta, Pembangunan, 1950), p. 38.

35. 'Lahirnja sebuah Tjerita Pendek' [The Birth of a Short Story], *Kisah*, 4 (1956), 21-4.
36. This has appeared in translation in L. Wigmore, ed., *Span* (Melbourne, 1958).
37. 'Hamid' has appeared in *Span* and the *Atlantic Monthly* (1956) supplement and 'Sensation at Top of Coconut Palm' in the Australian quarterly, *Meanjin* (1960), Part 4.
38. The best account of the Indonesian short story will be found in Ajip Rossidi, *Tjerita Pendek Indonesia* [The Indonesian Short Story] (Jakarta, Djambatan, 1959), in which Rossidi discusses published collections of short stories by 21 authors.
39. See Pramudya Ananta Tur, 'Mentjari Sebab-sebab Kemunduran Kesusasteraan Indonesia Modern Dewasa Ini' [Seeking the Causes of the Present Decline in Modern Indonesian Literature], *Indonesia*, 4 (1953), 330-33.
40. *Konfrontasi* (first issue July-August 1954) was intended to fill the gap left by the demise of *Pujangga Baru*, which had been revived in 1948 and discontinued in 1954, and to inaugurate a new approach to the cultural and economic problems facing Indonesia. The editorial board included Takdir Alisjahbana and Achdiat Karta Mihardja.
41. 'Mengapa *Konfrontasi*' [Why Encounter?], *Konfrontasi*, 1 (1954), 3-4.
42. Jassin, *Kesusasteraan*, 2, 11.
43. 'Sastra Muda, Bumi Muda' [A Young Literature, A Young Country], *Kisah*, 4 (1956), 18.
44. H.B. Jassin, 'Satu Tahun *Sastra*' [One Year of *Sastra*], *Sastra*, 2 (1962), 4.
45. *Kepribadian Nasional*, the K of USDEK.
46. This was not the first time the government had taken a hand in cultural affairs, though it was the first serious attempt to dictate artistic policy. The government had subsidized the Badan Musjawarah Kebudayaan Nasional (Consultative Body of National Culture), a federation of cultural groups founded in 1952. Although Lekra belonged to it, the association tended to lean toward the universal humanist side - a fact which Lekra, leaping on the National Personality bandwagon with understandable alacrity, lost no time in pointing out. See *Zaman Baru* (September 15, 1960), pp. 1-2.
47. *Kisah*, which began in 1953, was a monthly periodical devoted principally to the short story; it expired in 1957. *Sastra*, in effect a resurrection of *Kisah*, began publication in 1961.
48. It is most difficult to form any accurate estimate of the serious reading public in Indonesia. One would expect it to include

university students - at least those following the liberal arts curricula - school teachers, high school students, and aspirant writers. A serious interest in Indonesian literature on the part of Indonesians remains low, however. *Atheis* sells about five thousand copies in three years. The literary monthly *Sastra* has an impression of two thousand copies for nationwide distribution.

49. Teeuw, *Pokok dan Tokoh*, 2, 42-43.
50. E. Muir, *Essays on Literature and Society* (London, Hogarth Press, 1949), p. 144.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

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Buku Kita [Our Books]. A literary and cultural quarterly founded in 1955 and published in Jakarta by Gunung Agung, listing new publications and featuring valuable essays and reviews.

Indonesia [Indonesia]. A literary and cultural monthly founded in 1949 and published by the Consultative Body of National Culture (Badan Musjawarah Kebudayaan Nasional) in Jakarta.

Kisah [Short Story]. A monthly published by Jakarta Press, Jakarta, 1952-58. Devoted principally to the short story, but also including critical essays and poems. Succeeded by *Sastra*.

Konfrontasi [Encounter]. A literary and cultural monthly founded in 1954 to replace the postwar revival of *Pudjangga Baru*. Published by Pustaka Rakjat, Jakarta.

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CHAIRIL ANWAR: AN INTERPRETATION*

The relation of a poet to his environment: his acceptance or rejection of the world he lives in, its influence upon him, and his transmutation of his total experience into the images that find their inevitable and fitting shrine in his verse - these are perennial and fruitful questions that demand discussion whenever we are confronted with the work of a true poet. All the more so when the poet in question is one of the creators of a new literary tradition in his country, and his formative years are dominated by events as cataclasmic as the Japanese conquest of the Dutch East Indies in 1941-42, and the subsequent struggle for Indonesian independence.

Chairil Anwar was born in Medan in 1922 and died in Jakarta in 1949. His formal education extended only as far as the first two years of Junior High School, after which family difficulties caused him to leave home for Jakarta in 1940 - at the age of 18. Very little is known of his life in Jakarta until the Japanese occupation, when he became recognised as a poet among the circle of Indonesian intellectuals. Only a modicum of his poetry was published before the Japanese surrender, but after the war his reputation soared: he was regarded as the creator of a new Indonesian poetry who jealously preserved his artistic integrity during the Japanese occupation, and after the war was a burning patriot.

These, broadly speaking, are the terms in which many Indonesian and foreign writers see him. Not that he has received only praise. For a period, at least, it became the fashion to debunk him as a plagiarist. And writers associating themselves with the left-wing cultural association Lekra have, on political grounds, uttered severe strictures on his work on the grounds of his existentialist morality, and his cosmopolitan a-political outlook.¹

Neither of these views, however, contributes much to an appreciation of Chairil Anwar as a poet, or to an understanding of his poetry as poetry. A direct access to his work has, likewise, been impeded by

* First published in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, Vol. 120, pt 4, 1964, pp. 393-408.

the popular image he created for himself. It is no exaggeration to say that many writers who have directed their attention to him have been so obsessed by his personality that they have never come to grips with his poetry in its own terms.

Now, a personality he certainly was. Irregular, arrogant, eccentric, burnt up with an obsessional vitality, he plunged himself into every conceivable type of experience. He had no more and no less respect for the President than for a pedicab driver. He regarded the norms of social life as perpetuated and sustained by hypocrisy, and virtually destroyed himself rather than accept them. Thus, he devoted himself to art; and to be an artist he struggled to emancipate himself from the claims of family, religion and country, leading a characteristically Bohemian existence. But if his irregular life was partly a matter of principle - in the manner of Rimbaud - it was also in part a *persona*, a mask to conceal his real self which he revealed only in his poems.

Chairil Anwar began to write when a whole edifice of social behaviour was brought crashing down in ruins - when existing standards appeared to have lost their application and validity, and concepts of value associated with religion, morality, and the rule of law no longer had any meaning. The poor starved to death unpitied, the Dutch were expropriated, and all were subject to naked force which was the supreme law.

This chaos which surrounded him is important for any understanding of his personality, but it should not give the impression that there was anything frenetic or expletive about his verse, still less that it was in any way extemporaneous in character. Chairil's two guiding stars were life and art, to which, however, he attributed a purely existential significance. And he wrote giving expression to a kaleidoscope of moods provoked by the world he lived in. His subject was above all his own self: his doubts, despairs, nostalgias; what he was, in what he could find relief - all scrutinised and set down with an inexorable honesty and correspondingly steel-like discipline in his technique.

His poetry then is an interior poetry: and this, together with his concern with technique which led him to continual revisions of his work, are the two most important facts about him as a poet. His concern with technique was rational, not intuitive. In a letter he wrote: 'As an artist, Ida, I must be penetrating and decisive in evaluating

and deciding. Listen!! After Beethoven's death, his note-books were discovered filled with jottings, the ground work and preparation for his great melodies. His fifth and ninth symphonies did not appear ready made. He had to work for years before such a work was ripe for the plucking. The composition of his *Missa Solemnis* took more than five years.... So if I write without putting a total effort into my work, I may degenerate into an improviser.'²

The same concern is evident in the selections he translated from the letters of R.M. Rilke, chosen, undoubtedly, because they expressed the ideas closest to his heart. The following words from a letter from Rilke to Lou Andreas-Salomé might well have been his own: 'It is not form that I must learn from him, but the profound concentration necessary to create form. I must learn to work, Lou - this is my weakness.'³

It is usually claimed that Chairil Anwar was influenced principally by the Dutch expressionists Marsman and Slauerhoff, and that, using them as his models, he introduced Expressionism into Indonesian poetry. This affiliation, however, appears too narrow and provincial. His creation of an interior universe, and his dedication to technical perfection, in fact, mark him as an heir to the great movement in modern poetry inaugurated by the French symbolists. It is only necessary to read Valéry's aphorism, 'a poem is an intricate intellectual problem, a struggle with self-imposed conditions - it is, above all, something constructed', and his favourite simile: 'a poem is like a heavy weight which the poet has carried to the roof bit by bit - the reader is the passer-by upon whom the weight is dropped all at once, and who consequently receives from it in a moment, an overwhelming impression, a complete aesthetic effect, such as the poet has never known in composing it',⁴ and compare them with Chairil's attitudes to his art, to realize that we are in the same intellectual world.

Chairil Anwar's poetry then is a revelation of his inner self, his moods and attitudes; his poems, accordingly, are not objective comments on the external world, although they may be provoked by it; and in the symbolist manner, the content of his poetry, and the components of his images only becomes invested with their full meaning when they are interpreted as symbols of his own moods and attitudes. He tells us as much in 'Rumahku' (My House), which may be summarized: 'My house, where I live, take my wife, have my children, is of poetry; it is so trans-

parent that from without all the intimacies of my heart and mind are manifest.'⁵ The poem is based on 'Woninglooze' (Homeless), by Slauerhoff. But it is also significant to note a sentence occurring in another letter of Rilke that he translated: 'I find, stored within the poems that have become part of me more truth than is to be found in (personal) relations and friendships.'

His first published poem is probably 'Nisan' (An Epitaph):

Bukan kematian benar menusuk kalbu
Keridlaanmu menerima segala tiba
Tak kutahu setinggi itu atas debu
dan duka maha tuan bertakhta.

It is not [your] death which moves me,
But your resignation to all that befell;
I had not realised how high above dust
And sorrow, nobly you reign. 6

The significance of the poem is not immediately clear, nor the focal point of Chairil's personal involvement; and the syntactic patterns of the original, since the form is almost that of a traditional quatrain, are not easily definable. I understand the theme as the gulf between generations; and the cause of Chairil's grief is not so much the loss of the grandmother, but the loss of that sense of acceptance (*keridlaan*) she epitomized, which could make life bearable.

If such is the case, then this first poem sets the stage for all that is to follow. Chairil's world is a broken world. He recognises this and accepts the fact (though not perhaps without a backward glance of regret): better a broken world in which no values are sure, than a whole one, sustained by hypocrisy.

Consistency in this attitude does not make for peace of mind: despair awaits round every corner. And in a poem written only two months later, he exclaims: 'The happiness granted us is a mere trifle, worth neither treasuring nor nurturing.'⁷ Not only despair, but even revulsion, as in the poem '1943', where Chairil looks on a small child, apparently in perfect health, but already infected beyond redemption by the putrescence filling its lungs from the first breath of life.⁸

Sometimes, indeed, we find a poem flaming with self-confidence and vitality, the vitalism that he wished to infuse into art; but these are comparatively rare. Among them is 'Diponegoro'. Diponegoro was the messianic leader of the Java War 1826-30 - a Mahdi type figure, a revolutionary who in the popular Javanese imagination and tradition

would sweep away injustice, and create a new Heaven and a new Earth:

Dimasa pembangunan ini
tuan hidup kembali

Dan bara kagum menjadi api

Didepan sekali tuan menanti
Tak gentar. Lawan banyaknya seratus kali.

Pedang dikanan, keris dikiri
Berselempang semangat yang tak bisa mati.

MAJU

Ini barisan tak bergenderang-berpalu
Kepercayaan tanda menyerbu

Sekali berarti
Sudah itu mati.

* * * * *

At this time of reawakening
You live again
The startled embers burst into flame

In the forefront you stand
Unflinching, facing foes a hundredfold.

Swords at the right, spears at the left
Kindled with a spirit that cannot know death.

FORWARD

Your rank [marches] without beat of drum
Conviction is the signal for attack

Once to be meaningful
And after that death. ⁹

This was one of the few poems of real poetic calibre to pass the Japanese censor, but it is to be doubted whether the Japanese censor and Chairil understood it in the same way. To the Japanese, doubtless, it suggested that total devotion to the cause and disregard for death that characterises the true warrior. His Indonesian colleagues probably understood it as the struggle for political freedom. But is it not equally likely that the whole setting of the poem is within Chairil's mind, and that Diponegoro is a symbol for Chairil's determination to burst into the freedom of anarchy, even if it costs him his life? This is clearly the case with 'Aku' (My Self),¹⁰ in which he describes himself as a wild beast, rejected by his peers. True, he wants to live a

thousand years, but in his own way, fighting to tear down the props of hypocrisy that shore up the rotten façade of daily life and exulting in his own lack of involvement in them.

A different mood, but also of revolt, is to be found in 'Kepada Kawan' (To a Fellow Spirit),¹¹ a poem of *carpe diem*: Death, in seizing us will destroy himself - therefore, let us take the glass of life, and empty it at one gulp. Choose the wildest stallion and spur it onward, tethering it to neither day nor night. Destroy all you have made, and vanish leaving neither relative nor estate, asking pardon of none, taking leave of none! Then, when Death comes, he will find his prey has fled.

Perhaps only two of his poems could be called happy. One is 'Ajakan' (An Invitation)¹² a poem purely lyrical; a recall to the time of childhood, to years full of happiness and the innocent friendship of girl and boy. When the worst misfortune was to be caught in a shower of rain - and what of it? In a moment they would be dry again. The other is 'Taman' (A Garden),¹³ almost a romantic 'escape' poem. His desire: a garden for an 'I' and a 'Thou'. Small, one could not lose the other in it; simple, without myriads of flowers or a plushy sward; tiny, but filled with sunlight - a place to withdraw from the world and mankind.

There are, however, two major personal themes that run through his poetry: one is a sense of *oppressive loneliness*, a despair of attaining any kind of communication between man and man; the other, a *religious sense* that amounts almost to an obsession.

Among the poems of the first group, several communicate the oppressive horror of a nightmare. One such is 'Kesabaran' (Patience), written in 1943.¹⁴ The poet lies awake at night, and hears, confusedly in the distance, human conversation and the howling of dogs - dogs, human beings, what does it matter, all are the same in the darkness that has descended upon him like a wall of stone: he is completely isolated:

Aku hendak berbicara
Suaraku hilang, tenagaku terbang
Sudah! Tidak jadi apa-apa:
Ini dunia enggan disapa, ambil perduli
Keras-membeku air kali
Dan hidup bukan hidup lagi.

Kuulangi yang dulu kembali
sambil bertutup telinga, berpicing mata

Did anyone speak?
My companion is a skeleton

His vigour enfeebled by blows
He asked: What time is it?

It is very late:
Meaning is lost in latency
And movement has no sense.

The poet is not describing an actual walk at night. The darkness is in his mind, and the ships, stiff, motionless, dimly visible through the pouring rain suggest a parallel to the sluggish flow of his congealing blood as he feels the numbness of isolation. His companion can only utter words as meaningless and banal as: What time is it? And the poet comments bitterly: Whatever time it is, it is too late; nothing has any value.

Even sexual relationships are unable to transcend this isolation. 'Sia-sia' (Futility),¹⁸ for example, illustrates Chairil's incapacity to yield to love, and his fury with himself for this incapacity. A girl brings flowers to her beloved, and lays them at his feet. But all day long the couple can only sit facing each other, each unable to make the first move. And Chairil exclaims in disgust:

Ah! Hatiku yang tak mau memberi
Mampus kau dikoyak-koyak sepi.

Ah! My heart, which will not yield,
Die, devastated by loneliness.

'Orang berdua' (A Couple)¹⁹ has the same tenor. The room in which they find themselves is their last refuge in a boundless night. Together they reach out for a black raft (presumably, sexual union) not knowing whether on it they will be cast up onto the shore or sucked down into the whirlpool; uncertain whether they are truly in each other's embrace - achieving a full communication - or whether still pursuing an illusion.

This theme is expressed more starkly in 'Puncak' (name of a mountain resort).²⁰ After a night of naked embrace with a mistress, high in the hills, far from the frenzied disturbance of the town, the poet discovers that the thick morning mist resting on the green pines, and the sound of the clear stream rippling among them, only proffer again the same unresolved question: what is love, what is communication?

His concern with religion should not be understood in a confession-
al sense. To me, it seems that he was profoundly religious in temp-
erament, and that he found it far more difficult to divest himself of
a religious faith than to find one. His attitude to formal religion
was naturally determined by his total rejection of every form of social
organisation as irremediably corrupt, and he has no use for it. In the
poem 'Aku' (My Self - not to be confused with the other poem I referred
to earlier)²¹ he declares: 'I keep at a distance teachers of religion
with their javelin words.' In 'Di Mesjid' (At the Mosque)²² he depicts
his attempt to wrestle with God, and defeat Him:

Kuseru saja Dia
Sehingga datang juga

Kamipun bermuka-muka

Seterusnya Ia bernyala-nyala dalam dada.
Segala daya memadamkannya

Bersimpah peluh diri yang tak bisa diperkuda.

Ini ruang
Gelanggang kami berperang

Binasa- membinasa
Satu menista lain gila.

* * * * *

I call upon Him
Until at length He comes

We are face to face

He bursts into flame within my breast
With all my strength I strive to extinguish Him

My self, rejecting [His] yoke,
Is drenched in sweat

This hall (i.e. the Mosque)
Is our place of struggle

Bent on mutual destruction
The one contemptuous, the other mad.

Three of his poems, however, are remarkable testaments to a
religious faith. In 'Doa' (A Prayer)²³ he exclaims:

Tuhanku
Dalam termangu
Aku masih menyebut namaMu

Biar susah sungguh
mengingat Kau penuh seluruh

cayaMu panas suci
tinggal kerdip lilin dikelam sunyi

Tuhanku

aku hilang bentuk
remuk

Tuhanku

aku mengembara dinegeri asing

Tuhanku
dipintuMu aku mengetuk
aku tidak bisa berpaling.

* * * * *

My Lord,
When overcast by thought
Still I utter your name

Even in bitter sorrow,
At the thought of you, all is filled

With your light, pure and burning
Now a flickering candle in silent darkness

My Lord

I face dissolution
and collapse.

My Lord

I wander in a strange land.

My Lord
At your door I knock,
I cannot turn away.

Equally striking is the poem 'Isa' (Jesus),²⁴ very similar in style to 'Doa' and virtually a meditation on the crucifixion. He looks upon the broken bleeding body of Christ, and is confronted by the question: Am I guilty?

kulihat Tubuh mengucur darah
aku berkaca dalam darah

I see the body, bleeding,
In the blood, I see myself.

However, each of the poems has a sub-title. 'Doa' is dedicated to a

firm Believer, and 'Isa' to a true Christian. It is as though - deeply felt as the poems are - Chairil did not wish the sentiments expressed in them to be attributed to himself - rather they were for someone else. A third religious poem is 'Kepada Peminta-minta' (To a Beggar).²⁵ This is based very closely on a Dutch poem by William Elschot of the same title. The poet is confronted with the hideous pock-marked face of a beggar, dripping with pus, which pursues him incessantly and haunts even his dreams. The inspiration of the poem is the Gospel story of Dives and Lazarus, and the beggar clearly is the accusing finger of conscience, ordering the poet to throw himself laden with sin, at God's feet.

Chairil Anwar had only six years of life as a poet. The themes and attitudes I have outlined are broadly representative of his work, but not exhaustive. And it should not be imagined that Chairil was necessarily consistent in any of his attitudes, or that the poems I have discussed bear only one interpretation.

Some of his later poems, while not departing from his earlier concerns, lack the nightmarish oppression of his earlier work, and are marked by a tranquil acceptance of his fate - the realisation that his ideals are never to be achieved. A poem in this vein is 'Cintaku jauh dipulau' (My Beloved is afar off, on an Island):²⁶

Cintaku jauh dipulau,
gadis manis, sekarang iseng sendiri.

Perahu melancar, bulan memancar,
dileher kukalungkan olè-olè buat sipacar,
angin membantu, laut terang, tapi terasa
aku tidak 'kan sampai padanya.

Diair yang terang, diangin mendayu,
diperasaan penghabisan segala melaju
Ajal bertakhta, sambil berkata:
'Tujukan perahu kepangkuanku saja.'

Amboi! Jalan sudah bertahun kutempuh!
Perahu yang bersama 'kan merapuh!
Mengapa Ajal memanggil dulu
Sebelum sempat berpeluk dengan cintaku?!

Manisku jauh dipulau,
kalau 'ku mati, dia mati iseng sendiri.

* * * * *

My beloved is afar off, on an island
A sweet girl
Whiling away her time alone.

My boat surges onward, the moon radiates light,
and round my neck hangs a garland for my darling;
the wind is with me, the sea bright and yet I feel
that I shall never reach her.

For in the clear water, in the sighing wind
in the sense of all things fleeting to their close
Death sits in majesty and declares:
Direct your barque to my embrace.

Alas, so many years have I travelled
in the boat doomed to dissolution with me!
Why is it that Death should call
Before my beloved reclines in my embrace.

My sweet one is afar off, on an island;
myself dead, she too will die
whiling away her time alone.

The 'beloved' symbolises his idea of perfection. All the elements are favourable to him as he sets out in a boat to join her. But as the boat speeds onward, he realises in his heart that he is doomed never to meet her - and accepts the fact.

The same stoicism is apparent in one of his last poems 'Cemara menderai sampai jauh' (Pines straggling into the distance):²⁷

Cemara menderai sampai jauh
Terasa hari jadi akan malam
Ada beberapa dahan ditingkap merapuh
Dipukul angin yang terpendam

Aku sekarang orangnya bisa tahan
Sudah lama bukan kanak lagi
Tapi dulu memang ada suatu bahan
Yang bukan dasar perhitungan kini

Hidup hanya menunda kekalahan
Tambah jauh dari cinta sekolah rendah
Dan tahu, ada yang tetap tidak diucapkan
Sebelum pada akhirnya kita menyerah.

* * * * *

Pines straggling into the distance
It seems night is at hand;
Branches about the window collapse
Broken by the muffled wind.

Now I can bear it
- I am no longer a child,
But in childhood there was something
I can take no account of now.

Life is but an attempt to defer death
As the loves of schooldays fall further behind us,

And we realise that something must remain unuttered
Until the moment we concede defeat.

The technique of this poem is masterly in its sureness of touch. The deliberately uneven rhythm and pace paralleling the ragged line of pines, and the uncertain irregular pattern of life itself, only serve to highlight the steady, marching pace of the key generalisation: *Hidup hanya menunda kekalahan* (life is but an attempt to defer death). It is a poem of resignation. Pines characterize the mountainous region of Puncak, to the South of Jakarta, and the opening lines then set the atmosphere: the approaching dark chill of a mountain night, and by association, the cold of death. The notion of impending dissolution is crystallized by the collapsing branches about the window. And just as it takes little to bring them down, so it will take little to dissolve the poet's life. The poem thus states two truths, calmly accepted: life can never be crowned with ultimate success, and death is imminent.

At first sight these final attitudes appear to contradict his avowed ideals. In a letter he exclaims: 'Colonel Jamasaki is embodiment of my ideals... in his total devotion to his emperor, to his people, his country... in his tremendous capacity for devotion which must include a fantastic vigour which he will pursue to death itself. Vitalism, Ida! Vigour, the fire of life. And I see your enquiring look whether this vitalism really could be transmuted into art. Why not, Ida? How can a quality of this sort be dissipated or blotted out.'²³ Here, so far from writing against the Japanese, he finds inspiration in the Japanese total devotion to the Emperor. Yet, on another occasion he could write: 'During the Japanese occupation we had to act, or at the very least think and feel keenly on how to fight the atmosphere of that time, so as to preserve our self-respect.'²⁹ And elsewhere he writes: 'We must encounter the compensations and complexes within our own selves... compensations and complexes, the huge and dark store house where our true self is concealed.'³⁰ Yet, the apparent contradictions need not concern us. He was highly mercurial, one day pro-Japanese, another pro-Dutch, another pro-Republican. And of his violently swinging enthusiasms, he said himself that vitalism is the primordial chaos where art originates, and beauty the cosmic order which results when a particular work of art has achieved its formal expression.³¹ In this, in his exploration of the primal non-ethical energies, fascinated

equally by their horror and delight, he typifies the characteristically modern writer.³² These enthusiasms are, to use his own term, the 'chaotisch voorstadium' of his work, and between them and the ordered cosmos of a finished poem lies this delving into the huge and dark store house of compensations and complexes; the relentless scrutiny and disregard of every taboo, the evaluation, selection, analysis, and rejection.

There remains the question of his alleged plagiarism. It is adduced that certain of his poems are translations without acknowledgement; and that others, if not clearly derived from individual poems of such authors as Marsman, Slauerhoff, and du Perron, have resemblance of themes with the works of these writers, and occasionally contain individual lines clearly originating from their work. H.B. Jassin has very usefully, in a recent publication, put together all those poems which appear derivative with their alleged Dutch originals.³³

The fundamental question at issue here, of course, is the nature of originality in a poet. The two most common illustrations to support the charge of plagiarism are 'Datang Dara, Hilang Dara' (A girl comes, a girl departs), a rendering of 'A Song of the Sea', and 'Krawang-Bekasi' (these are two place names) based on Archibald MacLeish's 'The Young Dead Soldiers'.³⁴ The relationship of these two poems to English language originals is undeniable. But equally undeniable is the subtle transformation Chairil Anwar wrought in his adaptation. 'Datang Dara, Hilang Dara' - is far more rich musically than 'A Song of the Sea'. And, more important, whereas 'A Song of the Sea' is simply a romantic word painting, an evocation of a seashore scene, in Chairil's version the girl wandering on the seashore is a symbol of his own self, daring and transcending the elements, and even identifying itself with their inner essence, their vitality. This is apparent in his modification of the phrasing at certain key points, so that, for example, the English 'I am like the tossing of the wild sea' is rendered: 'Aku, sendiri geteran yang jadikan gelombang' - I myself am the pulsation (pulsating energy?) that creates the waves.' Similarly, 'Krawang-Bekasi' draws on the same material as Archibald MacLeish's 'The Young Dead Soldiers' - but with a highly richened music and rhythm, and an enhanced phrasing. It is only unfortunate that the conclusion of the poem which has no counterpart in that of MacLeish, falls so far below the level of the earlier part. If the poems, allegedly plagiarisms, are strongly individual, this is even

more the case with those poems which only appear to echo a Dutch author at one point or another. There is no need to dispute the fact that he was highly eclectic in what happened to strike a chord in his imagination, or that occasional lines attributable to Dutch poets served as points of departure for his own work. But in almost every case, wherever he borrowed, he deepened and transformed.

W.A. Suchting has noted that 'Every significant artist has a fundamental axis about which his work revolves, a basic perspective from which, in which, he sees the world and himself.'³⁵ In my view, Chairil Anwar, so far from being a plagiarist did possess such an axis, a basic perspective, and that his poems are directly personal and unique. Moreover, he was brilliantly successful in introducing into Indonesia, one of the major traditions of 20th century poetry.

Formally, Chairil Anwar applied faithfully the formulae of the symbolists. In particular, he shows much influence from Dutch writers. But this is no more a detraction from his merits than T.S. Eliot's indebtedness to the French symbolists. And, thus, he cannot be described as an imitator, because in some ways - writing in Bahasa Indonesia he is clearly the superior artist, his workmanship being more perfect than that of his Dutch models. And even where he is not original, his work has a peculiar distinction which lies, as has been said of Eliot, in his phrasing.³⁶

References

1. So Virga Belan in *Suluh Indonesia*, 17/4/63.
2. H.B. Jassin, *Chairil Anwar, Pelopor Angkatan '45* (Gunung Agung, Jakarta, 1956), p. 110. Chairil Anwar's prose is terse and concentrated. The renderings given here are paraphrases.
3. Jassin, *Chairil Anwar*, p. 132.
4. E. Wilson, *Axel's Castle* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1947) p. 80.
5. Anwar, *Kerikil Tadjam dan Jang Terampas Dan Jang Putus* (Pustaka Rakjat, Jakarta, no date), 24.
6. Anwar, *Kerikil*, p. 5. Numerals between brackets refer to the original text *infra*.
7. Anwar, *Kerikil*, p. 6.

8. Jassin, *Chairil Anwar*, p. 41.
9. Anwar, *Kerikil*, p. 7.
10. Anwar, *Deru Tjampur Debu* (Pembangunan, Jakarta, 1957), p. 7.
11. Anwar, *Debu*, p. 18.
12. Anwar, *Kerikil*, p. 20.
13. Ibid., p. 15.
14. Ibid., p. 19.
15. The 'resolution' (reda) in the final line of this poem is popularly understood as referring to the end of the Japanese occupation. This, in my view, is doubtful. Such direct, special pleading is out of character for the poet.
16. Anwar, *Kerikil*, p. 11.
17. Ibid., p. 25.
18. Ibid., p. 9.
19. Anwar, *Debu*, p. 9.
20. Anwar, *Kerikil*, p. 50.
21. Ibid., p. 27.
22. Ibid., p. 26.
23. Anwar, *Debu*, p. 14.
24. Ibid., p. 13.
25. Anwar, *Kerikil*, p. 36.
26. Anwar, *Debu*, p. 35.
27. C. Anwar, R. Apin, A. Sani, *Tiga Menguak Takdir* (Balai Pustaka, Jakarta, 1958), p. 17.
28. Jassin, *Chairil Anwar*, p. 112.
29. Ibid., p. 114.
30. Ibid., p. 128.
31. Ibid., p. 113.
32. See L. Trilling, 'On the Modern Element in Modern Literature', *Partisan Review* (XXVIII, No. 1), p. 25.

33. See note 2.
34. Jassin, *Chairil Anwar*, pp. 66-7, 94-7.
35. In 'The Poetry of A.D. Hope: A Frame of Reference', *Meanjin Quarterly*, XXI, pt 2, 1962, p. 154.
36. Wilson, *Tower*, p. 98.

A POET BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: THE WORK OF SITOR SITUMORANG*

The study of modern Indonesian literature, although a young discipline, is already weighed down by the excess baggage of an orthodoxy of received opinion. In this system of orthodoxy, generalisations all too often are accepted as a substitute for critical thinking. Indonesian literary history is neatly parcelled into 'generations' such as that of the pre-war Pujangga Baru (New Poet) era, and the post-war Generation of '45. Writers are given labels. Amir Hamzah, for example, is described as a religious poet, bringing to life for the last time, the diction and style of traditional Malay; Chairil Anwar figures as a frenetic revolutionary poet who wrote by impulse. Such generalisations are dispensed *ad nauseam* and elaborated without examination. In consequence, they appear so time-honoured and respectable that they impede fresh thought and deter re-analysis.

Modern Indonesian poetry then remains very much an unknown world, as much - if the truth be told - in Indonesia as elsewhere. Fundamental questions to which a whole range of possible answers need consideration and comparison are not even asked. Despite the verbiage proffered by critics faithfully following each others' footsteps, we still lack a definitive study of the work of any Indonesian writer: an account of his cultural formation, the sources of his inspiration, his indebtedness to his predecessors, his relations with his contemporaries whether as a poet, personality or thinker; his influence upon them, theirs upon him. We are equally in the dark concerning the aesthetics of modern Indonesian writing; we know next to nothing of the dynamics of Indonesian prosody, or what it is in the genius of the language which determines variety of pace and rhythm, influences mood, or suggests force, vitality, gentleness or despair. We still need to ask by what criteria the language of poetry may be distinguished from that of prose, from whence it derives dimension, and its potential for overtones.

It is this lack of discrimination and analysis which has led to

* First published in *Westerly*, November, 1966, pp. 28-39.

the stereotyped picture both of the history of Indonesian poetry, and of the personalities and styles of Indonesian poets. In fact, the literary attitudes manifested in the pre-war Pujangga Baru, are not an undifferentiated web; the Generation of '45 would in the great majority of cases be better described as the generation of '42; Amir Hamzah, apart from his very early work, was not a traditionalist; far from being a religious poet in the conventional sense of the word, doubt is as important an element in his work as faith; and - this apart - the tremendous development in maturity and depth in his work during four brief years of poetic activity renders it nothing short of astonishing that his work has been subsumed under a single label. Similarly to describe Chairil Anwar as a revolutionary poet is to misunderstand both the man and his poetry. He discovered, or stumbled upon a concept of poetry foreign to Indonesia, which appealed to him; he applied it rigorously with a cool intellectual passion for precision in the use of language. The results were extraordinary, and created new horizons for the Indonesian language; but this was a by-product; the content of the poems is Chairil's scrutiny of himself, not the defeat of the Dutch, the Japanese occupation or the subsequent Indonesian revolution. For all his importance he was but one poet out of many; and although he has had imitators, yet the best of his contemporaries such as Asrul Sani and Sitor Situmorang never lost their own identity and style through succumbing to his influence; in fact they followed paths quite different from his in their presentation of the predicaments of post-Independence Indonesian man - different paths in the pursuit of different solutions appropriate to their differing personalities and temperaments.

Sitor Situmorang particularly deserves close study for he is a highly gifted intellectual, a poet and dramatist, who has written widely on Indonesian literature, culture and the theatre in addition to his poetry; he is also the author of some of the best Indonesian short stories yet written. And his recent shift of orientation from the attitude to poetry and art described as Universal Humanism, guiding star of the so-called 'Generation of '45', to a view of art which imposes upon the artist a direct responsibility for the furtherings of specific social and political policies, renders his work all the more interesting.

He is a Batak, and was born on the island of Samosir in 1923. Details of his early education are not clear, but like Chairil Anwar,

he seems to have begun his literary activity shortly after the Japanese occupation, when he began work as a freelance journalist and literary critic. He first came into prominence in 1949 as an essayist, writing on the meaningfulness and validity of the term 'Generation of '45'. Our principal concern here, however, is with his work as a poet. He has published four collections of verse: *Surat Kertas Hijau* (Notes on Green Paper) 1953, *Dalam Sajak* (In Verse), date unknown, *Wajah tak Bernama* (A Nameless Face) 1955, and *Zaman Baru* (New Era) 1962.¹ Unfortunately - leaving *Zaman Baru* out of consideration - it is difficult to determine the order in which the poems in these collections were written, for they were printed at various times and places in a variety of periodicals before Sitor selected them for publication in these volumes. There is thus no guarantee that all the poems appearing in *Surat Kertas Hijau* were written before those in *Dalam Sajak* or *Wajah tak Bernama*, or that those in the later volumes were written after those in the earlier. Further, these volumes are not exhaustive of his oeuvre, and files of various literary periodicals now defunct or suspended may still yield quite a harvest of important work. With these reservations however it is possible to outline certain phases and themes in his collection of poetry; phases and themes which - aside from any question of relative poetic merit - establish Sitor as an important writer for the understanding of modern Indonesia. Chairil Anwar is a spokesman for no-one but himself, the same holds for Amir Hamzah; Sitor on the other hand is a striking representative of Indonesia between two worlds: his sense of belonging to a region, his own Batakland, has gone; that of participation in Indonesia as a geo-cultural identity is not yet mature. For Sitor was brought up in a closely knit Batak Christian community, in which traditional custom served as a complete guide to life; where everyone knew everyone else, shared the same social interests, habits and values. And he has had to essay the bridge sharper than a razor, finer than a hair which leads out of this village microcosmos into the mental and moral world of the twentieth century intellectual. In essaying this bridge, represented in part by his visits between 1950-52, to Holland, Paris and Italy, the system of faith and morals in which he was brought up has become meaningless and his Batak homeland spiritually remote; and Paris has so captivated him that he is adrift between two cultures, knowing that one does not belong to him, and uncertain of the meaning of the other. Here is material out of which

poetry may be made - different from that used by Chairil Anwar, but profoundly rich and important.

His poems of gradually increasing doubt and loss of faith are particularly moving, and in expression regretful and pining. They are strikingly reminiscent of the mood of Thomas Hardy's 'The Oxen': when Hardy recalls the legend he had heard as a boy, that at midnight on Christmas Eve the oxen kneel, and concludes:

If someone said on Christmas Eve
'Come; see the oxen kneel,
In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know'
I should go with him in the gloom
Hoping it might be so.

There is a similar melancholy music in Sitor's 'Kolam Berenang' (The Swimming Pool), a beautifully constructed sonnet: and the anguish is heightened by a suggestion of ambiguity although the tone of the poem excludes the ambiguity. In the octet, the scene is set as he lies beside the swimming pool with a boy, imagining that amid the reflections in the water are the countenances of those who have passed on.

The sextet presents the kernel of his thought:

Lalu si-anak bertanya sendiri
Apa kelangit orang pergi
Kalau sudah mati nanti

Dan karena tahu pasti
Aku mengangguk sepi
Si-anak lantas mengerti

Then the child himself asks
Whether people pass to the sky
Later, when they die

And because of certain knowledge
I nod bleakly
The child at once understands.²

Equally moving and similar in tone is 'Ziarah Dalam Gereja Gunung' (A Visit to A Mountain Church):

Dimana aku berada kau ada
Bayangan satu-satunya, demikian kurasa,
Benarkah kau ada disunyi begini
Dikedinginan ruang gereja - sendiri?

Dari luar sampai keruangan ini
Siut burung yang memuja pagi.

Jika aku ada disini, hanyalah aku sendiri
Serta dingin udara tak dipanasi mata hari.

Amen.

Wherever I am, there you are
My one and only shadow, so I thought.
Yet are You really here in this silence
Alone in the cold nave of this church?

From without there penetrates the nave
The song of birds at morning worship.
When I am here I am alone
With the chill air unwarmed by the sun.

Amen.³

Only God is my constant companion, as inseparable as my shadow always watching over me - or so I thought; this is the sense of the first two lines. And Sitor makes a pilgrimage to this mountain church hoping to restore his faith. He discovers there only emptiness: outside is the song of birds at morning worship, worship of life; but within, where the warmth of the sun cannot penetrate, his only companion is the cold. So to the death of faith, he adds: Amen.

However, of the poems of doubt, loss of faith and anguish of guilt at abandoning traditional morality, by far the greatest is 'Cathedral de Chartres'.⁴ It is not a long poem, consisting of eight four line stanzas and a concluding octet. Yet despite its small compass, somehow theme and imagery fuse together and great chords begin to sound and resound. Sitor has defiled Holy Week with adultery, has cut himself off from the grace of the redeeming risen Christ, and the joy of Easter. There is the same anguish of regret as in the preceding two poems, but the total effect is heightened. This is partly due to the setting, and the symbolic nature of the title - the great Cathedral of Chartres standing for the Kingdom of God, the community of Christian fellowship in which he has been brought up and from which he is now excluded. It creates its impact by the skilful placing of contrasts, between sin, loss, despair, on the one hand, as against the purity of snow, the hope and freshness of spring, the mystery of redemption, on the other; and the diction of the poem is superbly orchestrated, creating a majesty of utterance hardly equalled elsewhere in Indonesian poetry.

The first two stanzas express compactly all Sitor's aching longing:

Akan bicarakah Ia dimalam sepi

Kala salju jatuh dan burung putih-putih
Sekali-sekali ingin menyerah hati
Dalam lindungan sembahyang bersih

Ah, Tuhan, tak bisa kita lagi bertemu
Dalam doa bersama kumpulan umat

Will He speak to me in the silent night
When the snow is falling and the birds all flaked with white?
Sometimes, still, I long to yield
To find comfort in the purity of prayer

Alas, Lord, never again can we meet
In prayer together with your holy people.⁵

This is one of the few poems in Bahasa Indonesia to communicate and evoke a sense of place, with all the associations and values of a European and Christian culture: it establishes Sitor as an outstanding poet with a potential for greatness.

Loss of faith is followed by a loss of that sense of guilt that is so striking an element in 'Cathedral de Chartres'; and in the next group of poems to be discussed, Sitor uses sex to fill the emotional vacuum left by his loss of orientation. 'La Ronde II'⁶ for example is a heavily sensuous appreciation of the female anatomy, filled with tenderness, but marred by lack of balance and compensation. For sex is virtually his new object of worship, to which he appeals for release from the gnawing emptiness of daily life. In 'La Ronde III' he addresses his mistress:

Kau dewiku, penghibur malam hampa
Segala perbuatan siang yang sia-sia
Kebosanan abadi jadilah lupa
Dan badan hancur nikmat terasa

You are my goddess comforter of the empty night
And all the useless deeds of day.
Everlasting boredom becomes oblivion
As the body melts in an ecstasy of delight.⁷

This radical sentimentality, this unrestrained expression either of sheer hedonism, or of a mind that has lost its moorings, is unable to cope any longer with the pressures of circumstance. The latter is probably a fairer judgement of Sitor's character. This public self-abandonment results from a strain of weakness in his personality, but even so he rarely abandons completely that moral sense which informs virtually all Indonesian writing. Indeed, even in this group of poems

a sense of guilt, of moral inadequacy remains; and 'La Ronde I'⁸ concludes with a couplet strikingly in contrast with the sultry passion of the body of the poem:

Meninggi musim hingga ke subuh
Jendela dibuka melihat salju jatuh

As the season marches on to the dawn
The opened window surveys falling snow

- the whiteness of the snow and the clean cold bite of the winter air
- as in 'Cathedral de Chartres' symbolizing the world of innocence and grace.

Almost as poignant as the poems of loss of faith, and highlighting Sitor's attempt to find escape and solace in the embrace of a woman, are those of loss of home. The most moving expression of this theme is in 'Si anak hilang' (The Lost Son).⁹ It is ballad-like in style, and superficially (it is written in quatrains) traditional in appearance. Yet in spirit and economy of diction it is completely modern. The ship bearing the lost child homeward appears across lake Samosir as a speck on the horizon. The village is astir with excitement, the mother rushes to the landing stage to greet him, yet:

Si-anak hilang kini kembali
Tak seorang dikenalnya lagi
Berapa kali panen sudah
Apa saja telah terjadi

Seluruh desa bertanya tanya
Sudah beranak sudah berapa
Si-anak hilang berdiam sadja
Ia lebih hendak bertanya

The lost son has now returned
But recognizes no-one
How many harvests have passed
What has been happening

All the villagers ask and ask
Have you children, and how many.
The lost son remains silent
He would prefer to be the questioner

For to all the conventional, routine questions, stock in trade of village relationships, he can no longer give an answer.

Instead:

... mengenang lupa
Dingin Eropa, musim kotanya

... recalling what is forgotten
The cold in Europe, the season of its cities.

And when all are asleep:

Dipantai pasir berdesir gelombang
Tahu si-anak tiada pulang.

The waves rippling on the sandy shore
Know that the lost son has not returned

This theme of loss of home strikes a chord among more than one Indonesian writer. And one of the more outstanding recent novels by Nasjah Djamin is called *Hilanglah si Anak Hilang - Lost is the Lost Son*.¹⁰

Yet the loss of a home does not cure him of homesickness any more than the loss of faith unburdens him of problems of conscience. And 'M.S. Bali' is a poem of homesickness, presenting a picture of the life of the sailor on a cargo boat: the stale stench of warehouses, the monotony of the sea, the merciless heat of the sun; the malarial mosquitoes infesting the coastal waters, the restless boredom of the evenings, and the longing for the time when:

Senja pudar akan beralih keemasan
Di pagi bening, dilaut penghabisan

The dim twilight will change to the gold
Of a clear morning on the final sea.

And yet before it comes:

Sebelumnya, mari, menebas hutan, lumpur,
Berlagu rindu tanah Leluhur...
A singsing so,* a singsing so, a singsing so...

Until then, let us clear the forest, mud,
Singing our longing for the land of our ancestors...¹¹
A singsing so, a singsing so, a singsing so...

A strain of sadness runs through much of Sitor's verse, often expressed in terms of intimations of mortality. One of the finest of these poems is 'Lapangan Pagi' (A Field at Morning). It is beautifully restrained, developed so gradually, that the art is not manifest until the final couplet.

It opens:

Didepan penginapan banyak cemara
Ada bunga dan ada lapangan sunyi

Di belakang jalan turun ke kali
Di belakang sekali jalan besar kekota.

My lodging looks out on many pine-trees,
There are flowers and a deserted field;
Behind it a road leads down to the stream
Away behind, the main road to the city. 12

The statement is matter of fact, the rhythm irregular. Only gradually does it become clear that the perception of scenery and objects is that of a waking consciousness which perceives the pine trees, the flowers, the playing-fields, and notes automatically the road leading to the river, the road leading to the city and the morning clouds about the hills. Yet the rhythm of ideas in the poem is strong: the empty scene to be filled with the noise and uproar of children playing, and the return to emptiness paralleled by the poet's emergence from unconsciousness to a limited period of sensation framed by the uniformly green hills as far as the eye can see, and the loss of this perception in sleep.

The clock strikes one, emphasizing the silence of the now brightly lit room. The children have vanished; the day is more than half past; life has run more than half its course. And it is this which gives such force to the final couplet:

Aku menggigil. Disudut tak kuduga
Ada dingin malam tersisa.

I shiver. I had not realised that in the corner
there remained vestiges of the chill of night.

Night, symbolizing mortality, had never been absent and is now advancing to reclaim him.

Another poem of the same type is 'Pagi' (Morning), the morning after the party, of which the sole relics are puddles of spilt wine, like blood, with the red of the morning putrescent within them.

Menggapai sinar pagi di ruang dadaku,
Aku yang memandang hari di ufuk naik,
menembus hati setajam peluru,
kesedaran 'kan mati ditulang berisik.

The rays of morning stir within my breast
As I gaze at the spreading horizon of a new day,
And there penetrates my heart with the sharpness
of a bullet 13
The awareness I must die whispering in my bones.

This is not the only poem where Sitor meditates on the mystery of time and the certainty of death. These questions too he tried to evade by taking refuge in a woman's arms.

Tiada kekal tiada fana kali ini
Hanya kekinian saat beradu
Bernama perempuan

This time there is no past or present
Only the immediacy of one moment fused to the next
Called Woman. 14

for when he thinks about it, time terrifies him, and in the poem 'Jam' (The Clock) the counting of the clock re-echoes, rebounding against the foundation of his consciousness, and creates within him the sensation of a rising tide of emptiness.¹⁵ In 'Anak dan Waktu' (A Child and Time) he envies the child who for a moment is puzzled by the clock and its ceaseless counting of the hours.

Tapi si-Anaktak hendak bertanya
Sibuk kembali bermain-main
Lupa sudah ia kepingin,
Tahu hal jam serta tafsirnya.

But the child has no desire to ask
And busies himself again with play
Forgetting that he had wanted
To understand time and its meaning.¹⁶

It is quite a shock to pass from this poetry to that represented by *Zaman Baru* (New Era) published in 1962. It represents his transfer of loyalty referred to earlier from Universal Humanism to *l'art engagé*. Gone is the romanticism and introspection characteristic of his former poems, and in their place we find the stridency of 'Tanah Tumpah Darah' (Fatherland):

- Membangun dalam damai: -
Dengarlah seruan berabad-abad
seperti panggilan burung yang
membangun sarangnya
- Merdeka, bebas dan sejahtera!
Impian dari Rakyat.

- Reconstruct in peace!
Hark to the call of the centuries
like the call of the bird
building its nest
- Freedom, Liberty and Security
Aspirations of the people. 17

Another of his more recent works written according to the same criteria, which won a certain notoriety, is the poem written on the death of Lumumba.

Algojo putih telah beraksi
menghabiskan nyawa pejuang
Di Konggo sana
Komplotan lama diulang!
Mati pahlawan hitam
Untuk Afrika Merdeka
Asia Merdeka, Dunia Merdeka
Dibunuh dalam perangkap.

The White executioner has shown his mettle
Destroying the life of a warrior;
There in the Congo
the same old conspiracy succeeds again.
The Black Warrior has died for
a free Africa
A free Asia, a free world,
Murdered in captivity.

18

Such is the selection of themes occurring in Sitor's poetry. It cannot claim to represent the whole man, and I cannot claim to understand fully everything he has written. Yet it does give some picture of his poetic standing and personality. He is popularly described as the successor of Chairil Anwar. Apart from the fact that he was a year younger than Chairil, and produced most of his poetry after Chairil's death, I do not think that it is correct to give him this kind of placing in the narrative of Indonesian poetry. He was a very different quality of person from Chairil, his poetry could never be confused with that of Chairil, and the well-springs of his writing are quite different. Chairil for example never sought solace in sex. It was an experience - nothing more; he did not linger over it, he indulged in no sentimentality. In 'Puncak', the most erotic of his poems, he can dismiss the encounter as having got him nowhere.¹⁹ Never does he display the weakness of Sitor; and we could never imagine him making a pilgrimage to a mountain church in an attempt to regain a lost or ebbing faith. Faith in himself was Chairil's all, no matter what the cost.

Formally, there is a corresponding contrast between the style of the two writers, although this too is attributable to a difference of mood. There is a virility and tautness in Chairil's lines, a polished brilliance and fastidiousness which distinguishes them from those of

Sitor - qualities Chairil shared with Amir Hamzah. Even more important Sitor is far more steeped in the traditional verse forms, diction and moods of his regional homeland than Chairil was, and this has resulted in a natural preference for the more traditional forms, which Chairil used hardly ever, if at all. Yet let there be no mistake, Sitor is not writing in the style of Yamin or even Sanusi Pané. He is writing modern verse, but using principally traditional forms - as an Australian poet of the calibre of Alec Hope still does. In fact, Sitor, looking back, has bypassed Chairil in his search for form where he felt it was needed; and having rediscovered the traditional forms of Malay verse, has transmuted them into an effective medium for modern poetry. This role is usually attributed to Amir Hamzah; yet this popular view is not completely defensible; for if we exclude Amir's very early poems, it is clear that some of his most effective poetry is written either in free verse, or in forms of his own devising.

Sitor is an important Indonesian poet, and perhaps a great one. But so far his range has been limited; the melancholy music of his verse tends to pall; he lacks intellectual vitality, capacity for self-detachment, or any kind of irony at his own expense. In all this he shows himself inferior to Chairil who as a poet is far more detached, far more concerned with intellectual and verbal precision than Sitor. Yet we remain faced with a problem: why is Sitor's latest work artistically unsuccessful? The tragedy of Lumumba and the Congo for example lies on the conscience of all mankind. It merits great poetry, yet Sitor's stridencies are not worthy of it.

Pramudya Ananta Tur has drawn a distinction between writing in which political factors are determinant on a superficial level, and that profound sense of commitment that embraces the whole of life and imbues every sentence without the need to be vociferous - a type of commitment that is like the act of breathing to a living man, who feels no necessity to proclaim the fact that he breathes. And this is precisely the problem. Sitor's latest poetry is superficial, it is vociferous, it does set out to proclaim that he breathes.²⁰

What then has gone wrong? Is Sitor the sychophant many would have us believe, ready to cash in on the tide of popular sentiment, or is there another explanation for the extraordinary failure of this talent?

Earlier I referred to Sitor's lack of stamina, of his inability

to bear his responsibilities as poet and spokesman of his generation. The trauma of his visit to Europe, his loss of religious faith, his loss of the sense of belonging to his Batak community, a loss which has only intensified his longing to belong, has subjected his personality to strains beyond its capacity. Perhaps the answer is as Teeuw puts it, that he is no longer a Batak, but his Indonesian consciousness is not yet sufficient to fill the vacuum, and this is the cause of his loss of nerve.

This question of the idea of Indonesia as a concept and focus of cultural loyalty is central to Indonesia as a nation. Sitor, in my view, has hurled himself desperately towards this new psychological mooring like a man caught in a tropical downpour seeking shelter in an uncompleted house which lacks, among other facilities, a roof. For a common Indonesian set of values is still nascent; a framework is established, but the building still has far to go.

Perhaps this is the reason why the most striking Indonesian poets to date have found their strength as human beings in the context of what used to be called Universal Humanism. This collapse of Sitor only serves to highlight a quality common to such differing individuals as Amir Hamzah and Chairil Anwar: a profound courage and personal consistency. When Amir Hamzah gave up his commoner Javanese sweetheart and returned to Sumatra to marry a princess, he stopped writing; he did not write verse to his royal bride; Chairil never wavered in his devotion to poetry as his guiding star. He drained life to the dregs, and accepted the bitterness without complaint. Even death he faced with an unflinching stoic courage.

Amir and Chairil were both outsiders vis à vis their regional cultures but were strong enough not to require the mediation of a national consciousness before they could speak in the anguished accents of modern man without sacrificing the integrity of their poetic vision.

Sitor lacks this strength, and is therefore the lesser man and the lesser poet. But his personal tragedy should be understood in its proper light as that of a man caught between two worlds, victim of the tremendous psychological and social pressures that are part of life in Indonesia today.

References

- * 'A singsing so' is the chorus of a well known Batak song.
1. *Surat Kertas Hidjau* (Pustaka Rakjat, Jakarta) 1953, abbreviated here as SKII, *Wadjah tak bernama* (Pembangunan, Jakarta), 1955, abbreviated here as WTB. *Dalam Sadjak* (Van Hoeve, Bandung) no date, abbreviated here as DS. *Zaman Baru* (Zaman Baru, Jakarta) 1962, abbreviated here as ZB.
 2. WTB, 17.
 3. WTB, 19.
 4. SKH, 16, 17.
 5. This rendering is somewhat free; the music and succinctness of the original are difficult to recapture.
 6. WTB, 4.
 7. WTB, 5.
 8. WTB, 3.
 9. DS, 3, 4.
 10. Nasjah Djamin, *Hilanglah si anak hilang*, Nusantara, Jakarta, 1963.
 11. WTB, 13.
 12. WTB, 18.
 13. WTB, 14.
 14. SKH, 5.
 15. WTB, 22.
 16. WTB, 23.
 17. ZB, 9.
 18. Made available from Mr Achdiat's private collection. Documentation not currently available.
 19. Chairil Anwar, *Kerikil Tadjam dan Jang Terampas dan Jang Putus*, Pustaka Rakjat, Jakarta, 1949, p. 50.
 20. See A.H. Johns, 'Pramudya Ananta Tur, The Writer as Outsider: an Indonesian Example', *Meanjin*, 1963, Vol. 4, p. 361.

PRAMUDYA ANANTA TUR
THE WRITER AS OUTSIDER: AN INDONESIAN EXAMPLE*

Any approach to a recently established modern literature, such as that of Indonesia, which only since 1942 has achieved a general maturity of expression, at once involves an important question of principle: what criteria are valid for a disciplined study of works representative of this new literature, criteria which are both appropriate to the work in question and meet the writer on his own terms?

There is no single answer to this question. And since a tradition of literary criticism has still to be developed in Indonesia, it would be imprudent to assert dogmatically the exclusive value of any particular approach. Two American critics however provide points of departure which contribute to an interpretation of the work of Pramudya Ananta Tur (b. Central Java 1925). Edmund Wilson once remarked that 'literary criticism ought to be a history of man's ideas and imaginings in the setting of the conditions which have shaped them'.¹ And Lionel Trilling in an essay on the modern element in Modern Literature argues with considerable force that the distinguishing characteristic of the modern writer is that he is an outsider in relation to conventional social norms, and is likely to reject much of contemporary society because it depends largely on rationalized cruelty for its continued existence.² It is in this essay, too, he explains that he sees 'literary situations as cultural situations, and cultural situations as great elaborate fights about moral issues, and moral issues as having something to do with gratuitously chosen images of personal being, and images of personal being as having something to do with literary style'.

Pramudya Ananta Tur is one of the most important, and certainly the most prolific, of the writers of modern Indonesian prose. For the most part, his stories and novels are based on reminiscences of his childhood, or on his experiences during the Japanese occupation and the struggle for independence. His range therefore is limited. Further he lacks a capacity to create and differentiate character: his people are little more than personifications of attitudes; nowhere does anyone

* First published in *Meanjin*, 1963, pt 2, pp. 354-63.

make a significant choice; nowhere are we introduced to the complexities of self-doubt, inner struggle and development. Real humour, arising from character, situation or dialogue, never occurs in his work. On the other hand his technique as a story-teller is superb; his style is characterised by a striking immediacy, and he has a unique power to create an atmosphere of intense emotional stress when he confronts his characters with the (to him) profoundest problems of the human condition.

Pramudya is through and through Javanese in his cultural attitudes. At the same time he finds much in his traditional culture repellent. And it is this ambivalence - his isolation from and commitment to his Javanese traditions - that is the source of much of the emotional intensity of his work, an intensity that at times degenerates into hysteria. Thus the double concept of the writer's ideas in relation to his environment, and his personal isolation from his society, is of particular value for an understanding of his work.

Pramudya has attempted various solutions for his mental torment and sense of isolation which are documented both in his creative and his critical work. These solutions range from a Buddhist type of resignation to fate, and with it the dissolution of the self, to a passionate nationalism, and more recently he has found a haven in the Communist party. His career, then, is in part an illustration of the political appeal of Communism to the intellectual and artist in the Afro-Asian countries.

Resignation and acceptance mark the conclusion of one of his earlier works *Dia Yang menyerah* (She Who Yielded, 1950).³ The story concerns a girl Sri, and her life through the years 1942-50. Her world is shaken to its foundations with the Japanese invasion. As a result of consequent deprivation and poverty, her mother dies. The relatives then descend on the house like locusts, and take the lion's share of her mother's possessions. The three daughters cannot protest, for the rights of age are absolute. Meanwhile the war takes its course, and two of her brothers are reported killed in Burma. With the defeat of the Japanese and the proclamation of Indonesian independence, everyone hopes for peace and prosperity, but it is not to be: the village is overrun by a Communist brigade that rules by terror. Her older sister joins the party, but her father, loyal to the Republican government, is arrested and killed along with many others. Eventually the Communists are expelled by the Republican forces, who mercilessly shoot the

remnants of the Communist army, inevitably leaving destruction in their wake.

Before the village can recover from this series of disasters, it is invaded and occupied by the Dutch forces, so that the villagers are exposed both to the attacks of the Indonesian underground and to the Dutch reprisals. Quite unexpectedly, one of the brothers reported lost in Burma appears in Dutch uniform. Instead of joy, however, the reunion brings further sorrow and destruction. The underground, suspecting that the Sri household is co-operating with the Dutch, shoot her brother dead and burn down their house.

And Sri's philosophy becomes: 'Let it all happen, disregard everything. We must be able to conjure away our own selves, regard them as no longer existing. Then all these events can speed on their course.'⁴

Sri has suffered too much. When sovereignty is transferred from Holland to Indonesia, is it surprising that she does not attend the mass meeting in celebration of independence?

One of Pramudya's most deeply personal books, in which nationalism appears imbued with semi-mystical overtones, is *Bukan Pasar Malam* (No Night Carnival, 1951).⁵ It is a story, told in the first person, which is essentially an exploration of the thoughts and feelings crowding into the mind of the narrator, Gus, during the days leading to his father's death from tuberculosis.

The book opens when Gus, in Jakarta, hears the first news of his father's grave illness. Then follows the journey home to the village in central Java and the family reunion. Gradually the emotional tone of the book increases in intensity as the author presents the profoundest questions of life and death. But it tells us much else besides of his attitude to his society, and its problems.

The new Republic has failed both Gus and his father who devoted his life to its realization. After the father's death a visitor remarks to him: 'Your father's illness was caused by disappointment; disappointment at the results of independence which has been accompanied by social collapse and all its consequences. And those who were generals during the guerilla struggle joined in the scramble for positions and authority; and whoever was left empty-handed lost interest in the Republic.'⁷

His father, although desperately ill, has no hope of treatment in a sanatorium. Why? '... the fees at a sanatorium are extremely high

... thus the sanatoria are filled with merchants. If you work for the government, and you do not belong to the higher échelon, don't dare hope for a bed in a sanatorium.'

The father had been a teacher. He chose to be a teacher because it is the teacher who bears the major part of the responsibility for building a new society. Yet the teacher, as a lower ranking government servant, lacks any status in a social system that perpetuates class distinction. This theme of the importance of the teacher is given special emphasis in the dying words of his father:

I am the son of a religious teacher [*ulama*], but I did not wish to devote my life to the mosque... I wanted to be a nationalist... because of that I became a teacher ... to open the hearts of children so that they could enter the garden of patriotism... that is why I chose to become a teacher... to fertilize the development of my people....

The world in which Pramudya has placed his narrator is a broken world. It is represented by the village home in a state of disrepair and collapse. This home stands for more than just the father's house: it symbolizes his whole society. And the old goat slaughterer who knew Gus when he could only crawl, and who had built the house, serves as a chorus linking the past to the present, illuminating both with his wisdom and advising Gus for the future: 'You are the oldest son, and I hope - even though I do not belong to your family - that you will look after your house.' And Gus replies: 'Yes, I will repair the house.' The significance of this symbol is, I believe, that it is used by the author to indicate both his involvement in and sense of isolation from his society. The house fell into decay during the narrator's absence, he had left it for many years. Yet it is still his house. Thus the broken world that faces him he regards as a personal problem and a personal responsibility. Thus Pramudya, as a writer, is attempting in his own way to repair it.

On a deeper level, Pramudya expresses in the story his bewilderment and grief at why the world is as it is, why war, death and sorrow are inevitable. Gus says to his younger brother:

'All this has come upon us without our asking it. And we have to accept it. We can only accept it. Man is powerless in the face of something he does not understand.'

'Why does there have to be war, Mas?'

'Because we don't know, my brother, because we don't understand.'

'O ... war, war has robbed us of our mother, of our youngest brother, of our grandfather, of our grandmother, and destroyed our father's health. Why is it, how does it happen?'

'Yes, because we do not know, that is why.'

But the heart of the book is the scene in which Pramudya expresses his anguish at the universal loneliness of man. The friends and acquaintances of Gus' father have gathered together after his death, and in the course of the general conversation that runs around the room a Chinese says:

'Yes, why do we have to die alone? Just as we are born alone. And why must we live in a world with a multitude of our fellow creatures? And when we are able to love someone, and that person loves us' - he shifted forward on to his knees, and looked through the window to the central room where the body was lying alone - 'just as our late friend, for example - why are we then separated in death - one by one, alone; and then someone else is born, then another, then another. Why cannot we be born all together and die all together? I want the world to be like a Night Carnival.'

This is in fact the significance of the title, the comment on life and the world we live in that the book has to offer us: life is not a Night Carnival where people throng together to enjoy themselves and then depart. Everyone is faced by the inevitability of loneliness and death.

It is not only in this book that Pramudya exposes social and moral collapse, and the essential inhumanity of the traditional sense of propriety. Consider the short story, *Inem*,⁷ also told in the first person. Inem, a little girl of eight, shares the narrator's village home. Quite suddenly her mother decides to have her married. Married she is, and after enduring a year of cruelty, is divorced. Her parents, to whom she is now only a burden, ill-treat her, so at the age of nine she wishes to return to the comfort of the narrator's house. But his mother, though a kindly woman, refuses to have the young divorcée - 'because of propriety'.

Religion, for Pramudya, is as bankrupt as any other social manifestation about him. This is the only conclusion to be drawn from his story *Sunat* (Circumcision), in which appears the contrast between a

boy's simple enthusiasm to be circumcised, to be a true Muslim and a true Javanese, and the materialistic coarseness of his religious teacher.

'When I am circumcised', says the boy hero, 'I will be a true Muslim and have the right to enter heaven.'
Our teacher laughed heartily and added: 'You will receive forty celestial maidens.'

'But I wouldn't like one with six or eight teats, like a bitch,' I said

The teacher laughed again..., displaying his rotten unbrushed teeth.

And after his circumcision the boy is disappointed because he still does not feel a real Muslim, even though he regularly performs all his religious duties. So his mother consoles him:

'Perhaps when you have performed the pilgrimage and been to Mekka, then you will feel a true Muslim.'

'Go on board ship?' asked my younger brother.

'Yes, go to Arabia', said Mother.

'In that case do we have to be rich first?' I asked.

'Yes', replied Mother.

Immediately all my hope of becoming a true Muslim vanished. I knew only too well the poverty of my parents. We could not possibly perform the pilgrimage.

Religion too - this is Pramudya's point - is something to be bought and sold. And the story concludes: '... we were children whose all had been seized by poverty'.

In another story, *Kemudian lahirlah dia*⁸ (And then he was born), Pramudya outlines a brief stirring of hope for the renewal of his society. He uses reminiscences of his childhood to describe the enthusiasm for the Swadeshi movement which swept through his narrator's village in the early '30s, pioneered by the boy's father. With the efforts to achieve communal prosperity through the revival of cottage industries, and expressed in the organization of co-operatives, people's banks, classes to eliminate illiteracy, courses in economics, politics, general knowledge, the creation of a new world seemed possible. But the whole enterprise was stifled by the Dutch government. The father received a warning letter from the Resident; the stencilled lessons

were confiscated, the electric supply for the school building was cut off and the movement collapsed. Initiative was replaced by stagnation, and in bitterness and frustration the father degenerated into a gambler.

It is not surprising, then, that Pramudya's innermost feelings are torn by frustration and bitterness at the contemplation of the bland inhumanity of all established authority, whether it is represented by the Dutch colonial government, traditional village respectability, or the Indonesian Republic. He essays various rationalizations of his feelings, among them the dichotomy between East and West. As he puts it in one short story:

If it is true that the writer is the mirror of his society, then this turbulence in my spirit is a reflection of the turbulence in my society: the first stage of the blending between East and West, where the level of the West makes demands which the inheritance of the East still rejects; the East forced continually to make concessions as the West consistently demands a place within the self, within the soul, which properly knows nothing of the West. So all I know is that my self is a place laid bare as a field of battle, continuously rent by explosion after explosion.

9

This tortured, embittered anguish in some stories results in an accumulation of horror upon horror, where Pramudya seems to revel in violence and destruction for its own sake. In *Keluarga Gerilya*¹⁰ (A Guerilla Family), for example, the theme of the story is the agony of a family during three days and nights. The family is split by a conflict of loyalties: that of the father to the Dutch-sponsored Federalist State, that of the two sons to the Indonesian Republic. Kartiman, one of the sons, is with the guerilla bands in the mountains. Saaman works in the city to support his family, but acts as an undercover agent for the guerillas. Before the story opens the two sons have killed their father. During the three days covered by the narrative Saaman is arrested, sentenced to death and shot; Kartiman is killed in a clash outside the city, their mother loses her reason at the sight of Saaman's body, and the sister surrenders her virginity to a Federalist who (falsely) promises to save Saaman if she satisfies his lust.

In *Blora* (A Place Name) Pramudya's hero is a prisoner of war who has a nightmare in which he is unexpectedly released. He returns home, becomes again involved in the guerilla struggle. The story is saturated with horror, and comes to a climax when he has to kill with a knife

his youngest brother who has seen the transport of arms, and is too young to realize that he must keep silent.¹¹

One of the major scenes in *Di Tepi Kali Bekasi* (At the Side of the River Bekasi) is almost unalleviated sadism: a hideously vivid description of a long series of attempts to kill an elderly *haji* who as a result of magical power is invulnerable, and for a long time remains unscarred. But eventually he is fastened to a truck, dragged along the ground and disembowelled.¹² It is as if Pramudya is both fascinated and horrified by cruelty. Sometimes he gives a plot solution a vicious destructive twist for its own sake.

This is the case in one of his most thoughtful books, *Perburuan* (Pursuit). It is the story of an Indonesian officer who takes part in an unsuccessful rising against the Japanese, his pursuit by the Japanese and life as a beggar as he seeks desperately to evade capture. The title encompasses several levels of meaning, ranging at the most obvious from the Japanese pursuit of the fugitive, to - at the most profound, the fugitive's search for the innermost meaning of treachery and loyalty. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the book consists of four dialogues. The first is particularly successful. The hero, after six months hiding from the Japanese in a deep cave, visits for a fleeting moment the house of his future father-in-law in the vain hope of a glimpse of the girl he loves. He then goes off into the evening along the road to the town. The girl's father, hearing he has been there, trails after him, determined to lure him back to the house to hand him over to the Japanese. The Japanese will reward him, and he will no longer have the disgrace of his daughter faithful in her betrothal to a beggar.

The setting of the dialogue on the lonely road is superb, and so is the presentation of the character of the old man as he keeps shifting his approach, using every appeal he can think of to bring the beggar back to his home; and in step with the change of approach, the tightening or loosening of tension, there is the living background: the occasional breath of cold night air, the clouds drifting across the sky covering and again revealing the stars, the appearance and disappearance of the lights of the city, and the gradual ascent of the moon. The sense of time passing is also vividly communicated as the old man continues his vain pleadings. Little by little the moon rises, and early in the narrative a buffalo cart is heard in the distance

trundling slowly along. Its approach fits in against the dialogue, and to me the song of the driver, which has echoed down the centuries, is reminiscent of Judith Wright's -

While past the camp fire's crimson ring
the star-struck darkness cupped him round,
and centuries of cattlebells
rang with their sweet uneasy sound.

As the relentless pursuit by the Japanese secret police continues, we are taken into the officer's inner musings, as well as his dialogues. We are shown his forgiveness for the comrade who betrayed him, and his love for his betrothed Ningsih. He is caught by the Japanese. But just as he is about to be shot the Japanese surrender is announced, and with it the proclamation of the Indonesian Republic. The red and white flag is raised and the crowds swarm into the streets. All is well, one would think. But a Japanese soldier goes berserk with a tommy-gun: his sole victim is den Hardo's beloved.

Nevertheless, Pramudya possesses that immense sense of compassion that can transmute horror into art. This we can see in the final prayer of Kartiman in *Keluarga Gerilya* who has killed his father:

Perhaps these my sins, you do not account as sins,
because it is you who have brought to birth this new
people. Also because we - because I - am on the
weaker side, and defending myself. Yes, we are on
the weaker side. But all the deeds I have committed
for me are still sins. I have sinned against myself;
I have sinned against humanity; I have sinned against
the families [of others] - the families of those
soldiers I have killed. I have sinned against their
love which has been in vain.

13

In this, as in all his major works, Pramudya attempts to penetrate to the heart of the human problem. And in the example I have just quoted, he has taken a phrase *Kasih tak sampai* - unrequited, unfulfilled love - which used by earlier writers had merely a limited or sentimental sense, and deepened and transformed it. For Pramudya it signifies an aspect of the whole human predicament: of love rendered vain by death - the impermanence of all relationships, and the fundamental loneliness at the heart of man, rendered even more unbearable by the destruction of personal values in war.

In addition to his creative work Pramudya has written many essays on literary criticism, and the relation of literature to life, which

both increase our understanding of him as a man and his attitude to his own writings. A literary work, for Pramudya, is not emotion recollected in tranquillity, or an exquisite and timeless evocation of a situation such as Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. In *Kesusasteraan Sebagai Alat* (Literature as a Tool)¹⁴ he explains that he regards literature as being basically no different from an adze, a car, a typewriter or any other technical means at man's disposal to achieve a definite end. Creative work, he therefore insists, is inadequate if written without a conscious purpose. For without this, a writer is liable to be arbitrary in his definition or recognition of values. Fundamentally a writer should be concerned with the effect his work will have on society. Nevertheless Pramudya, at this stage still rejects the concept that art should serve a propagandist purpose, and draws a distinction between writing in which political factors are determined on a superficial level, and that profound sense of a commitment that embraces the whole of life and imbues every sentence without the need to be vociferous - a type of commitment that is like the act of breathing to a living man, who feels no necessity to proclaim the fact that he breathes.

When he wrote this essay (1952) Pramudya certainly did not reject out of hand the aristocratic view that art is for those who understand. But he did contrast it with that expressed in Mao Tse Tung's dictum: 'Literature and art should serve the people, especially the workers, peasants and soldiers'. Concerning these two extreme views, Pramudya comments: 'The first is capable of preserving creative integrity, whereas the second eradicates the possibility of a decadent creation that may endanger society. Both however can produce art.' But his preference seems already to be for the latter.

Another important essay is *Definisi dan Keindahan* (Beauty and the Definition of Literature). In it he indicates the short-comings of the 'classical definition' of literature which regarded it as 'the totality of human creation in prose or poetry expressing something of beauty'. This definition, he continues, might have been adequate during the golden age of romanticism, but now literature has a rôle to play in an area broader and more important than that of mere beauty. Today, justice, humanity, morals and even nationalism are not rarely uttered by literature with a full conviction, aside and apart from anything that is called beauty. Beauty is only one element out of many in the

composition of a literary work, and if a writer opts for beauty alone he becomes the victim of his senses, which can mislead him. Beauty is negative and inert unless it is directed towards a particular end in a specific form. Artists therefore (and when Pramudya speaks of an artist we may be sure he means himself) are not merely a group of people gifted with sensitive feelings and a discerning sense of beauty, but people with a sense of justice, humanity and compassion.

Tentang Angkatan (On Literary Generations) is another valuable essay for various reasons. It gives an outline of the dialectic of literary development as Pramudya understands it. One generation, he says, automatically succeeds another, and every generation has its strengths and weaknesses. Its weaknesses result in its death. It cannot correct itself, it can only be corrected by a new generation. It may well be that there survive remnants of the older generation who do not wish to be by-passed and who therefore attempt to avail themselves of the insights of the new generation. 'But this is dishonest because they are using what is not their own.' The best that can be said of this theory is that it is mechanistic, if not naive; nevertheless Pramudya develops it further and links it to corresponding developments and tensions within society. He continues: 'A literary generation is not the creation of one or two people. It comes into being as the spirit of a time, place and environment, it comes into being as a social necessity. Thus it is quite wrong to refer to the generation of writers of '45 as the generation of Chairil Anwar.'

This essay is also remarkable for its violent outburst against the ideals and attitudes of the time in which he lives:

Dilatoriness! It is dilatoriness that has killed off earlier generations of writers, and dilatoriness which now prevents us Indonesians from becoming a strong people. It is hardly appropriate to regard the buffalo as a symbol of the Indonesian people - a crocodile or a lizard, that does everything by halves, even working and resting, would be more apt... but this dilatoriness will be dispelled by the sense of purpose of a coming generation.

It is not difficult to discover where Pramudya found the coming generation. In 1956 he translated into Bahasa Indonesia an article by the Chinese Communist writer Ting Ling, 'Society and Creative Writing'. The ideological point that Ting Ling wishes to make is that if a writer is to succeed in his calling, he needs not only a thorough understanding

of Marxist-Leninism, but also to live with the workers and share wholeheartedly their hopes and aspirations.

I would not suggest that Pramudya has a compelling interest in theoretical Marxist-Leninism; but the possibility to feel as one with the masses which, under communist leadership, seem to be marching with a disciplined and sure tread to a better world, to him offers hope for the satisfaction of his deepest yearnings. And he must have found the following paragraph an intimation of a heaven on earth:

The government officials understand the importance of literature and are only too happy to help the writer to understand life and politics, and to provide him with the best possible working conditions. The people around him hope that he will write a good book about them, and that he will stay long among them, and tell him everything he wishes to learn. Eventually, when the work is published, they pardon its shortcomings, and generously reward him for his services, and encourage him. Never before have writers had such opportunities or influence as they have now.... We writers must struggle to influence our environment, to introduce into it broader perspectives, to inaugurate a new life.

It is not difficult to see in this rose-tinted ideal the key to the resolution of those inner tensions within Pramudya's mental makeup that result in explosion after explosion: the tension between the artist proud of his integrity who nevertheless wishes to remould society; between the individualist, the outsider oppressed by loneliness, and the committed idealistic humanist longing for a world like a Night Carnival, and to play a significant part in social reconstruction; between the writer so deeply influenced by Europe and writing in a European art form; yet preserving a deep instinctive attachment to his Javanese traditions.

The Communist party, in fact, has provided the psychological link Pramudya instinctively requires, the 'rainbow bridge' that makes it possible for him, the outsider, to feel part of the whole, and to suppress if not sublimate the explosions rending his inner life. Such at least is part of the story of Pramudya: the outsider who does not want to be an outsider. It still remains to be seen whether this resolution of his psychological problems will result in new developments in his creative work.

This essay has discussed the cultural and moral attitudes implicit in Pramudya's work. The more specifically formal and literary aspects of his writings still await exploration.

Postscript

Pramudya has been detained without trial on the island of Buru since 1966 as a result of changes in the Indonesian political situation resulting from the attempted coup in 1965. At the time of the reprinting of this essay, rumours are current that he is shortly to be released.

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The modern Malay literature of Malaysia has attracted relatively little interest compared with that of Indonesia; and measured in terms of volume of achievement, this different degree of interest can be readily understood. Malay under the name Bahasa Indonesia was launched on its career as the national language for Indonesia in 1928. The Malay of Malaya and the territories later to be associated with it in the Federation of Malaysia, did not begin the journey along its road to become the language of a linguistically and racially plural sovereign state until about a quarter of a century later, and in quite different circumstances.

It might have been expected that the new status and direction to be given to Peninsular Malay would be able to subsume and take advantage of the Indonesian experience in language development, particularly since the indigenous peoples of both states are ethnically and culturally so closely related. But history exacts its due, and the absence of a Malay élite with a clearly defined national as opposed to a group consciousness until 1946 set the development of Malaysian Malay as a national language a generation behind that of the Indonesian projection of the language.

Modern Malay writing, one could say, was established with the appearance of a literary group which styled itself the 'Generation of '50'. This group owed its emergence and identity to three historical events: the Japanese Occupation in 1942, the British attempt to impose a new constitution, the Malayan Union in 1947, and the Malayan Emergency in 1948. The Japanese occupation brought new ideas of society and the role of literature into Malay life, it brought Malaya and the territories of the former Dutch East Indies into close contact, and it demonstrated that the British Raj was dispensable. The attempt to impose the Malayan Union as a new constitution created the first Malay national movement since it provided issues on which all Malays could unite: to resist a threat to their privileges and to the powers of their rulers.

* First published in *Search for Identity: Modern Literature and the Creative Arts in Asia*, A.R. Davis (ed.), Sydney, 1974, pp. 59-75.

It also proved that such a movement could be successful. The Emergency, caused by a Communist, largely Chinese rising, had unexpected side-effects on members of the Malay Community; for the clumsy and arbitrary imposition of the Emergency Regulations drove a number of talented Malay writers and journalists to the relative haven of Singapore, where they became both a nucleus of and a model for a new intelligentsia, independent of the Arabic-educated, *surau*-oriented religious élite and the traditional aristocracy alike.

This group, which formed the nucleus of the 'Generation of '50', saw themselves as pioneers of a new Malaya and a new role for the Malays and the Malay language. The group included such names as Usman Awang, Keris Mas, Asraf and several others. In their early work can be seen the romanticism of the pre-war Indonesian Pujangga Baru type which became tolerably well-known in Malaya during the Japanese occupation, expressions of devotion to the Japanese Great East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, and anguish and bewilderment at the impact of the Emergency Regulations.

This 'Generation of '50' took as its watchword 'Art for Society', by which they understood art as justified by its purpose and social effect. This 'Art for Society' impetus lost its momentum by 1956, and a number of younger writers more interested in the problems of the individual than of society began to make their appearance. To poets, struggling to find new images of personal being that would express their inner complexities, it brought the charge of obscurity; to prose writers attempting to put into effect the doctrines of naturalism, it brought the charge of obscenity.

In fact, this development indicated that writers were learning to get to grips with the difficulties involved in understanding and communicating the intimacies of the individual consciousness. In taking a person instead of a message as the point of departure for their work, they were also forced to come to terms with themselves, to see themselves not as ideologues but as artists, and all that this implies.

This is the importance of the novel *Salina* by the Singapore journalist Samad Said, first published in 1961. *Salina*, of the title, is a prostitute, living in a shanty town Kampong Kambing on the outskirts of Singapore, so called because the houses are made of converted goat-pens. The small group of characters who inhabit the 500 or so pages of the novel live in squalor and disease, the evil preying on and destroying

the good. Salina is driven from her home by a ruffian to whom she gives shelter; an orphan, Nahidah, is raped, the young man Hilmy who hopes to be an architect has to abandon all ambition, when his mother, struggling to earn a living as a laundress, dies of tuberculosis. The only political activity recorded in the book is a low-key picture of an election campaign in Kampong Kambing - an empty ritual of posturing and declamation, without any meaning for the dwellers of the shanty town.

Samad Said offers no moral judgements. He presents a picture of life as it is lived. Man - his philosophy seems to be - has no resource other than his innate dignity as man, no comfort or consolation except through personal relations. Equally important, this novel gives an identity to Malay writing, for it could never be mistaken for anything written in Indonesia. A distinctness in quality of vision, atmosphere and dynamic structure is immediately apparent.

Shahnon Ahmad, to whose work this paper is devoted, is in effect a writer in the same tradition as Samad Said. By profession he is a school teacher, and was born in Kedah in 1933. More important he is a countryman, born in the little village of Banggul Derdap deep in Kedah, who, despite his English education, has never felt the temptation to reject either physically or artistically his village home for the more dramatic and colourful world of the city, although this does not imply that his interests are exclusively rural. He is a prolific author both of novels and short stories, and his work from the time he began to write in the late 1950s has shown a sure and steady growth in technical competence and complexity.

His earliest volume is *Anjing-anjing* (Dogs), a collection of short stories, published in 1964. At times it is somewhat disconcerting. A first reading reveals a certain vigour of style, social concern and a touch of melodrama. Yet reflection, and perhaps hindsight shows that a very distinctive literary talent is at work. There is the story of the young divorcée, cast out because she is barren. She leaves her village for the big town of Alor Star with a letter of introduction in her pocket to the madame of the best brothel in town. Madame gives her an interview, and finds her eminently suitable: young and attractive, experienced and barren. Clearly the author is against prostitution, and intends to expose those social attitudes that can leave women with no other source of livelihood. But at the end of the story is a wry

twist, to which one can only give the name, compassion. The oldest of Madame's 'girls', who is already finding it difficult to attract customers, catches sight of the new arrival and realizes that her career at the prestigious establishment is over. Interest and compassion in the individual predicament has grown out of, and makes a stronger impact than the social concern in which the story was conceived.

The same is true of the story *Sipilis*. The moral is that promiscuity is a bad thing and may result in venereal disease. The description of the (anti?) hero's ailment is excruciatingly detailed, although one should point out that the author appears to have confused the symptoms of gonorrhoea for those of syphilis. His portrayal of the mental anguish of repentance, and the misery and congenital ill-health of the hero's children is harrowing. But once again interest in character gets the better of commitment to message. The man, so penitent while in pain, is cured by an injection of penicillin. Within a short time he is back at the gay round, humming to himself, as he skips up the stairs of the next bordello, 'you only live once'.

Shannon's next collection of stories *Debu Merah* (Red Dust) shows a striking development in range and treatment. The same vigour in writing is apparent, but the crude plot-construction is replaced by a confidence, a zest and enjoyment of writing as a craft. Equally important, the narrative line no longer even begins with lip service to a social issue, although it may be implicit in the plot; rather the story is the vesture, the image one might say, of a comment on life and human nature. A good example is *Babi Hutan* (Jungle Boar), one of the first stories by a Malay author on the negrito peoples of the deep forest. Nibong, a youth, has found the girl he wishes to marry. But, as a bride price, he must present to her family a rogue boar with yellow tusks. For over a month, armed with his blow-pipe, he has hunted it in vain, returning exhausted and dispirited after a long search of days at a time. His mother urges him to give up this ambition with the unreasonable demand it imposes on him, and tells him to be content with a girl from his own tribe. But the boy obstinately sets out once again, and searches unsuccessfully for a further three days and nights. Weary, he finds his way back home only to be shocked to discover his house has been destroyed, the vegetable patch torn to pieces, and his mother and sisters lying dead and disembowelled. Not far from them, sleeping peacefully after its rampage is a rogue boar with yellow tusks.

Niblong puts his blow-pipe to his lips, takes careful aim and kills the boar. He has his bride price at last.

The developments we have seen in Shahnon's work: a growing competence in technique, an interest in character, developing out of social concern, and the increasing use of thematic material as the vesture for a comment on the human condition are all revealed in a much more ambitious work, *Rentong* (Burnt to Ashes), his first novel. Apart from a melodramatic conclusion in which the villain meets Nemesis, it is amazingly effective, and represents something strikingly new in the development of Malay, or for that matter Indonesian writing, for it is set totally in the countryside, in a village the namesake of Shahnon's birthplace, Banggul Derdap. More compact than *Salina*, it is also richly orchestrated. Its characterization is also more interesting, partly because Shahnon has hit on the technique of revealing only a little at a time of the personality of each of his major characters.

The story opens with a minor character, Jusoh, on his way to a meeting at the house of Pak Senik, the village headman. As he lights his way across the rice fields with a *damar* torch, the surrounding darkness is filled with an atmosphere of tension and menace because of the evil reputation of Semaun, who may lurk to attack in dark corners, and who, it is said, hobbles cattle out of pure malice. The meeting is to discuss a government plan for rural development. If the villagers agree unanimously to plant two rice crops a year, the government will provide seed, fertilizer, the use of tractor and plough, and arrange for irrigation water to be pumped from the river. But Semaun will not co-operate: the plan therefore cannot be put into effect. After a long discussion of the recalcitrance of Semaun, Pak Senik counsels patience, and undertakes to persuade the menacing loner to co-operate.

The following day we meet Semaun, and begin to understand the reasons for his recalcitrance and bitterness: discriminated against and robbed of his rights by one of Senik's assistants, Dogol. And into Semaun's mouth are put the words which express the peasant's love and respect for his land: 'We may not disregard the traditions of our forebears even if this brings us profit four-fold. We must not torment our ancestral soil; the rice land is our spirit, our pulse; we are created from the clods of earth; when we die, we are laid in earth. And if we exploit greedily the earth, it will be angry with us, and not grow our crops.' Senik cannot counter this argument, and although he persists

gently in his plea, Semaun orders him from his house. But Senik does not abandon his responsibilities as headman to everyone in the village, and when Semaun's father dies, he is the only person to come to Semaun's house to follow the old man to his grave.

In the meantime Dogol is spreading rumours to the effect that Senik is weak and old, no longer fit to be headman, and he attempts to manipulate the villagers, through their distrust and hatred of Semaun, to dismiss Senik. One of his cows, heavily in calf, tethered near the edge of the forest, vanishes and, without any investigation or evidence, Dogol claims that Semaun has hobbled and stolen it. He incites the villagers and leads an angry mob to burn to ashes (*rentong*) Semaun's house, hoping by this decisive act to rid the village of a scapegoat and to assert his right to be headman.

But when the mob arrives at Semaun's house, Pak Senik is already there, and the ensuing confrontation between the old man and the angry mob is a fine climax to the book. Senik succeeds in restraining Semaun from charging the mob with his adze, single-handed, to protect his home, and in his appeal to the villagers to obey the laws of evidence set down in the *adat* - the unwritten code that governs village life and has procedures for the settlement of disputes. They search for the cow and find it dead, badly mauled by a tiger; Dogol's scheming is exposed and Semaun brought back into the village community.

No less than in the *Anjing-anjing* stories, a moral purpose can be discerned, but the presentation is indirect and has various facets. Government plans for rural development, however well-intentioned, are liable to break down. A free distribution of buffaloes creates possibilities for corruption and misappropriation, and may have a divisive effect on the village community. The campaign to encourage two rice-crops a year runs headlong into the moral question as to whether it is right or wrong to demand from the soil two rice-harvests in a year.

At the same time, the characterization is far more complex than that of the early collection of short stories. Somehow we are taken into the thoughts and emotions of the principal characters: of Semaun, the loner, distrusted and feared by his fellow villagers, of Dogol, the greedy and ambitious 'operator', and of Pak Senik, the village headman, wise, gentle, and perhaps weak, but in the last resort able to restrain an angry mob, not by personal charisma, but by simple honesty and humble courage. While no one could claim that the analysis of character

is profound, these are real people. The description of the rural background is even more effective: culturally there is not a false touch, and as for the setting, the landscape is vibrant with implicit life, whether under the radiance of the sun or shrouded by the darkness of a moonless night.

Instead of a direct plea for modernization, we have a living picture of the structures of traditional social life and of the difficulties involved in change. Semaun's picture of the life of the soil, bred through millenia of animism is moving and beautiful. Yet there is a new dimension as well. The plot resolution could be regarded merely as a conventional happy ending. It might, however, with equal justice be seen symbolically as Shahnon's vision of life as it could be, and the structuring of the narrative and creation of the characters as images used to present a moral judgement on the human condition.

To suggest this possibility of symbolism is not altogether fanciful, nor is it forcing the data to see a personal vision dominating the structure of the work. For his next novel, *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* (Stakes along the Way), shows specifically a continuation of this development. In it, the technical skills he has mastered through his earlier writings are joined with his interest in character and the human condition generally, and his sensitivity to the problems of the peasantry; they are invested with symbolic overtones as striking as they are original, and dominated by a tragic vision of man pitted against a merciless universe.

As in his earlier writings, there is a background of social concern, revealed in references to rural Malay indebtedness, and the permanent loss of land mortgaged to the Chinese. The poverty that causes the alienation of land, also puts out of the peasant's reach the aids of mechanization - only the *pengulu* has a tractor which can complete seven-days back-breaking manual work in less than as many hours. This poverty has many causes: the inability of the Malays to develop subsidiary industries, the pressure on limited land resources of a growing population, the waste of three months of the year between harvest and the new season's planting, in wedding feasts and idleness, and the precarious character of the peasants' life, in which a simple accident, such as treading on a thorn, can cause disaster. The Malay peasant simply accepts his fate as the will of God: man can only endure. But the story is not structured around these elements: just as

they are implicit in the social situation, so they are woven into the texture of the narrative.

The book has an overwhelming impact: in part due to the sheer writing skill of the author. Lahuma's agony and death, and Jeha's madness are presented in a way that impresses their horror on the reader, but it is not these scenes alone which give the book as a whole its particular power. This derives rather from a tight formal structure, and a cunning, if unconscious selection of archetypes and overtones. The opening, 'Life and Death; Joy and Sorrow are in the hands of God', sets a key chord sounding. In itself this is a simple, pious ejaculation. But it becomes at once something deeper. The structural framework of the book is the rice year. It is the rice year and all that happens within it that is in the hands of God; it is the rice year that is the building block of time out of which the span of every human life is made, and through which every generation of Man has lived.

Each succeeding year then is not simply a measure of time: it is a constantly recurring field of battle where man pits his strength against that of the elements. Lahuma accordingly is not simply a peasant facing the difficulties of daily life, but is invested with a symbolic cosmic role. He is made from the dust of the earth, and his destiny is to struggle with the earth each year to make it yield its fruit to support his life. He is one creature, who shares life on the earth with other creatures. He must respect even those that are harmful to him until the annual battle is joined, when quarter may be neither asked nor given.

This annual struggle has all the intensity and devotion of a religious duty, and could rightly be called the *dharma* of the rice-field. Before undertaking so great a task one prays, for this *dharma* is a battle field in which one's life and all are at stake. And so on the evening before his struggle with the mud and weeds commences, Lahuma - unwilling to step down to the rice-field without invoking the help of God - sits on his prayer-mat and prays: 'Almighty God, let me begin my task tomorrow and carry it through under your protection. Keep far from me all natural disasters, all diseases and harm from cockroaches, snakes and scorpions. Avert all floods which can overwhelm my rice; avert all spells of drought which can parch my rice-land. Keep at a distance all disasters that can impede our work; keep at a distance all the white crabs that can break our young rice stems; keep at a

distance all storms and tempests, keep at a distance the mice, pigs and humans who would steal our rice. Give length of days to myself, to my wife Jeha, to our children Sanah, Milah, Jenab, Semek, Liah, Lebar and Kiah. Keep us safe from all harm.'

After praying, he listens to the call of the sparrows that later are to menace the ripening grain, and decides to go out alone into the night to survey the field of battle, like an army commander in the old stories. First he walks to the window and looks out on the darkening landscape, and sees the twinkling oil lamps of the neighbouring houses, and behind them the massive blackness of the forest. The crabs and sparrows, he says to himself, are living creatures just as ourselves. Only God can forbid their coming. Then he leaves his house, and in the stillness of the night walks along the dikes dividing the rice-plots. He sees the stars reflected in the water, dips his adze into it and stirs it around. A few leeches attach themselves to the blade. He draws it out of the water and says to them: 'I will not harm you as long as you do not suck my blood. But once I have sown the seed, and stride through the water, and you attack me, or my wife and children, I will kill you without mercy.' He looks up at the sky at the thinning cloud and exclaims: 'I shall not do harm to any creature, not even those which can harm me, unless they interfere with my struggle and with my family.'

The scene is vivid enough. But Shahnong increases its impact by setting it at a point in a series of rhythms: there is the slowly moving rhythm of generations as grandparents, children and great-grandchildren in turn play their role in the cosmic struggle, the rhythm of the seasons and months, and then the rhythm of day and night, built out of the rhythmic recurrence of the five Muslim ritual prayers, marking the sacral points of the earth's rotation.

In this cosmic battle, there are many casualties. Lahuma perishes, and Jeha loses her reason. It is clear that they have a symbolic role, but the vision imparted by the symbols is not that of *Rentong*, where prosperity and harmony are won by tolerance and understanding. In *Ranjau* prosperity is something Jeha only knows in her day-dreams, when after a plentiful harvest the peasants relax: buffaloes graze on the stubble, children fly kites, and the community celebrates weddings: the reality is toil and labour against overwhelming odds. Jeha slaves night and day to ward off one of the plagues that ravages her rice-fields:

masses of tiny fresh-water crabs that destroy the roots of the young plants. After three nights without sleep she temporarily gives in to exhaustion, and has a terrible nightmare in which she sees her husband swollen to huge proportions striding across the countryside. The children rush to him, but he brushes them aside and continues to trample down the rice. He bends down and begins to stuff the crabs into his mouth devouring them in hundreds until his huge stomach begins to swell and bursts and his bowels gush out. Jeha awakes in horror calling her husband's name, and sobbing tells the children: your father is angry with us. She staggers out again to continue the struggle, and she faces these misfortunes, but her sanity is broken. At the end of the year, after the harvest, she is locked in a cage, and whimpers through the night, 'my rice, my rice'.

Such is the vision of the book: Man lives in a merciless universe; created from the dust of the earth, his fate is to wrestle with that dust in order to survive. The odds against which he must struggle make death and insanity his lot. But he may never surrender.

Shahnon's next novel *Terdedah* (Stripped, Exposed), which appeared only a year after *Ranjau*, pioneers a new technique and presents characters from a different social background. It is set in an urban environment - a world of government offices, committee meetings, cars and telephones. In *Ranjau* the organizing structural concept was the rice-year; in *Terdedah* it is a span of 24 hours, from the time the central character, Sharifah Shuhada, a wealthy widow, awakes one morning to her awakening 24 hours later. Shahnon describes his story as a tale of human bestiality during a day and a night. In fact, at one level, it is a story of man reduced to his lowest common denominator as a sexual animal. But at another, its message is that for man oppressed by loneliness and lacking in ideals and altruism, selfishness and sexuality are all that remains. The Malay word *terdedah* means exposed, and it is used to describe the wares a hawker has set out by the roadside, where passers-by can view them, and flies and dust settle on them. This is the kind of exposure that Shahnon gives his characters. Sharifah Shuhada awakes clasping her pillow in loneliness. She gets out of bed and calls Hamid the gardener who is cutting the lawn - not for any purpose, but simply for the sake of communication with a human creature; but her voice cannot reach him because of the sound of the motor-mower. The symbolism is rather wry: the mower was bought with her late husband's

insurance policies. She is accordingly wealthy, and her wealth combined with her aristocratic descent, indicated by her title *sharifah*, makes communication with ordinary human creatures impossible. To assuage her loneliness, she telephones an acquaintance of the same social status as herself, Syed Mohsin, to make an assignation. She hears an ominous giggle from the receptionist at the other end of the line, and then is told that he is not available. Disappointed, she telephones a parliamentarian, Enche Adnan, for the same purpose, barely suppressing a feeling of revulsion. In terms of descent he has nothing to boast of, but having in his political career become a people's representative, he need no longer be regarded as one of the people.

Adnan, all agog for his meeting with Shu (Shuhada) is now the focus of attention. Unfaithfulness to his wife and three children does not trouble his conscience unduly. Another problem, however, is not so easily solved. He suddenly recalls that he has to attend a party meeting at 9 p.m. that night, a meeting he himself has called, to discuss allegations of corruption in the State government service. All day he is in a dilemma. Should he postpone the meeting? Corruption is after all an everyday event. It will keep. Then he fears if he does not postpone it, Shu will imagine that he regards the common people, of no quality of birth or breeding, of more importance than herself, and so reject him.

But the problem has another angle. Corruption is an election issue. To postpone the meeting may well have electoral consequences both for his party and for himself. Without the party, he would not be a member of parliament, and would thus be of no significance for Shu: women can be procured any time, Shu too - as long as he is a member of parliament. The meeting must go on. And so the meeting takes place, with Adnan as chairman fidgeting like a cat on hot bricks, eager for his assignation, guillotining the discussion and restricting the agenda to one item. Business is completed well before 9 p.m. And Adnan is free to drive to the home of the wealthy widow.

But to his chagrin, his rival, Syed Mohsin, to whom the telephone message had unexpectedly been passed on is already there. The two men look at each other in frustration and embarrassment; embarrassment turns to petulance, and both depart together leaving Shu in dismay, wondering at the childishness of men. Indeed, this childishness, this lack of any kind of responsibility is the basic comment of the book on politics and

politicians. All the characters are children indulging in sex play for the want of anything better. Shu is eager for either Adnan or Syed Mohsin; Hamid is eager for time alone with Shu's servant girl Tijah; Fakar, the party secretary, imagining that Adnan will not be home that night, pays court to Adnan's wife Rohana. All are frustrated, but their frustration is nothing compared to the agony of Sharifah Shuhada.

Everything she has thought or desired re-emerges in her sleeping consciousness, distorted into a hideous nightmare in which there is a kaleidoscopic change of roles: Adnan has become chief minister and she is his wife; at an audience with the Sultan, Adnan's wife Rohana, now married to Fakar, rushes forward and stabs him. In the confusion Shu is filled with terror, then wakes sweating with loneliness at the realization that she has to face the emptiness of a new day.

It is evident that in addition to innovations in technique, interior monologue and stream of consciousness taking the place of action, there has been a shift in Shanon's interest from village life to the issues of political responsibility at the national level. Yet the same concern with people noted in the earliest stories is still dominant. Despite the exposure of venality and hypocrisy, the book's literary impact derives from its communication of Shu's aching loneliness.

In two subsequent novels, *Perdana* and *Menteri*, questions of political responsibility are paramount. *Menteri* deals with a weak political leader who, at the end of the book, also has a nightmare in which he sees a vision of the future: the cities of Malaysia populated by Chinese, and the Malays forced into the backwoods; and the responsibility is laid clearly at the door of the Malay political leadership which, as a result of selfishness and incompetence, has not provided the quality of leadership necessary to give the Malay community a rightful place in its homeland.

Shanon has been in Australia for two years now. His writing in Malay has naturally been limited, but a short story - *Salam Sekeluarga* (Greetings from all the Family) published in 1969 deserves mention. Its point of departure is the May 13 riots of 1969, and it shows the villager at a loss to understand the world of urban-style politics: in effect it provides a link between his rural and political interests. It too shows striking advance in technique, and conveys a brilliant insight into the mind of a simple villager of the older generation,

whose world and his responses to it are illustrated through his letters to his son in Australia. Not that the old man can write. He dictates his letters to a nephew who is educated (Awang Cik Teh), a mosque official. The letters are simple, and usually contain little but a catalogue of greetings from all the members of the family. But they have a sincerity, a pulse which goes beyond the words, the paper, the sentence structure: they are a living link between the village community and the son across the ocean. Such letters as a rule come only once a month. But a week after the general elections an unexpected letter arrives, of unusual length. There has been tremendous activity in the village: special prayers, solidarity meetings, beating of drums, blowing of trumpets, training in the use of primitive weapons. The old man does not say what is the cause of the intense emotional stir. The connection with the election is only suggested.

And what was the election to the old folk? In the days before polling a stream of visitors had come to the house - canvassers of the political parties. But to the old folk they were guests, to be hospitably treated as such: coffee had to be served, the trained monkey sent up the coconut palm to bring down fresh coconuts, chickens to be slaughtered and curried. All the visitors were charming, but each said something different from the other, leaving the old folk more and more confused. On polling day the old man could not go to vote. He had no-one to tend their buffalo. Mother went alone. She was taken by car. In the car she was given a dollar which she accepted; it is a sin to refuse alms. In the polling booth she saw the picture emblems around the wall. In bewilderment she marked one which she saw to her right. Then she put her voting paper into her betel basket and took it home. Despite the allusive style, no comment is necessary.

This survey has covered a selection of Shanon's work. It is important to realize that his development is still open-ended: his style of writing, his technique, his ability to insinuate himself into the consciousness and sensations of his characters is still developing. This is particularly well displayed in the short story *Salam Sekeluarga*.

In approaching literary works, in attempting to understand their structure, it is useful to make the effort to understand the mysterious chemistry of an author's personality, and to discover the way in which it has reacted with its environment.

For at some time in his career there is a magical moment at which

the basic values and styles which inform his work coalesce, set the path he is to follow, and determine the field in which he is to achieve significant work. In general, a writer's field is limited: if he departs from it, he may produce a competent work, but it will not be a genuine product of his vocation as a writer. This does not mean that he is limited to one style of writing, to a single environment, or to a particular topic. But there is in his response to experience a spread of concerns, an area of richness in his personality, which defines the limits of his creative vision, and has its counterpart in all his genuinely characteristic work.

Part of the critic's task is to define this field of creativity, just as much as it is the responsibility of the creative writer to sense the scope, nature and limits of his own talent. The ultimate question in fact is one of identity. Such a question is vexing enough for a writer in a long established tradition. For a writer in a new nation, developing a new language, with, on the whole, only traditional models and the experimental efforts of his contemporaries to guide him, it is a very different thing.

Language itself is a strange alchemy. Part of the effectiveness of a language resides in the range of imaginative writing it sustains, and the efficacy with which this writing enriches both the minds and sensibilities of its native speakers and those for whom it must become a language of cultural intercourse and educational development. Indeed, what a person is, what it is within his capacity to become, depend on the resources and scope of the language through which his sense of the world, values and personality are formed. And once this formation has occurred, it is almost impossible for experience gained in later life significantly to modify it. By the same token then, every extension to the compass of a language is an extension of intellectual range and fecundity of the people to whom it is native.

A language does not grow into this role overnight, and every established modern language has had to follow its own line of development, to face particular social challenges and complexities. Malay is no exception, and while this is not the place for a detailed analysis of what the modernization of Malay implies, certainly it includes the language mediating between a traditional and a modernizing society within the Malay community, and serving as the instrument by which it and the other racial and cultural communities in Malaysia can achieve

mutual understanding and respect.

It is against this background that we have to assess Shahnnon's work and understand his sense of identity. His contribution to the resources of modern Malay is striking both through his absorption of the motifs and archetypes of traditional Malay literature, and the range of resonances and overtones implicit in his style.

Aside and apart from this, however, Shahnnon has succeeded in coming to terms with himself as an individual without losing touch with his traditional society. At the same time he has been able to keep a distance between himself and his characters, as he implants some aspect or other of himself into each of them. His interests have included questions of personal morality, rural modernization and political responsibility. His concerns with people have led him - through the characters he has created - to view man from various aspects: as a creature oppressed by loneliness, as a creature overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy and bewilderment at the birth of a new world - and in so doing to give a cosmic vision of the human condition.

In discussing his writing, Shahnnon says he does not wish to tell a story of external events which can be plotted along a line of development already known, as in traditional Malay literature - rather it is the personalities, thoughts and values of his characters that interest him and that he wishes to communicate. This I hope is one conclusion evident from this paper. But there is a further point to be made. All his efforts to give form to his ideals and to communicate his vision derive from one human quality: Compassion. And from this quality derives the poetry that infuses his best work.

AMIR HAMZAH: MALAY PRINCE, INDONESIAN POET^{*}

Sir Richard Winstedt, by his numerous contributions to the study of Malay Literature, has put all later scholars in his debt. It is therefore almost an obligation to honour this aspect of his work by an essay on more recent developments in the Malayo-Indonesian literary field.

One of the most absorbing and fruitful points of departure for the study of a literature is to follow the work of a poet throughout the course of his career - to note the uncertainties and inadequacies of his early attempts at poetic expression, his gradual mastery of technique, and growing independence and boldness as he develops his own distinctive manner of expression. One can note those influences which were significant to him, and which he made his own in his encounters with reality, and thus appreciate the slow and tortuous path from adolescence to the fullness of maturity, when his themes and style are clearly established, and his characteristic attitudes are at their most fertile and intriguing.

Amir Hamzah (1911-46) is worthy of such a study on many counts. He was the finest poet to appear in the Malaysian world during the pre-war years, and the first to exploit to the full the potentialities of Bahasa Indonesia as a medium for modern poetic expression.

By descent, Hamzah was a Malay of royal lineage. He was born at Binjai in north Sumatra, and brought up amid the traditions of the Malay court at Langkat. His father had a lively interest in Malay literature, and frequently held recitations of old Malay *syair* and *hikayat*. Thus Hamzah, from his earliest years, was exposed to, and delighted in, traditional Malay literature. It is commonly said of him that his genius as a poet lay in his remarkable ability to resurrect the burnt-out embers of Malay poetry, and to infuse into the forms and rich vocabulary of traditional Malay, an unexpected and vivid freshness and life. Further, it is added, he was through and through a Malay, and his later verse reflects a deep and sincere religious faith. Professor A. Teeuw could even say of him that his death at the hands of

^{*} First published in Bastin, J. and Rooluink, R. (eds.), *Malayan & Indonesian Studies: Essays Presented to Sir Richard Winstedt*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1964.

the revolutionaries in north Sumatra in 1946 could be interpreted symbolically as signifying that the past he had temporarily brought back to life was dead, never to return.¹ Now this is certainly all true, to a point. Ethnically Hamzah was a Malay; he was brought up saturated in Malay literary tradition; by religion, he was a devout Muslim; in attitudes, he was conservative. He was all these things, but he was also much more.

He left home to study in Java when he was fourteen, in 1925, and did not return until 1937. Thus he passed the major part of his formative years, and wrote all of his significant poetry, away from a Malay environment. In Jakarta he attended a Christian Junior High School. There he not only received a Dutch education, but absorbed something of Christian concepts and values. In 1929 he went to Senior High School in Solo, one of the two principal centres of Javanese culture. He specialized in oriental literature, and was highly competent in Javanese. In 1932 he returned to Jakarta to study in the law school, and remained there until summoned back to Sumatra to marry in 1937. Both in Solo and later, after his return to Jakarta, he was in personal contact with the leading figures of the Indonesian literary revival. In 1933, together with Takdir Alisjahbana and Armijn Pané, he was one of the founders of the cultural periodical *Pujangga Baru*. He was a writer among writers, a poet among poets, and at the law school in Jakarta, during the crucial years of the early 1930s, could not have been ignorant of the strong undercurrent of political nationalism. He had, in fact, as catholic an education as was open to an Indonesian during this period.

A strong element of sadness pervaded Hamzah's mental make-up, and this was intensified by a forlorn love affair in the comparative freedom of Java, which he had to surrender when ordered to return home, marry, and take a place in the feudal court of Deli. It is clear that a bitter mental conflict preceded, and much bitterness and regret followed, his decision to obey the summons to return. If many of his earlier poems reflect the pining and sensuality of adolescence, his later verse in large measure reflects his attempts to find solace in religion for the agonizing sense of loss that family loyalty and his aristocratic heritage had caused him.

The poems he wrote in Java, principally for the periodical *Pujangga Baru*, subsequently appeared in two slim volumes, *Buah Rindu* (The

Fruit of Love), and *Nyanyi Sunyi* (Songs of Solitude).² He also made, through the medium of Dutch, translations into Bahasa Indonesia of Japanese, Persian, and Sanskrit poetry, including the *Bhagavad Gita*, but these are not our primary concern here.

Hamzah himself was responsible for the arrangement of the poems in his two volumes of original verse. In general, the poems may well appear in print in chronological order, but this is not altogether certain. Bohang, quoted by Jassin, suggests that the poems in the volume *Buah Rindu*, from 'Cempaka' (Frangipanni) to 'Teluk Jayakatera' (The Bay of Jakarta) were written before he left Jakarta for Solo; 'Hang Tuah' to 'Malam' (Night) were written at Solo,³ and the remainder of the poems in that volume, and those of *Nyanyi Sunyi*, were written after his return to Jakarta to study law. This is a useful division, although a closer study of Hamzah's style and diction, together with what is known of his life, may entail certain modifications.

A characteristic of Hamzah's early poems is his fondness for the traditional quatrain and conventional flower imagery of Malay verse. Although *pantun* and *seloka* rhyme-schemes are freely varied in one and the same poem; although the poem is clearly the work of an individual reacting to a particular situation, yet there is here nothing to suggest the striking individuality and intensity of his later work. Not only much of the imagery, but even couplets can be traced to the *pantun* literature. 'Kusangka' (I thought), for example, where the poet compares the beloved to a flower, at first sight spotless, but which has in fact been ravished many times by a bee, is characteristically *pantun*. The lines from the poem 'Buah Rindu II' (which begins sombrely enough: Come to me, O Death, Free me from all my sorrow):

Bonda, hajat hati memeluk gunung,
Apatah daya, tangan tak sampai.

Mother, my desire is to embrace a mountain,
but how, it is beyond my arm's reach

in the Winstedt collection of *pantun* occur as:

Rasa hati memeluk gunung,
Apa daya, tangan tak sampai.⁴

My desire is to embrace a mountain,
but how, it is beyond my arms' reach.

A perusal of the two major collections of *pantun* in print reveals many

instances of lines and attitudes of traditional verse absorbed into his original work.

Not all of these early poems are successful technically. 'Tinggallah' (Farewell), in which Hamzah bids farewell to his island, Sumatra, and to his mother, shows many signs of an imperfect mastery of even the simple quatrain form. Lines such as:

Jauh hatipun konon datang meliput

(Which though) the heart be far, still covers us

and

Menyampaikan pesan 'katahan hati

(To) deliver a message from my heart

display all the awkwardness of a poet still unsure of his technique. However, if 'Tinggallah' was written at the time of the event it describes - Hamzah's departure from home - the author could not have been older than fifteen. 'Senyum hatiku, Senyum' (Smile my heart, smile) also in *sya'ir* form, has similar weaknesses, and one line is startlingly unsuccessful:

Tetapi, engkau, aduhai fakir, dikenang orang
sekalipun tidak

But you, oh luckless one, are not even remembered.

These poems most clearly belong to Hamzah's earliest work. Others, although still melancholy, and still clearly based on traditional models, show more polish and balance. The poem we referred to earlier, 'Buah Rindu II', develops a motif which is clearly derivative, but re-told in Hamzah's words is fresh and moving: the lover looks at the clouds drifting overhead, asking them to halt for a while:

Tuan aduhai mēga berarak
Yang meliputi dēwangga raya,
Berhentilah tuan diatas teratak
Anak Langkat musyafir lata.

O clouds, moving in procession
to fill the firmament of heaven,
Halt you a moment above the dwelling
of the son of Langkat, a pining wanderer.

For he wishes to entrust them with a message to his beloved. Not only is there here something of the technical mastery we have the right to

expect from a poet, but we can note the first beginnings of that matchless verbal music which is so characteristic of Hamzah's best work.

'Teluk Jayakatera' (The Bay of Jakarta) should, according to Bohang's classification, belong to the earliest period of Hamzah's productivity, before he went to Solo. The scene of the poem is the bay of Jakarta, and Hamzah looks out to sea, and then back at the swaying palms on the shore, recalling his beloved, and the times when their kisses united them. From this, Jassin deduces that Hamzah's beloved must have been in Sumatra.⁵ But the language of the poem would lead one to suspect otherwise. He uses Javanese terms in reference to her, addressing her as *yayi*, and *Tejaningsun*. It is at least probable that this poem was written at a time when Hamzah was forced to contemplate his return to Sumatra, and, as he did so, memories of his Javanese beloved welled up within him.

On the whole, the poems in the second half of the volume, from 'Hang Tuah' on, are of a higher standard than those in the first. Bohang allocates the majority of these poems to a so-called Solo period.

By any standards 'Hang Tuah' is a remarkable poem. The theme is simple: Malacca, awaiting the Portuguese attack, is in confusion. As a last resort, Hang Tuah is summoned from his sickbed, but his efforts are in vain. He and his ship are destroyed by the Portuguese cannonade, and Malacca falls to the enemy.

The poem consists of rhyming couplets, but is quite unique in the history of Malay literature. Despite the historical theme, the poem is completely modern. True, Hamzah uses archaic words for various types of warship, such as *penjajab* and *pusta*, but to take advantage of their acoustic properties and atmosphere, not to denote specific types of vessel. The internal assonance within the lines and the highly wrought alliteration is consistently and throughout far more sophisticated than anything to occur in the *pantun*, and clearly points to the influence of Hamzah's studies in Javanese literature. The first couplet clearly and decisively sets the pace and tone of the poem:

Bayu berpuput, alun digulung
Banyu direbut, buih dibubung.

The wind blows, the rollers are curled,
the spray is seized, spume is flung.

Not only does this complex, involuted assonance illustrate the influence of Javanese *macapat* verse which we referred to above, but we find Hamzah

increasingly drawing on words at least as common in Javanese literature as in classical Malay, such as *bayu*, *alun*, *segara*, and even words never absorbed into Malay, such as *banyu*.⁶

In general each line is divided by one strongly marked caesura, but there is sufficient variety of movement and rhythmic stress to prevent monotony. If the caesura normally occurs in the centre of the line, there are several examples of its appearance elsewhere. For example:

Melaka! Laksana kehilangan bapa
Randa! Sibuk mencari cendera mata!

Melaka, as though it has lost its father
Forlorn as a widower, seeking his beloved.

Further variety is achieved by occasional use of a double caesura in one line, contrasting with a single caesura in the following:

Laksamana, cahaya Malaka, bunga Pahlawan,
Kemala setia, maralah Tuan.

O, Laksamana, Light of Malaka, Flower of warriors,
Faithful and precious, come forward.

The plasticity of the verse is such that it can express dialogue, narrative, and dramatic effect without any strain or forcing. Not least, the story is told with a rigorous economy of diction and sentiment. The story unfolds inexorably, and reaches its conclusion without any comment. Hang Tuah meets his death:

Peluru terbang menuju bahtera
Laksamana dijulang kedalam segara...

The bullet speeds towards the ship
The Laksamana is hurled into the sea...

and the story is done.

We have noted the growing influence of Javanese diction and choice of words in Hamzah's poetry. Javanese religious attitudes likewise soon leave their mark on his work. In 'Ragu' (Doubt), he utters a prayer to an image of Syiwa, possibly the one at Prambanan:

Permaisurimu Uma, sudah kupuja,
Seroja putih beta sembahkan;
Sekarang ini, wahai Syiwa,
Pada tuanku beta paparkan.

To your spouse Uma, I have uttered praise
and offered a white lotus;
and now, O Syiwa,
to you I tell my tale.

There are a few poems of sheer romantic delight in the remainder of the volume. Among the best of them is 'Kenang-kenangan' (Memories) which ends with that lightness and delicacy of wit which is so characteristic of the *pantun*. Hamzah indulges his memories of an evening under the stars with his beloved in his arms, listening to the Javanese melody *Mas Kumambang* borne through the night air.

Dinda berbisik rapat ditelinga
Lengan melengkung memangku kepala
Putus-putus sekata dua:
'Kunang-kunang mengintai kita'.

You whisper close to my ear
while your arm cradles my head,
softly word by word:
'The fireflies are peeping at us'.

But a crisis that was to destroy his happiness was already developing: the realization he would have to make a choice between love and duty. In 'Bonda I' (Mother I), he imagines his home calling him, almost unheard through the surge of the Malacca Strait, while he plucks a white flower at the foot of Mount Wilis.

Which loyalty was to weigh most with him, love, or, as he understood it, duty? At some point, not clear from the arrangement of the poems in *Buah Rindu*, Hamzah decided that he could not be disloyal to his family traditions, that he could not marry a Javanese girl. But this act of renunciation left him with a deep sense of loss and regret from which he never recovered.

In 'Berlagu Hatiku' (My heart sings), a poem memorable for its subtlety and variety of movement, he tells how he thought he had at last found his true love. Eagerly, he would build a palace for her in his heart, lay a carpet of flowers at her feet. Alas, it was not to be:

Tetapi engkau orang biasa
Merana sahaja tiada berguna;
Malu bertalu karena aku
Ganjil terpencil berpaut kedahulu.

But you are just an ordinary person
pining away in vain
with only embarrassment (and sorrow) from me,
awkward, isolated, fettered to the past.

He looked desperately around him for consolation, and attempted to return to the past, as in the beautifully evocative 'Sunyi' (Solitude).

Kuketuk pintu masaku muda
hendak masuk rasa kembali;
taman terkunci dibelan pula
tinggallah aku sunyi sendiri.

I knock at the door of my youth
wishing to enter it again;
but the garden is locked, barred too,
And I remain desolate alone.

In despair he turned to God for solace, but with little success, and Hamzah's struggle for relief from his acute misery is the principal theme of the volume of later verse, *Nyanyi Sunyi* (Songs of Solitude). And these poems perhaps explain his lack of success, for they reveal that Hamzah did not possess that transcendent faith which can make a great sacrifice, and resolutely accept the consequences. Time and again one gets the impression that Hamzah regrets his decision, and would go back on it if he could. His religious faith wavers in the darkness of despair. He revolts against God, as if to blame Him for his predicament. The word he most often uses to address God is *kekasihku*, my Beloved, but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is often a projection of his own sense of loss. But this should not be understood as a qualification of the poetic value of *Nyanyi Sunyi*. Rather, many of the poems in this volume do achieve a true, timeless greatness just because Hamzah is so honest in his expressions of grief, doubt, and loss.

Perhaps the finest and most perfectly controlled poem in the volume is 'Padamu jua' (To You Alone). It is a flawless specimen of free verse. Every word is a perfect opal in the line, inevitable, and irreplaceable. Each phase of the poem manifests that remarkable discipline of expression we noted in 'Hang Tuah'. Hamzah, having turned away from his beloved, faces God, The Beloved, whom he addresses:

Kaulah kandil kemerlap
Pelita jendéla dimalam gelap
Melambai pulang perlahan
Sabar, setia selalu.

You are a gleaming candle
The light in the window on a dark night
beckoning home, gently,
patient and ever faithful.

But God appears to him under a variety of aspects, conditioned by Hamzah's own moods. Hamzah is human, he longs for satisfaction of his sense of touch, sense of sight - in vain, for God can only be known through His words in the *Qur'an*. Hamzah resents God:

Engkau cemburu
Engkau ganas
Mangsa aku dalam cakarmu
Bertukar tangkap dengan lepas.

You are jealous
You are ferocious,
I am prey in your claws
as You seize, let go, and seize again.

For God, as it were, plays cat and mouse with him, arousing yearnings that He will not satisfy. Hamzah becomes frenzied in his anguish, and then accepts his desolation, and the poem ends with a remarkable serenity and resignation:

Lalu waktu, bukan giliranku
Mati hari - bukan kawanku...

Time passes by - it is not my turn
the day has died
[Time passes by] but not my Friend.

But Hamzah could not accept this silence indefinitely. God's ways are beyond him. In 'Permainanmu' (Your plaything) he attempts to unravel the meaning of God's dealings with Pharaoh. God himself hardened Pharaoh's heart, yet Pharaoh had to bear the scourges of God's wrath for his treatment of the Israelites. What does this mean? And he asks God:

Bertanya aku, kekasihku,
Permainan engkau mainkan?

And I ask, my Beloved,
is it a game You are playing?

And in questioning God's dealings with Pharaoh, he is expressing resentment at his own fate: sacrificing his own will, turning to God, and gaining nothing in return. No wonder he felt torn between two worlds, the Divine and the human. In 'Turun kembali' (Returning earthwards) he describes his attempt to scale Jacob's ladder, but on catching sight of the world and its delights gleaming like a candle below him, he swiftly descends again. In 'Kurnia' (A Gift) he describes the two

qualities fused within him struggling for supremacy, the good attempting to bear him heavenward, the evil binding him to the earth.

On the whole, Javanese influence is more strongly marked in *Nyanyi Sunyi* than in *Buah Rindu*. Consistently Hamzah uses the Javanese form *swarga* rather than the Malay *syurga*, and there are numerous Javanese words and expressions occurring throughout the poems in addition to those already mentioned, such as *alit purba*, *raja dewa*, *swara suwarni*, and *riwarni*, to mention only a very few. There are likewise traces of Javanese morphological influence, for example *nipis* instead of *menipis*. (In 'Mabuk' [*Buah Rindu*] are such characteristically Javanese forms as *rangkai-rinangkai* and *rangkum rinangkum*.) It is further clear, moreover, that his stay in Java considerably tempered his Islamic faith. Not that he became any the less a Muslim, but he developed attitudes to religion more to be associated with the remarkable tolerance of the ethnic Javanese than with the traditional Islam of the Malay world. In 'Hanya satu' (One alone), Hamzah compares Christianity and Islam to two shafts of light from the one jewel Abraham, and adds: what value are our quarrels when the Jeweller Himself throughout the centuries does not judge the rival claims. As for Hamzah:

Padaku semua tiada berguna
Hanya satu kutunggu hasrat,
Merasa dikau dekat rapat
Serupa musa dipuncak tursina.

To me this is all without use
for I have only one desire,
to feel You close beside me
as did Moses on the peak of Sinai.

'Barangkali' (Perhaps) appears to show the influence of Javanese theosophy:

Engkau yang l  na dalam hatiku
Akasa swarga nipis tipis;
Yang besar terangcum dunia
Kecil terlindungi alis.

You, who slumber within my heart
subtle beyond the firmament of heaven,
Who in Your greatness enfold the world
Yet tiny, lie hidden beneath an eyebrow.

It is true that the doctrine of divine immanence within the human heart is not exclusively Javanese; but the whole flavour of this stanza is clearly Javanese, and the idea expressed in the final couplet is

well known in Javanese literature. In any case Hamzah could hardly have been familiar with such concepts at the age of fourteen when he left Sumatra.

Further he shows a truly Javanese capacity for syncretism in the names he uses to refer to the Divinity. In 'Buah Rindu III', *Dewata* and *Maulana* occur in successive lines. In 'Buah Rindu IV' Hamzah addresses his prayers to the *duli Dewata Mulia Raya*. At the end of 'Naik-Naik' (Ascend, ascend), he prays to be:

Jauh Dunia disisi Dewa.

Far from the world at the side of God.

Another poem in *Nyanyi Sunyi*, 'Sebab dikau' (Because of you), shows how deep an impression the Javanese shadow play made on him: the shadows appearing and acting out their parts on the white screen at the bidding of the *dalang*, to disappear and be replaced as one set of puppets is returned to the box and another brought out for a new performance. And he concludes:

Aku boneka, engkau boneka
Penghibur dalang mengatur tembang;
Dilayar kembang bertukar pandang
Hanya selagu, sepanjang dëndang.

Golek gemilang ditukarnya pula
Aku engkau dikotak terletak;
Aku boneka engkau boneka
Penyenang dalang mengarah sajak.

I am a puppet, you are a puppet,
we delight the *dalang* as he sings his song
Upon the screen we may exchange glances
for the length of a melody, a song.

Then he changes the gleaming puppets,
you and I are laid in the box;
I a puppet, you a puppet,
to please the *dalang*, to accompany his song.

A comparison of Hamzah's work with that of his best contemporaries shows how outstanding and how individual his genius was. As far as technical ability is concerned, consider only the description of a storm, by his near contemporary Rustam Effendi (b. 1903), and that of the Flood in Hamzah's 'Hanya Satu'. Both are written in the same form - quatrains, with alternate rhymes.

Rustam's verse:

Bersabung kilat diujung langit,
gemuruh guruh, berjawab-jawaban
Bertangkai hujan, dicurah awan,
mengabut kabut, sebagai dibangkit.⁷

The lightning flashes in the distance
the thunder rolls echoing in answer,
the rain streams, poured down by the clouds
the mist thick, as though made to be so.

And Hamzah's:

Teriak riuh redam terbelam
Dalam gagap gempita guruh;
Kilau kilat membelah gelap
Lidah api menjulang tinggi.

There is uproar, destruction, annihilation
amid the fury and resonance of the storm;
the gleam of lightning splits the darkness
[like] a tongue of fire streaking upwards.

Rustam's verse is competent, but there is a masculinity and vigour, an immediacy and concentration of sound and sense in that of Hamzah, which puts it in a different class. Note, for example, how the contrast between the velar stops and high front vowels of *kilau kilat* and the heavier bilabial and lower vowel sounds of *membelah gelap* intensifies our visualization of the brilliance of lightning cutting through the blackness of the stormy night sky.

The majority of Hamzah's contemporaries were inspired by the poets of the Dutch romantic revival of the 1880s. This movement was based on a devotion to beauty which at times expressed itself in forms not far removed from blasphemy, as in the poem of Perk: 'Oh, beauty, Thou whose name be hallowed; Thy will be done, Thy kingdom come'; and in the famous line of Kloos, 'I am a god within my innermost thoughts'. The writers of this generation were particularly fond of the sonnet, and much of their work was characterized by melancholy. Their general ideas were taken over by the Indonesian poets of the thirties, who developed their aesthetic concepts from them. In an essay published in the first number of *Pujangga Baru*, in July 1933, Armijn Pané declared that the artist is the servant of his spirit, and that the artist must follow the promptings of his psyche in all he has to express. The poet Tatengkeng (b. 1907) declared: 'Art is a movement of the spirit' and both writers implied that the artist's spirit must respond to inspir-

ation as and whenever it comes to him from the manifold world about him.

These ideas are clearly manifest in the poems of Sanusi Pané and Tatengkeng, no matter how different they were in other respects. These two authors were by no means the only other poets writing during the thirties, but, Hamzah excepted, they were the most outstanding. Sanusi Pané found much of his inspiration in India and ancient Java, and in a carefully chosen poetic language, wrote poems with such titles as 'Taj Mahal', 'Krisyna', 'Arjuna' and 'Candi Mendut', many of them in sonnet form and melancholy in the extreme. The following lines from 'Candi Mendut' are in many respects typical of his work. He gazes on the edifice, and sighs:

Diam hatiku, jangan bercita,
Jangan kau lagi mengandung rasa,
Mengharap bahagia dunia Maya. 8

Be still, my heart, excise ambition,
lay aside forever
any hope of joy in this illusory world.

Tatengkeng, on the other hand, was a Christian from the Celebes. Much of his verse springs from a crystal-clear faith in God and joy in creation. In 'Rindu Dendam' (Deepest Yearning) he delights in the beauty of a dewdrop resting on a petal in the early morning, and concludes his poem:

O, Tuhanku,
Biarlah aku menjadi embunmu,
Memancarkan terangmu
Sampai aku hilang lenyap olèhnya...
Soli Deo Gloria. 9

My Lord,
Let me become Your dew
reflecting Your radiance
until it consumes me...
Soli Deo Gloria.

Nevertheless he shared the current aesthetic concept of inspiration. In 'Perasaan seni' (The Experience of Art), he compares the coming of inspiration to fill the poet's spirit to a flood, to a tempest, to the sweetness of the dew, and to the melody of the singing wind, moving him to write in various moods.

None of this prevailing current of ideas had any discernible effect

on Hamzah. He never wrote in sonnet form. He addressed no poems to inspiration or to his muse, neither did he look for inspiration in the world around him. Almost everything he wrote was a direct communication of his joys, sorrows, bewilderments and frustrations. Although in his early poems he reflects much of the Malay literary tradition, in his maturer works he is far more concerned with a compact expression of what he has to communicate than with the conventional beauties of poetic diction. Rigorous economy of expression is, as we have said, one of the most striking characteristics of his best work. In a sense it is unfortunate that he is known as the poet of *Buah Rindu*, since the associations of this title blur his essential virility, and give him no credit for the steel-like strength and integrity of his later verse.

He was not, in the ordinary sense of the words, a religious poet. Rather he was a poet of faith and doubt. Tatengkeng could write, on the death of his newly born child:

Anak kami Tuhan berikan
Anak kami Tuhan panggilkan,
Hati kami Tuhan hiburkan,¹⁰
Nama Tuhan kami pujikan.

Our child, Lord, you gave
Our child, Lord, you called away;
Our hearts, Lord, you console,
Your name, Lord, we praise.

with perfect serenity and acceptance, echoing the words of Job: 'The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away,... blessed be the name of the Lord.'

Hamzah, at times, in a poem such as 'Didalam Kelam' (In Darkness), can only pray in his darkness:

Meminta aku, kekasihku sayang:
Turunkan hujan embun rahmatmu
Biar padam api membelam
Semoga pulih pokok percayaku.

I beg You, my Beloved
pour down the dew of Your mercy
extinguish the blackening flame
that my faith in You be restored.

It should now be clear that the conventional picture of Amir Hamzah needs considerable modification. He was not merely the poet who gave a temporary new life to the traditional forms and diction of Malay verse. For the kind of Malay influence, so clearly manifest in his

early work, is scarcely in evidence in that of his maturity, where very little trace of traditional diction remains. True, there are quatrains in *Nyanyi Sunyi*, but one can hardly point to any direct relation between these and the traditional Malay quatrain. In any case, the quatrain as a verse form is so ubiquitous that its use, in itself, is of minor significance. It is true he never showed any overt foreign influence in his writing, but he was exposed to and absorbed a variety of cultural influences which enriched his personality and his work. However, at least two of his poems show a knowledge of the Old Testament, and in one number of *Pujangga Baru* he translated some verses of the Song of Solomon.¹¹ There is no trace of political nationalism in his poetry, but he was closely associated with several of the nationalist élite, and his years at the law school must have brought him into close contact with the developing nationalist movement. It is not surprising then that he dedicated his first volume of poetry (*Buah Rindu*) to Indonesia, Queen and Mother.

We have already referred to the rich Javanese influence in his later work which would sometimes result in obscurity to a reader not familiar with Javanese. This is true even of the motto of *Nyanyi Sunyi*, which concludes:

Sunyi itu lampus.

Solitude is extinction.

Few readers outside of Java would realize that *lampus* is a *kromo inggil* word meaning death or extinction.

Amir Hamzah may have been a conservative in many things, but he was not, on the whole, in his poetry, his fondness for oriental rather than Western literature notwithstanding. Both in form and content he was far more of a revolutionary than any of his contemporaries. In his mature verse he shows clearly that he has no further need to rely on any traditional verse form. The intensity of his theme fashions its own form, and his mastery of word choice and construction of phrase is magnificent. And a poem of the disciplined vigour and modulated intensity of *Padamu jua* not only pointed the way for Chairil Anwar, but even provided for him a point of departure. Compare only Hamzah's

Kaulah kandil kemerlap
Pelita jendela dimalam gelap.

You are a gleaming candle
The light in the window on a dark night

with the lines in Chairil's early poem 'Doa' (Prayer) -

Caja Mu panas suci
tinggal kerdip lilin dikelam sunyi.

Your light, pure and burning,
still remains, like a candle flickering in silent
darkness.

Hamzah died at the hands of revolutionaries in Sumatra in 1946. His effective life as a poet, however, had ended ten years earlier, for after his return to Deli he had little contact with his colleagues of *Pujangga Baru*. But in his six years of creative life, he left poems that represent an absolute, not a relative, excellence in the development of Bahasa Indonesia. If we wish to characterize his distinctive genius and outlook as opposed to that of the majority of his contemporaries, we can best refer to an essay in which Auden describes two types of poetry, two types of poet, the one regarding poetry as a magical means of inducing desirable emotions and repelling undesirable ones, the other regarding it as a game of knowledge, a bringing to consciousness, by naming them, of emotions and their hidden relationships.¹³ If Sanusi Pané, Takdir Alisjahbana, and the majority of their contemporaries belong to the former group, Amir Hamzah unquestionably belongs to the latter.

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3. H.B. Jassin 'Amir Hamzah, Penjair Buah Rindu', *Bahasa dan Budaja*, 8th year, no. 5/6, pp. 5, 6.
4. R.J. Wilkinson and R.O. Winstedt, *Pantun Melayu* (Malaya Publishing House, Singapore, 1955). The second collection referred to is *Pantun Melayu* (Balai Pustaka, Jakarta, 1952).
5. Jassin, *Bahasa dan Budaja*, p. 25.
6. Achdiat Karta Mihardja (in *Tjatatatan-tjatatatan tentang Amir Hamzah* [P.P.K. Yogyakarta, 1955], 119) has perhaps been the only critic to note the freedom with which Hamzah introduced Javanese, Kawi,

and Sanskrit words into his poems, adducing such examples as *dewangga*, *dewata*, *sura*, *prawira*, *estri*, *ningsun*, *padma*, *cendera*, *daksina*, and many others.

7. Takdir Alisjahbana, *Puisi Baru* (Pustaka Rakjat, Jakarta, 1951), p. 75.
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CULTURAL OPTIONS AND THE ROLE OF TRADITION:
FECUNDATION OF A NEW MALAY POETRY

An essay in memory of Pendita Za'ba

The European student of Malay¹ faces various problems when he attempts to come to terms with Malay Literature. These problems have to do with his mastery of the Malay Language, his understanding of Malay society and its values, and his expectations and assumptions of what a literary work should be. They are compounded by the rapid changes taking place in the Malay world: in language, in society and in the evolving ideas and expectations of literature among the speakers of Malay themselves.

Such perceptions I owe in large measure to Pendita Za'ba. I learned much of his attitudes to life and culture as a student of his in London in 1951, and it is this personal relationship with him, seen from the perspective of twenty five further years study of Malay that is the starting point of this essay.

From him I realised that any teacher of a language and a literature not his own has to cope with difficulties that increase in geometric progression to the degree that the language and literature he teaches differs as to form, content and cultural matrix from that with which he was brought up. The further the remove, the greater the danger of distortion to which he is exposed.

During the last ten or so of the twenty five years, Malay has found a place in the field of general studies. It has become a university subject in various parts of the world not just for the occasional specialist, but as one of the options for a Liberal Arts education. And the new nations of Malaysia and Indonesia apart, nowhere is this more so than in Australia. It is the kind of growth in the status of Malay of which Za'ba dreamed, and to which he contributed so much.

The study of Malay then is a new academic discipline and has to take its place alongside older ones. This has the disadvantage that

* First published in *Bahasa Kesusasteraan dan Kebudayaan Melayu - Essei-essei penghormatan kepada Pendita Za'ba*, Kementerian Kebudayaan, Belia dan Sukan Malaysia Kuala Lumpur, 1976, pp. 3-135.

signposts and familiar landmarks are few; on the other hand, when one is relatively unencumbered by precedents and prejudices, there is freedom for manoeuvre and experiment.

The European teacher of Malay faces a particular challenge: to present the language and to interpret its literary traditions to fellow westerners. To achieve this he has to structure and interpret his material in a way that will give coherence to his teaching so that his students gain from it not simply a knowledge of facts, but an intellectual formation.

He needs to work with his Malay colleagues and counterparts, in adding to the corpus of knowledge of things Malay, in fecundating new areas of research, and generally contributing to the intellectual stature of this new discipline.

Only by so doing can he ensure that his own cultural formation, generally in an urban, middle class background, in which even a concept so crucial to the study of Malay literature as the oral tradition is unfamiliar, does not distort his understanding of the culture he is studying, and render his presentation of it unrecognizable to its creators. For he has to accept the responsibility that what he teaches succeeding generations of students is creating in their minds an image of the Malay world and its peoples which, in Australia will mould the public opinion of a 'European' nation about two of its Asian neighbours. The image he presents then must be as close to the reality as the fragile and imprecise nature of human communication and his personal ideosyncrasies and weaknesses allow.

The validity of European analyses of Asian culture and history may sometimes be questioned. The issue is a vexed and complex one, but in the field of literature at least, the different perspectives of the foreign student of a language - any language - and the native speaker are more complementary than exclusive. And the foreign student approaching a literary work may discover in it significances and emphases which extend the appreciation of the author's achievement among all his readers. There is an element of risk involved, for the dividing line between distortion and the genuine discovery of a new facet of an author's talent, is at times very fine indeed. Yet the attempt is worthwhile, and the attendant risks justified, especially when a modernising literature, such as that of the Malay world is the field of study. This is, above all, a situation in which the modern writer is discover-

ing new forms, learning to express his individuality through them, and attempting to extricate himself from the meshes of a collectivist outlook; a situation in which he is equally likely to be misunderstood by his compatriots as by foreign scholars; the compatriot perhaps missing the significance of those aspects of his work which are specifically modern, the foreigner overlooking those aspects that are specific to the cultural matrix to which he belongs.

It prepares the ground for the growth of a tradition of critical writing which will be effective in proportion to the diversity of approaches out of which it develops. Such a critical tradition can appear only after a creative literature has put down its roots. This is inevitable: no one ever becomes a writer through the study of literary criticism. Yet criticism is necessary: to test and explore the meaning of an author's works; to delineate the areas of strength and weakness in his talent, to mediate the significance of his work to the reading public; and to extend the public, to provide it with the tools by means of which individual readers may test the validity of their responses to what they read, and by so doing to develop a level of taste.

The crux of the matter is just as the development of new literary forms such as the novel, the short story and lyric poetry need a period of adaptation before they can grow with any vigour in a new environment - and there is no automatic guarantee that any particular form will grow - a critical tradition likewise needs a period of time, not only for adaptation, but also gestation.

Every established critical tradition, English or French for example, has grown out of a tradition of creative literature, which supports it like a tree a vine. It cannot be detached, and transplanted to a new literature. To the degree that the host is alien, the transplant will not take: at best it may remain in a state of suspended animation; at worst it may even harm the new host.

Thus the westerner cannot simply pick up a text book of criticism, whether by Wellek and Warren, Leavis or Kermode,² and use it straight-away as a basis for the evaluation of modern Malay writing. The concepts these critics develop, and their approaches, their expectations of literature and their value judgements are inextricably derived from the corpus of material out of which they have been gleaned. And despite the fact that literature is a universal human activity, the relevance

of the critical ideas of one culture to the literature of another may at best be tangential.

Yet no scholar is likely to make much sense of the literature of a language and culture foreign to him without a broad sensitivity and awareness to literature in general. He needs a point of departure if he wants to justify his responses, develop insights, and discern the texture and shape, the lines of development of the literature he seeks to interpret.

In the same way he needs a familiarity with various approaches of literary criticism from as many traditions as possible, in the hope that he can derive from this general body of material, approaches, notions, concepts, which extend his awareness of the possibilities implicit in literature, and refine his sensitivities to them. Such approaches, notions and concepts are only starting points, the seeds of criticism, not criticism itself: some may grow, others may wither; they may enrich one's understanding of the achievement of an author, or they may be destructive. In any case, the greatest temptation for the westerner is to press any single approach too far, and to make it a Procrustean bed on which either to stretch or mutilate new writing in Malay.

The safest approach is exemplified in Teeuw's *Modern Indonesian Literature*.³ This is based on a very full listing of works published to which are added biographical data, resumes of important works, and simple personal responses. This is not yet criticism, but the book is a valuable guide through the corpus of material extant, and has an exceptionally detailed bibliography and index.

At present the only sustained study by a foreign scholar of Malay literature that develops and applies critical categories consistently and fruitfully is '*Puisi Baru: the Emergence of a non-traditional Malay Poetry in Pre-War Indonesia*',⁴ although the bibliography of less ambitious works is growing.

The starting point of this essay is T.S. Eliot's concept of tradition and the individual talent.⁵ It is an attempt to discover the nature of the power of integration shown by modern authors writing in Malay as they have come face to face with their individual identities, with their various pasts, with a changing society, and with a wide range of cultural options. It is an approach which like any other, has its limitations and should not be pressed too far.

The need to search for a line of continuity, to discover the relationship between his past and present, to define axes of change, and in the field of literature to see how any author's individuality depends as much on his rejection as on his acceptance of the achievement of his predecessors, is very much a part of the European mind.

Eliot expresses very incisively the importance of this past:

The tradition of the European poet involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write with not merely his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole literature of Europe from Homer, and within it the whole literature of his own country, has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.

6

It is natural then for a European to approach any other literature historically, whether 'established' or 'modernising'. This phenomenon of 'modernisation' in literature is wide spread. One need only mention by way of example Japan and the Arab world where these developments have been in Japanese and Arabic respectively or various of the new states of Africa in which modernising Anglophone or Francophone literatures have appeared. These new movements began at different times over the last century and a half, and have followed different lines of development. The relationships between them and the relevant 'metropolitan' literatures is an exciting field in comparative studies.

Malay provides an example of such development within a language indigenous to a region. Its growth into the national language of two new states, and the appearance in it of a modernising literature are two sides of the same coin.

Various elements had a role to play in this process. An important, though not a dominant one, derived from the Muslim heartlands of the Middle East. Despite the strength of the colonial powers at the turn of the century, and the western, secular character of the educational ideals put before the local elite groups, Islam continued to sustain an educational system which contributed to the formation of thousands of students, and provided an access to the broader currents of cultural change and reform in other parts of the Muslim world.

The intellectual modernisation of Egypt began early in the 19th

century, and spread rapidly in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. A thorough going literary modernisation however did not begin until the early 20th century.⁷ Students and scholars from the Malay world who took part in the intellectual life of cities such as Medina, Cairo and Damascus were caught up in this new movement, and transmitted its ideals and enthusiasms to their homelands. The ideals transmitted mostly concerned religious belief and practice, and were dominated by the reformist teachings of Muhammad Abduh, but literary developments too made their mark. In what is now Indonesia, very little research has been directed to the possibility of literary influence from the Arabo-Muslim tradition, at least on the regional level. At the national level, the only well-known writer whose fiction shows the influence of an Arabic author is Hamka, whose novel *Tenggelamnya Kapal van der Wijck* (1938) is to a minor degree derived from an Arabic work, *Majdulin*, by the Egyptian writer Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti (1876-1924).⁸

In Malaysia, on the other hand, Arabic literary influence was much more pronounced. Pendita Za'ba gives an account of this influence in the chapter *Modern Developments* which he contributed to the first edition of Winstedt's *History of Malay Literature*. He points out that 'The twentieth century saw a new spirit in Malay literature, a leaven taken from the awakening Arabic literature of Egypt and Islam.'⁹ The examples he gives of various works translated into Malay from Arabic - which include a history of Japan - are particularly interesting. The popularity of some of these translations is illustrated in the popularity of Sayid Shaikh's rendering in Malay of *Faridah Hanum*, 'a love romance in a wealthy and educated Muslim family of modern Egypt'. The book published in 1926, Za'ba continues 'was read from one end of the Peninsula to the other, and the author suddenly found himself famous'.¹⁰

It is in this chapter also that Za'ba, with a shrewd percipience, draws attention to two streams in the new Malay literary movement. He points out that the 'more outstanding among these new writers are not pupils of the Malay Vernacular School or College; they are those who have received their education and taste for literature from other quarters, either through the Arabic language acquired under modern conditions or through a knowledge of English acquired later and after their vernacular education'.¹¹

The Arabo-Muslim tradition could have played an important role in the fecundation of a modern literature. Arabic was well-known in

religious circles, by some at least acquired under modern conditions. It was the medium of a shared religion, and could have served the Malays as a key to the whole range of Muslim civilization, ancient and modern, religious and secular. In the '30s, it could have developed as the medium of a genuine Muslim humanism, a viable alternative to the philistinism of the British Public School Tradition which the Colonial Administration of the Federated Malay States decided should be the norm for education of the children of Malay royalty. Yet it was not to be. The two sources of cultural change developed not as alternatives but as religious and secular orientations which grew further apart, the religious Arabic educated wing no longer pursuing its broader interests: the secular, English educated wing going its own way without more than a respectful nod in the direction of religion.

And so the great developments on the literary scene in Cairo, Beirut and Damascus in the early '50s, which marked a general literary take off in the Arab world as writers proved their mastery of the huge range of tributary sources they had taken into their individual literary cultures since the war - and one of their touch stones was Eliot's essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* - awoke no echo in the Malay world. The western, secular stream remained the dominating foreign influence on the Malay modernising movement.

For comparative purposes, it may be noted that the decade which in the Arab world witnessed the achievement of a new synthesis, in the Malay world was heralded in Indonesia by the brave words of the Surat Kepercayaan of the Gelanggang group 'We are the legitimate heirs of the culture of the whole world, a culture ours to extend and develop in our own way', echoed across the Straits of Malacca by the ideals of the Angkatan Sastrawan (Asas) '50 based on the concept 'Art for Society'. The keynotes of a program, certainly, but without the achievements either in translation or original works that could compare with writings in Arabic.

This comparison is not meant to imply a value judgement, but rather to indicate the consequences of a different background. Despite a common Muslim civilisation, the two regions of the world are literally poles apart: the Arabs have had a tradition of stable urban civilisation and a constantly growing literary heritage from the time of the prophet Muhammad; the cultures of the Malay people have been predominantly agricultural. Rather it is intended to bring into focus the

whole problem of an elucidating literary tradition in the Malay world, whether from the standpoint of the creative writer, or of the literary historian.

For it is this sense of tradition, common to the European and Arab worlds, which conditions the approach of the European to Malay letters. And as a result he is left floundering when he attempts to put together a history of Malay Literature in order to discover what a contemporary writer of Malay has in his bones of the literary past of the Malay language and its culture, its myths, symbols and archetypal images, and the power of his tradition to synthesize foreign elements. It is the failure to come to terms with this problem and to realize that the nature of tradition in the Malay world is different from that in Europe or among the Arab peoples that has rendered unsuccessful most attempts to write a general history of Malay Literature.

It is for this reason that I believe that the title of Winstedt's book *A History of Classical Malay Literature*¹² is misleading, for his use of the word 'classical' is nowhere defined: and one cannot be sure whether style, content, age or provenance were uppermost in the author's mind in determining what to include.

From the standpoint of content, it embraces materials ranging from the mystical philosophy of Hamzah Pansuri in the 16th century to the follies of Pak Pandir which are still popular today; from the standpoint of provenance, it discusses works deriving from the court, from the peasantry, from the community of religious scholars, and from the occasional middle class author such as Abdullah, drawing no clear distinction between the Malay Peninsula or Sumatra and the Riau Archipelago; in time, it ranges from the 16th to the end of the 19th centuries.

In face of this geographical and social diversity, 'style' scarcely offers a more secure foothold. There is the style that Winstedt praises in various chronicles, and to which he had stories from the folk tradition reduced. But this style is better described as 'court' than 'classical'. And this court style itself is not a constant. The Raffles text of the *Sejarah Melayu* is stylistically different from that of the Shellabeare version. And Virginia Matheson in her study of the 19th century *Tuhfat al-Nafis* has shown that in two contemporary drafts of this work, two styles of court Malay are illustrated: a relatively plain 'business' style, and a more elaborate or formal style, when

material was to be gazetted.¹³

The *Sejarah Melayu* indeed is widely held as the apogee of classical Malay. It is written by definition in a court style. Yet it is proper to ask in what sense it has the role of a classic. It is a structure of many elements, indigenous and foreign: episodes and anecdotes deriving from a wide variety of sources and built into a genealogical list making it an amalgam of Arabic, Persian, Indian, Sumatran and Javanese elements, which, while reflecting a complex background, perhaps does not achieve a full symbiosis as a literary work. It has nevertheless a historical and social function in establishing the primacy of the Malacca royal house vis-a-vis the later sultanates on the Malay Peninsula, and providing a locus probentus for an enduring contract between the Malay people and their rulers.

Unfortunately no definitive text of the work has been published, and it is difficult to avoid the impression that it is more praised than studied. It is then not a classic in the sense that it is read, and re-read, and establishes itself as a kind of luminous presence, providing a series of symbolic reference points that can enrich and add the dimension of tradition to modern writing; it does not represent a summit of intellectual achievement in the way that could be claimed for the writings of Hamzah Pansuri.

Yet it may be that the *idea* of the work may have something of the role of a classic. And this stature attributed by a modern consciousness to the *Sejarah Melayu* enhances some of its episodes with the overtones and resonances of myth. One such episode is the scene set in the royal palace of Malacca the night before the city is to fall to the Portuguese, and the young nobles ask the ruler to allow them to read the story of Muhammad Hanafiyya to inspire them with courage.¹⁴

This begs the question as to whether any modern writer has a sufficiently detailed knowledge of the book for the status accorded to the idealization of it to set fire to his imagination. The same question may be put of other older works - whether hailing from the court, or other areas of society. To what extent for example does a work such as the Malay *Hikayat Sri Rama* live in the minds of an educated Malay class?

Likewise, one comes to the 19th century, one may well ask, for all the praise given to Abdullah, what role his autobiography or any of his other works plays in the general formation of the modern writer in Malay?

With very few exceptions, it must be admitted that the direct debt of the modern writer to this literary past is tenuous. And yet as Eliot says, should not any author have as full a grasp of his own literature as possible?

The fact is that although there is a continuity between facets of an older complex of traditions and the new Malay literature, this continuity is often indirect and sometimes fortuitous. One reason for this is that the majority of first generation 'modernising' writers in Malay were Dutch educated 'expatriates' from Sumatra who had gone to Java for higher education and professional training in medicine, veterinary science or law. Dutch was the medium of instruction in all educational institutions after primary school; it was the language in which the intelligentsia, such as they were, communicated with each other, the language of the literature that they read. Malay was the language of childhood, the home and perhaps of religious education. But at school, it was a subject, taught through the medium of Dutch. Thus although these writers had some direct knowledge of pantun, riddles, and traditional tags and sayings from their home environment, if they studied older Malay literary forms, such as *sya'ir* and *hikayat* it was as though these, not Dutch works, were in the foreign language. By and large they did not partake in Malay as a living tradition: their world was far removed from that of the folk stories told by the Penglipur Lara, and the older they grew, the further removed they were from it. The only element that lived on within them was the spirit of the pantun, which sometimes achieved a poignant and intense lyricism. Apart from this, their formal education in Malay as a school subject served to crystallize in their minds certain ideas about the form of Malay poetry, that it was very difficult to modify.

The point at which the new tradition of Malay writing came to life at the expense of the older was when urban Dutch educated innovators such as Muhammad Yamin and Rustam Effendi began to learn from each other without any direct reference either to older models or other areas of society. With the emergence of a new professional elite and other aspects of modernisation, the court tradition fell into disuetude, separation from the predictable rhythms of village life produced a dissociation from the folk tradition, and the failure of the religious group to integrate with any secular movement reduced its capacity to enrich the new development. It is for this reason that one speaks of

the break in the Malay tradition, and of the death of 'classical' Malay. Yet perhaps here, too, the metaphor derives from European categories. For in Europe the classics are enshrined in dead languages.

It may well be that the education of many of the early colonial officials who took an interest in things Malay, based on Latin and Greek, led them to look for and in part invent a classical Malay literature (in the European sense of the word); and to add to the corpus of 'classical' Malay works, they killed a genuine folk tradition by forcing specimens of it into the 'classical' mould. And thus it is that gems of folk tales such as *Malim Deman* and *Awang Sulung Merah Muda* are accessible today only in abridged, bowdlerised, linguistically standardized forms with numerous uncertain readings.¹⁵

These 'reductions' of real achievements of the folk imagination are of minor interest. But for a long time English educated Malays have taken them at their face value as genuinely representative of the Malay folk tradition, and regarded both of them and it with polite disinterest. The link that they furnish with a tradition that could provide sustenance to a modern writer of Malay, and thus make possible for him an appeal to an audience wider than that furnished by the educated urban minority is fragile indeed.

It will be seen then that remarks to the effect that the diction of the older language was worn out and had degenerated into clichés are an oversimplification. They do not boil down to much more than the observation that those traditional forms of the language accessible to urban, foreign educated speakers of Malay, lacked vitality; and that, for example, the *syair* written by these same urbanised Malay authors - such as Marah Rusli introduced into *Sitti Nurbaya* - smelt of the lamp.

For people such as Marah Rusli and Abdul Muis, and others like them were living in a new world: the world of the Malay court and the peasantry had been left behind for that of commerce, economic individualism and other secular activities. Traditional literary forms could not speak *directly* to them; and they could not reproduce them with the breath of life. But it does not, and did not necessarily follow that these forms had no function or continuing life of their own in a different environment - that of the rural community.

Yet the new generation of writers was not totally divorced from this tradition, even if its echoes were faint. For it was meaningful to their parents or grandparents, or at the very least some members of

their extended family with whom they had come into contact; it had some effect on their formation in childhood, and through this, something of the past flowed through their bones, and certain of the archetypes of their imagination were given shape by this past.

The strength and quality of this folk tradition in itself should not be underestimated, simply because so little of it is familiar or accessible in an authentic form. Yet if knowledge of the Malay folk story in the urban, foreign educated community is limited to half a dozen resumes, one oral form of literature has maintained its life and authenticity, even in an urban setting: the pantun. A pantun is not always at its best on the printed page, with no reference as to by whom or to whom it was uttered, where, when or on what occasion. Many however stand as gems of poetic achievement in their own right; outstanding by reason of their depth, universality, intensity and wit that enables the best of them to stand on equal terms with any comparable verse form in world literature.

One may refer to such examples as:

Di tenun kain dengan kapas
Bermacam-macam warna ragi
Perahu lilin layar kertas
Berani kulanggar lautan api.

A *kain* is woven from cotton
Woven with threads of many colours,
In a boat of wax with sails of paper
I dare to sail a sea of fire.

Burung merpati terbang seribu
Hinggap seekor di tengah 'laman'
Hendak mati di hujung kuku
Hendak berkubur di tapak tangan.

A thousand pigeons take flight
One alights in the forecourt;
I would die at the tip of a finger
Be buried in the palm of a hand.

Saya tidak segan menyapu
Sampah banyak si daun dedap
Saya tak segan membuka pintu
Ayah dan mak belum lelap.

I'm not unwilling to do the sweeping
There's much rubbish, and dedap leaves;
I'm not unwilling to open the door
Mother and Dad are not yet asleep.

or such individual lines as:

Bukan mudah bercerai kasih
Sebagai wau menanti angin

It's not easy, parted from love,
One is left like a kite, waiting for the wind.

Seperti kiamat di dalam hati.

Like Judgement Day in the heart.

In fact whatever the topic of any particular pantun, erotic, satirical or religious, the brevity of the form produces an impact that many a modern poet would envy. Thus there is considerable scope for the imagery and style of the pantun to be used and reworked by modern poets, transforming metaphors and images into symbols, in the same way as, say, Blake and Yeats drew on folk traditions as the well-spring of their poetry.

The starting point of modern authors writing in Malay is not easily defined. Nevertheless no poet can begin writing *tabula rasa*. And since, in practice, there is no 'classical' Malay tradition for them to reinterpret or extend, it is doubly important to get some idea of their spiritual ambiance, to discover the kind of cultural exploration and questioning that the loss of one sense of identity and the gaining of another is forcing upon them, as Malay develops from an ethnic language to a national language, an ethnic literature is forced to give way to that of a national multi-racial community and ultimately an ethnic culture is extended and transformed to a national culture. This change entails something of loss and gain. Lost is the specificity, freshness, colour and concreteness of the rural culture; gained is a heightened level of abstraction, individualism, and a wide range of cultural options.

It is this loss which presents a crucial challenge to modern authors: for how is it possible to ensure that development of an urban national culture does not culturally disenfranchise the rural population? There is no immediate answer to this question, although an important integrating component in the situation could be the Islamic religion because its universalism holds in its embrace the little world of the village, the bustling metropolis of the city and is a firm link with the international community of Islam.

The problem is a serious one, and in the last resort, the only key to its solution lies in the development of the individual author: what does he start from, how does he proceed. To understand this we need to learn something of the imaginative structure and formation of his mental world, both that deriving from his encounters with reality, and that extending and enriching his experience vicariously. For then it is possible to see the character of his individual talent, his relation to his own cultural heritage - whether rich or attenuated - and the impact upon him of European and other non-indigenous literary traditions. But what is tradition if it is to be understood in a dynamic sense, and not simply as a line of continuity? I see it as having to do with the relation of a writer to his past; as having to do with his role as an innovator, as having to do with his power of integration. The tension implicit in these three aspects of tradition when they are realised within an individual creates a new and more complex foundation for the further development of a culture, and a striking enrichment of its identity. They are to be found in Amir Hamzah, and a consideration of them reveals new perspectives of his talents, and illustrates something of acculturation in a more general sense.

According to received opinion, his relation to his past is simple. He was a Malay brought up in the literary world of a traditional Malay court, who for a fleeting moment brought that literary past back to life. Thus his death at the hands of social revolutionaries late in 1946 is seen as having a symbolic significance: that the past cannot be brought back to life. Which is as much as to say that he looked backwards but happened to move forwards.

Further, received opinion classifies him as a Muslim poet, as though his poetry were simply an expression of his religious piety.¹⁶ The reality is far more complex. His importance resides not in that he was a Muslim who wrote devotional poetry but that he was a poet, an individual within whom Islamic belief exercised a dynamic power to integrate various elements of diverse cultures to form a new whole in a way that is characteristic of the great tradition of Islam. And at a time (the early '30s) when the nascent Indonesian culture was to develop in a direction predominantly secular he showed the alternative possibility of a cultural expression of Islamic Humanism: a new culture that was genuinely Islamic and genuinely human.

The power to integrate diverse elements belongs in some degree to

every poet whatever his race or background. For an author writing in Malay in a world in a state of flux, surrounded by the quick sands of change and instability, to achieve this integration requires an imaginative thrust and intellectual grasp of an especially high order.

Each of the pioneers of the new Malay poetry began his career from the restricted base of one or other of the cultural options open to him which he then extended. Muhammad Yamin's point of departure was the discovery of the sonnet of the Dutch 80'ers which he used to express ideas of patriotism in Malay verse; but since he did not extend this base, his poetry never developed. Sanusi Pané started from the same base, but with the example of Yamin before him, then extended his intellectual range to take into his ambit the concepts and iconography of the Hindu Buddhist tradition as he discovered it in India and Java. Chairil Anwar's base has certain key ideas of the French symbolist movement which he extended dramatically, seizing upon elements both in European and to a certain degree local poetic traditions, forcing them to yield to the demands of his poetic personality. Of these three poets, only Chairil Anwar shows a continuing extension of intellectual grasp and a growth in complexity; and although it now appears that his greatest achievement was to integrate certain western concepts of poetry into Malay, the roots of his intuitive mastery of the resources of Malay have yet to be studied.

Amir Hamzah, although writing several years earlier demonstrates precisely the same capacity to extend his base, to integrate a wide range of cultural elements. He saw himself as an individual at a particular point on several lines of tradition, and succeeded in drawing them together tight in a knot. No less than Chairil, he was dominated by an overwhelmingly felt experience that demanded expression. It was not the experience of Chairil, for his personality was formed in a different world. Chairil's background was that of an aspirant middle class Minangkabau 'emigre' in the big city of Medan; an expatriate, thrown on his own resources. Amir Hamzah was an aristocrat, brought up in a self-contained world, a court culture in which ceremonial Malay still had a function. This both influenced his personality and taste, and developed in him a feeling for language different from that of Chairil. He was the only significant pre-war poet writing in Malay whose knowledge of Malay was gained from a living tradition of the language, not studied as a subject in the framework of the Dutch school

curriculum. This, combined with his temperament led him to explore paths closed to Chairil, and to find an enrichment in worlds closed to the later poet.

The differing background and cast of mind of the two men determined their reading; their experience determined the use they made of what they read and the way in which it enhanced and extended that experience to such effect that what each of them read found a response in his own soul.

In Amir's case this happened to be mystical poetry of a kind that matched his religious moods. Amir was a person of integrity, of sensibility and a keen religious sense, all these qualities infused his attitudes and responses. Yet he was not a mystic. His religious sense had the freshness and intensity with the emotional penumbra that often accompanies religious fervour in late adolescence and early adulthood: it is a phenomenon as familiar in Islam as in Christianity. When with the passing of adolescence this penumbra disappears, religious faith may be lost completely, or after a period of bewilderment and frustration, be re-established. This is not to be confused with that stage of mystical experience known as the Dark Night of the Soul.

Such a period of frustration and bewilderment was one personal crisis that Amir had to endure; another culminated in his decision to sacrifice the personal freedom he enjoyed in Batavia and the love of the Javanese girl he wished to marry, and to return home to Binjai to accept his 'feudal' responsibilities. Much that is obscure and ambivalent in his poetry - written between the age of 19 and 27 - becomes clear if we accept this diagnosis of two crises. They may not have each been distinct in his mind; one may have intensified the other, the vocabulary of one may have overlapped with that of the other: there may be ambiguity, but not a Freudian type of ambivalence which would have the love of a girl projected on to the numinous concept of the divinity.

The starting point of his career as a poet was the tradition of Malay poetry in which he had been brought up, which he exploited and developed to write of subjects by and large secular: his loneliness and homesickness, his romantic poetry and later that astonishing *tour de force* 'Hang Tuah'. These are the poems of the collection *Buah Rindu*.¹⁷ Although it is easy to summarize them as a temporary return to life of old Malay diction, yet they are not to any degree older in

style than that of many of the poems written during the 30s. Amir's vocabulary is richer; but more important in that he is communicating experience with a refreshing kind of directness: whether he is cradling a girl friend's head on his lap, turning back to the garden of his childhood - effectively using the symbol of the garden as a universal archetype - or investing the name of the legendary Malay hero Hang Tuah with a symbolic sense.¹⁸

The paradox of the poem 'Hang Tuah' is that it could have been written without the poet ever having read the voluminous and often boring Hikayat of the same name. A summary of one episode of the story would have been sufficient for Amir's needs. The force, speed and concentrated unsentimental pathos of Amir's poem owe nothing to the older literature. The achievement of the poem is to have transformed the older figure into a symbol and myth of the Malay world, with perhaps Hang Tuah's failure paralleling Amir's sense of his ineffectiveness.¹⁹ The poem may be compared to Chairil's 'Diponegoro' - where a figure from the past is also used symbolically. Few would disagree that 'Hang Tuah' is the better poem.

The collection of later poems, *Nyanyi Sunyi*,²⁰ consists exclusively of religious verse: exploring areas of experience more solemn and more anguished than those to be found in *Buah Rindu*, although not all of them are, for that reason, better poems. More important for the purposes of this paper, is the bold extension of his starting point, the wide range of traditions that contributes to his work and the sureness and strength with which he integrates them into something new.

The poems of *Buah Rindu*, despite some Javanese influence on diction and rhetoric, belong culturally to the Malay world but not for that reason the world of old Malay. And the poems that succeed, succeed because he is looking at things in a new way. This in itself is an achievement; for one of the roles of a poet is to bring new things out of old. The great achievement of *Nyanyi Sunyi* is to bring in new things.

Chairil extended his poetic range by translations. Amir reached out for 'new things' in the same way, and has left an impressive body of translations. Some were published in *Pujangga Baru*, including the *Bhagavad Gita*, and excerpts from the Song of Songs;²¹ others appeared in the collection *Setinggi Timur*²² - fragments of works by Omar Khayyam Kabir, ibn Farid and several others, including Chinese, Japanese and

Turkish authors, all accessible to him in Dutch translations. The range of religious styles that he handled would today be called ecumenical, notwithstanding that there was no wavering in his personal commitment to Islam.

The role of these translations in his personal development and illustrations of how he related to particular traditions and the way in which they inspired him have not been discussed. Yet some of them are intimately related to his original work. Thus they form a documentation of the building blocks of his mind, furnish examples of his selectivity, show the ideas which fecundated his own verbalisations, through which he discovered the images and even the phrases that were to appear in his original poetry.

This is not to suggest that everything he translated is directly relevant to his own poetry. Selectivity is a key word. His rendering of the *Bhagavad Gita* in *Pujangga Baru* is felicitous and moving, but it appears to have had no direct influence on his original work. On the other hand his brief selection from the Song of Songs does illustrate themes which were personally important to him.

His knowledge of the Bible probably dates from the period spent at a Protestant School in Batavia. It is of course misleading to speak simply of 'the Bible': the Bible is not so much a book as a library, comprising various works in different styles and forms, and from different periods. This, of course, holds for the Old Testament as for the New. None of the books of the New Testament appear to have made any impact on his imagination. But there are certain parts of the Old Testament, including those presenting material shared with the Islamic tradition that appealed both to his formal religious sense, and served as symbols for states of his own mind. Thus we see in his work an acquaintance with Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy and the Psalms.

We have already mentioned that he translated (from Dutch) some verses from the Song of Songs, sometimes known as the Song of Solomon.

The Song of Songs is a series of eight poems. There are two speakers, a Bride and a Groom, who call to one another, seeking each other, and continually lose each other just as they are about to meet face to face; in attendance is a chorus.

The immediate appeal of the Song to him lay in its nature imagery and emotional intensity. But it also spoke to him at a much deeper level. The passages he chooses to translate appear at first sight to

be taken at random, for they give no idea of the structure of the poem. The parts that he has translated are I: 2, 9, 15; II: 10-14; IV: 1, 7-16 and V: 1-16. The verses taken from I, II and IV pay no regard to the structure of the dialogue. This is in part because the Dutch²³ version that Amir was using did not make clear who was speaking which lines; yet this is not important: for the verses that he chose were not determined by logic, but by the demands of his personality which was captured by the sheer beauty of the descriptions, and the intensity of the cries of anguish and unfulfilled longing. A discussion of his renderings, poem by poem will make this clear. I have indicated the speakers of the verses as appropriate:

I

- 2 Bride: Dicumanya aku dengan kucupan bibirnya:
karena kasihmu lebih utama dari anggur.
- 9 Groom: Kekasihku! kubandingan tuan dengan tezi rata
Fir'un.
- 15 Groom: Lihatlah, alangkah manisnya tuan, Kekasihku!
lihatlah alangkah cantiknya tuan; matamu mata
merpati.

(The Song of Songs, which is Solomons's)

- 2 Bride: Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. Your
love is more delightful than wine;
- 9 Groom: To my mare harnessed to Pharaoh's chariot I compare
you, my love.
- 15 Groom: How beautiful you are, my love,
how beautiful you are!
Your eyes are doves.

The erotic intensity of I: 2 is obvious; *karena* appears to introduce a non-sequitur, but this is due to the Dutch text which Amir has rendered literally.²⁴ It is not clear from the Dutch that the 'horses of Pharaoh', in I: 9 mare, and that therefore this line is appropriate to the Groom.²⁵ I: 5 is a romantic exclamation of delight of the Groom for the Bride; the metaphor 'Your eyes are dove's eyes' must have struck an immediate chord in Amir's sensibilities.²⁶

II

- 10 Bride: Menjawab kekasihku, katanya: Bangkitlah sahabatku,
intanku mari!
- 11 Lihatlah, musim dingin telah lampau, hujan lebat
telah teduh, telah berhenti.

- 12 Bunga telah memecah kelopak, musim dendang telah
tiba, suara tekukur 'lah terdengar di negeri kita.
- 13 Pohon ara menjulang buah, junjungan anggur yang
membuai putik, menyerak harum. Bangkitlah saha-
batku, jiwaku, mari!
- 14 Groom: Balamku! walaupun tuan di celah-celah jurang, ter-
sembunyi dalam tempat yang curam, tunjukkanlah
rupamu; dengarkanlah suaramu; karena suaramu merdu,
rupamu permai.
- 10 Bride: My Beloved lifts up his voice,
 he says to me,
 'Come then, my love,
 my lovely one, come.
- 11 For see, winter is past,
 the rains are over and gone.
- 12 The flowers appear on the earth.
 The season of glad songs has come,
 the cooing of the turtledove is heard
 in our land.
- 13 The fig tree is forming its first figs
 and the blossoming vines give out their fragrance.
 Come then, my love,
 my lovely one, come.
- 14 Groom: My dove, hiding in the clefts of the rock,
 in the coverts of the cliff,
 show me your face,
 let me hear your voice;
 for your voice is sweet
 and your face is beautiful.'

II: 10-13 are uttered by the Bride, repeating joyfully to herself the words with which the Groom answered her when she called him. Their appeal to Amir is clearly in the passionate excitement they express, and the beauty of the imagery which he renders superbly: the ceasing of the heavy rains, the spring flowers opening their petals, the singing of the birds, and the call of the turtle dove.

II: 14 is uttered by the Groom who now the Bride is awaiting him, has lost his way to her. He imagines her concealed in holes in the cliffs or crannies on the high ledges, and calls to her in anguish:

Tunjukkanlah rupamu, dengarkanlah suaramu

Show me your face, let me hear your voice.

- 1 Groom: Masuk aku kedalam tamanku, ya adikku, jambangan mata! Kupetik buah mur dan rempah-rempahanku; kuminum maduku seraya kumakan sarangnya, telah kurasa anggurku dan susuku. Makan, sahabatku! Minum, dan mabuklah, ya kekasihku!
- 2 Bride: Tidur aku; tetapi hatiku berjaga; suara kekasihku mengetuk, katanya: 'Bukai aku, adikku, sahabatku, merpatiku, utama jiwa! basahlah huluku oleh embun, ikai suraiku, oleh lembab malam.
- 3 Telah kutanggalkan kainku; bagaimana pula aku mengenakannya? Telah kubasuh kakiku, bagaimana pula aku mencemarkannya?
- 4 Di lepaskan kekasihku tangannya dari lobang pintu; dan isi perutku berduka oleh karenanya.
- 5 Akupun bangun akan membukai kekasihku; tanganku basah oleh mur dan jariku menitikkan mur yang mengalir pada hulu kunci.
- 6 Kubukai akan kekasihku, tetapi emasku telah undur; telah lalu; terbang semangatku karena katanya; ku-cari ia tetapi tiada ia menyahut.
- 7 Kawal yang mengelilingi kota melihat daku; di pukulnya, di lukainya aku; kawal di atas dewala mengambil tudungku.
- 8 Kupohonkan padamu, ya dara Baitulmukaddis! kalau engkau bertemu dengan kekasihku, apakah yang engkau katakan?
- 1 Groom: I come into my garden,
my sister, my promised bride,
I gather my myrrh and balsam,
I eat my honey and my honeycomb,
I drink my wine and my milk.
Eat, friends, and drink,
drink deep, my dearest friends.
- 2 Bride: I sleep, but my heart is awake.
I hear my Beloved knocking.
'Open to me, my sister, my love,
my dove, my perfect one,
for my head is covered with dew,
my locks with the drops of night.'
- 3 'I have taken off my tunic,
am I to put it on again?
I have washed my feet,
am I to dirty them again?'

- 4 My Beloved thrust his hand
through the hole in the door;
I trembled to the core of my being.
- 5 Then I rose
to open to my Beloved.
myrrh ran off my hands,
pure myrrh off my fingers,
on to the handle of the bolt.
- 6 I opened to my Beloved
but he had turned his back and gone!
My soul failed at his flight.
I sought him but I did not find him,
I called to him but he did not answer.
- 7 The watchmen came upon me
as they made their rounds in the City.
They beat me, they wounded me,
they took away my cloak,
they who guard the ramparts.
- 8 I charge you,
daughters of Jerusalem,
if you should find my Beloved,
what must you tell him...?
That I am sick with love.

9 Companions:

(Chorus) Apakah kelebihan kekasihmu daripada yang lain,
ya kusuma dara! Apakah kelebihanannya daripada
yang lain, maka kami tuan pesani? 27

- 9 Chorus What makes your Beloved better than other lovers,
 O loveliest of women?
 What makes your Beloved better than other lovers,
 to give us charge like this?

In the six remaining verses not quoted here, the Bride justifies her plea to the companions to seek the Groom for her and tell him of her love.

The core of V is the words of the Bride:

Tidur aku; tetapi hatiku berjaga.

I sleep, but my heart is awake.

She sleeps, but her heart is awake, awaiting the visitation of her beloved. When he knocks on the door and calls her, she thrills with joy, although pretending to demur. As he places his hand upon the latch, she rises to let him in, but on reaching the door, finds that he has vanished. She runs through the streets seeking him, and is

beaten by the guards for breaking the curfew. She calls to the daughters of the city, (the chorus) asking them to pass on to him the message of her love. But they reply in scorn - 'What is so special about your Beloved that we should have to find him for you?'

Scriptural exegetists have written much on the Song of Songs. These are not important for us, for Amir was responding to the text as a man, not a scripture scholar. A man concerned with the beauty of nature and seeking love; finding its footsteps, attempting to trace them, and losing them again. But what kind of love? One common allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs is that of the human soul seeking God. It is likely that Amir knew it, and used this imagery to express his longing for a sense of the presence of God. The delicate but intense eroticism in V communicates an overwhelming sense of expectation that fulfilment is at hand; in contrast to it is the anguished sense of loss. The Groom has come close enough to the Bride to awaken her longing, but then melted away, as though he had never existed, leaving her to roam through the streets distraught in search of him.

In II: 10-14 on the other hand it was the Bride who had called the Groom to her across a world bursting with spring, and then withdrawn herself, leaving him to seek her in holes in the cliffs, and in crannies on the high ledges, crying: 'let me see your face, let me hear your voice.'

The intensity of the rendering of these cries of longing is convincing proof that the images of the Song of Songs expressed something profound in Amir's own experience: his search for something, surely the presence of God; no sooner did he feel he had attained it than it vanished, leaving him to start the search again, only to meet disappointment once more. And this is one of the dominant themes of the collection *Nyanyi Sunyi*.

The Song of Songs is the only direct translation from a book of the Bible; but in some of the poems of *Nyanyi Sunyi* are echoes of the Psalms. 'Hanyut Aku'²⁸ (I'm Adrift) is a striking example.

Hanyut aku, kekasihku!
Hanyut aku!
Ulurkan tanganmu, tolong aku.
Sunyinya sekelilingku!
Tiada suara kasihan, tiada angin mendingin hati,
tiada air menolak ngelak.
Dahagakan kasihmu, hauskan bisikmu, mati aku sebabkan
diammu.

To you alone I have recourse
In this moment of total darkness.

He found in the Psalms the same shouts and cries of pain as he felt himself, and in finding a voice that shared his pain, he was able to transform an expression of the maudlin depression of adolescence into a poem of genuine power, comparable perhaps to Hopkins 'terrible' sonnets.

The volume *Setanggi Timur* (Incense of the East) did not appear until 1939. The translations it contains were made earlier however: Jassin suggests that he prepared them in 1934 from various Dutch sources to illustrate a series of lectures he gave on Eastern Literature.³¹ This means that they were part of his imaginative experience well before he wrote the poems to be published in *Nyanyi Sunyi* in 1937.

As the name of the volume 'Incense of the East' implies, all are from writings originally in Asian Languages. But as with the other translations, only a few are directly expressive of his own experience.

The longest single item is a selection of 34 stanzas³² from a Dutch rendering of Fitzgerald's version of the *Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam*. The arrangement of the verses is quite arbitrary. Amir retains nothing of Fitzgerald's order, or indeed any kind of order at all. For example stanza 1 in Fitzgerald is 21 in Amir's anthology, 2 in Fitzgerald is 33 in Amir, and 3 in Fitzgerald is 32 in Amir.

The renderings are accurate and felicitous, but although he maintains the four line stanza of the *Rubaiyyat*, the verse is free rhythmically, and no single end-line rhyme scheme is maintained. Despite the length of the extract however it contains virtually nothing that Amir developed in his original work.

In other, briefer, extracts in the anthology, however, chords are struck which resound in the poems of *Nyanyi Sunyi*. Consider the rendering from Kabir:

Tuan tidur dari abad keabad,
Jagalah, hatiku, jaga
Pada subuh-sentosa, jika embun menyejuk rumput.
Hendakkah tuan selalu bisu selaku batu,
Hatiku, aduh hatiku?

33

Lord, you slumber from age to age
Awake my heart, awake
In the stillness of dawn, when the dew cools the grass
Lord, are you always to be dumb as a stone,
my heart, alas my heart.

Jagalah, hatiku jaga (Awake my heart, awake) echoes his rendering of a line from the Song of Songs: *Tidur aku; tapi hatiku berjaga* (I sleep, but my heart is awake (V: 2)) as he calls on his heart to remain awake to be ready to receive divine solace in case it comes.

Hendakkah tuan selalu bisu selaku batu (Lord, are you always to be dumb as a stone) expresses one of the key themes in *Nyanyi Sunyi* and shows that Amir has discovered and felt as his own, the expression of another man's aching loneliness before the silence of God. It is also important to observe that even in this translation one can recognize the development of one of Amir's rhetorical styles, with the carefully patterned assonances:

embun menyejuk rumput
the dew cools the grass
and selalu bisu selaku batu
always dumb as a stone.

A translation from ibn Farid expresses an ecstatic awareness of the Divine Immanence:

Yang Menjadikan terkandung
Dalam segala yang dijadikan
Dan yang dijadikan
Tersimpul dalam yang Menjadikan.³⁴

The Creator is contained
Within all he has made
And what is made
Is within the Creator.

a concept that Amir is fond of exploring and testing as in

Kalau aku dalam engkau
Dan engkau dalam aku
Adakah begini jadinya
Aku hamba engkau pengulu?³⁵

If I am within you
And you within me
Would it be still like this
I the servant, you the Lord.

Another author in the collection who expresses ideas that overlapped with his own was Rav-Das. Among the lines of his that Amir renders are the following:

Kalau Engkau bukit
Akulah meraknya
Jika senda cuaca purnama
Akulah burung cakora.

Jangan aku ditinggalkan, ya Rabbi, padaMulah aku tetap
Kalau tiada dengan Dikau, dengan siapa aku berjalan?

Jika Engkau, ya Rabbi
Aku sumbu di dalamnya
Engkau arca kurnia
Akulah penziarahnya, ya Gusti.

Kasih mengikat aku dan Engkau, Tuhanku
Bebat lain telah keputuskan
Ke mana aku pergi, selama aku hambaMu
Tiada lain Gusti melainkan Diri.

Tiada maut menjerat siapa
Yang hanya
Memuji Senda.

Rav-Das menyanyi, Tuhannya dipuji.³⁶

If you are the hill
I am the peacock
If you are the moonlight
I am the cakora bird.

Do not abandon me, O Lord
To you I cleave;
If not with you, with whom shall I walk.

If you O, Lord, are the candle
I am the wick within it,
If you are the statue of favour
I, O Lord, am its pilgrim.

Love binds you and me, O, Lord
All other bonds have I broken
Where I go, always am I your servant
There is no Lord, other than you (or: the Self).

Death will ensnare no one
Who only
Praises you
Rav-Das sings, his Lord is praised.

The first four lines of the poem are reminiscent of pantun, particularly in the apposition of metaphors. The appeal of the form to Amir can readily be understood. But the poignant expression of devotion

Jangan aku di tinggalkan, ya Rabbi, padaMulah aku tetap

Do not abandon me, O Lord, to you I cleave
is Amir's own, just as is the feeling of the Divine Immanence:

Tiada lain Gusti melainkan Diri.

There is no Lord but you (or: the Self).

Various of the other poems in the collections embroider these ideas and emotions: the pain of loneliness, a longing to feel the presence of God. Some make use of attractive poetic 'conceits' to express the Union of Lord and Servant, as in the anonymous couplet from the Turkish

Aduh, kekasihku, semoga dapat aku berbuni dalam sajakku
Kan mengucup bibirmu-bergerak, sedang engkau
menghapal dia 37

O, my Beloved, would that I could hide within my verse
And kiss your lips while you recited it.

And the lines from Kemalpasazade (Kemalpascha Saidi Ahmad in Amir's transliteration)

Inilah, Tuhanku, untukmu pujian-rayu:
Kami duli menjadi mutiara!
Tetapi kini, hasrat senantiasa padaMu jua:
Balikkah mutiara menjadi hina? 38

This, my Lord, for you is the greatest praise
We, the dust, become pearls!
But now, always yearning for you
Can the pearls turn back to dust.

In this stanza is embedded the phrase *padamu jua* - the title of the first, and perhaps the most perfect poem in *Nyanyi Sunyi*. And in fact, this poem is a marvellous example of how the whole range of cultural elements and traditions that extended the range of his reference points, have come together and become transformed, adding a new depth to the generally lyric character of his verse.

PADAMU JUA

Habis kikis
Segala cintaku hilang terbang
Pulang kembali aku padamu
Seperti dahulu

Kaulah kandil kemerlap
Pelita jendela di malam gelap

Melambai pulang perlahan
Sabar, setia selalu

Satu kekasihku
Aku manusia
Rindu rasa
Rindu rupa

Di mana engkau
Rupa tiada
Suara sayup
Hanya kata merangkai hati

Engkau cemburu
Engkau ganas
Mangsa aku dalam cakarmu
Bertukar tangkap dengan lepas

Nanar aku, gila sasar
Sayang berulang padamu jua
Engkau pelik menarik ingin
Serupa dara di balik tirai

Kasihmu sunyi
Menunggu seorang diri
Lalu waktu - bukan giliranku 39
Mati hari - bukan kawanku...

To You Alone

It is finished
All other love is fled
And now I return to you
As before.

You are a gleaming candle
The light in the window on a dark night
beckoning home gently
patient and ever faithful.

One, is my Beloved
I am human
Long for touch
Long for form

Where are you
You have no form
Your voice is distant
Only your word binds the heart.

You are jealous
You are ferocious
I am prey in your claws
As you seize, let go, and seize again.

I am torn apart, insane
And yet still I return to you

You are enigmatic, awaking longing
like a maiden behind a curtain

Your love is lonely
waiting alone
Time passes by - it is not my turn
the day has died -
[time passes by] but not my Friend.

The technical skill of the poem is as remarkable as the intensity of experience that it communicates.

It will be noticed for example how the rhythmically awkward line from *Kemalpasa*

tetapi kini, hasrat senantiasa padaMu jua

But now my yearning is for you alone

has been transformed to

pulang kembali aku padamu

I return to you.

This suggests something of the way in which Amir applied his craftsmanship.

But craftsmanship apart, the richness of the poem derives from the diverse elements that it holds together.

The metaphor *Kaulah kandil kemerlap* (You are a gleaming candle) for example is not uncommon, and it is presented in another aspect in the lines of Rav-Das already quoted

Jika Engkau kandil, ya Rabbi
Aku sumbu di dalamnya

If you, O Lord, are the candle,
I am the wick within it.

It is one of those metaphors which, if the diction is right have a universal power. One need only think of Portia's lines in the *Merchant of Venice*:⁴⁰

How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

and in Amir's Malay the presentation is so effective that it is as if one were reading it for the first time.

In the succeeding two groups of four lines appear the same expression of anguish and loneliness that we saw in the Psalms:

Aku manusia
Rindu rasa
Rindu rupa

I am human
Long for touch
Long for form

coming to a climax in the cry

Di mana engkau⁴¹

Where are you.

This longing for a knowledge of God through the senses of sight, hearing and touch, is an echo of the cry of the Groom in The Song of Songs (II: 14)

Walaupun tuan dicelah-celah jurang, tersembunyi dalam tempat yang curam, tunjukkanlah rupamu; dengarkanlah suaramu, karena suaramu merdu, rupamu permai.

Even though you are in the clefts of the rocks, hidden within the steep places, show your face

Make heard your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face beautiful.

The agonised

Engkau cemburu
Engkau ganas

You are jealous
You are ferocious

may be an echo of Exodus 20: 4 'For I, Yahweh, your God, am a jealous God'; or Deuteronomy 4: 24 'For Yahweh your God, is a consuming fire, a jealous God.'

The erotic image of God arousing in the creature's heart a longing for him, like a maiden hidden behind a veil, suggests a direct parallelism with the Bride hiding in the cliffs and crannies of the rocks while the Groom seeks her (II: 14) and an inverted parallelism with the Groom knocking on the door to call the Bride to him (V: 2).

Amir has succeeded in integrating a whole range of his experience, in part direct and personal, in part vicarious, through his reading,

and to create from the total something new. His reading, his translations, his technical exercises, the mysterious alchemy of his unconscious, and his own total experience of life, have been at work together. The poem then is successful because it holds together in a luminous simplicity a wide range of cultural resources which all are subordinated to communicating an experience recognizable by all the family of man.

The same richness and complexity occurs in 'Barangkali':

BARANGKALI

Engkau yang lena dalam hatiku
Akasa swarga nipis-tipis
Yang besar terangkum dunia
Kecil terlindungi alis

Kujungjung di atas hulu
Kupuji dipuncuk lidah
Kupangku dilengan lagu
Kudaduhkan diselendang dendang

Bangkit Gunung
Buka mata-mutiara-mu
Sentuh kecapai firdusi
Dengan jarimu menirus halus

Biar siuman dewi-nyanyi
Gambuh asmara lurus lampai
Lemah ramping melidah api
Halus harum mengasap keramat

Mari menari dara asmara
Biar terdengar swara swarna
Barangkali mati di pantai hati
Gelombang kenang membanting diri.⁴²

Perhaps

You, who slumber within my heart
Subtle beyond the firmament of heaven,
Who in your greatness enfold the world
Yet tiny lie hidden beneath an eyebrow

I honour you
I praise you on the tip of my tongue
I cradle you in the arms of song
I sing you a lullaby in a shawl of melody.

Mountains arise
Open your eyes of pearl
Stroke your heavenly lute
With your fine tapering fingers

Let the goddess of song awake
The dancer of love lissom, slender
delicate as a thin flame
gentle, fragrant, incense burning, sacred.

Let the maiden of love dance,
let her golden voice be heard
Perhaps will die on the shore of the heart
The waves of memory beating themselves there.

The first stanza, with its image of the divine reality slumbering within the human heart, yet enfolding everything that is made, echoes the translation from ibn Farid:

Yang Menjadikan terkandung
Dalam segala yang dijadikan
Dan yang dijadikan
Tersimpul dalam yang Menjadikan

The Creator is contained
In all that is made
And what is made
Is enfolded within the Creator.

The second stanza tells how the poet expresses his worship:

Kupuji dipucuk lidah
Kupangku dilengan lagu
Kudaduhkan diselendang dendang

I praise you with my tongue
I cradle you in the arms of song
I sing you a lullaby in a shawl of melody.

The image in the second two lines 'I cradle You in the arms of song, I sing to You a lullaby in a shawl of melody', with its suggestions of anthropomorphism, is at first sight daring. Yet the anthropomorphism is only apparent.

The poet is worshipping God through his recitation of the Qur'an, the uncreated Word of God. Quranic recitation is a great art form. It is performed in a wide range of melodies and styles, according to the sense and rhythms of the Quranic passage recited. And on the tongue of an accomplished reciter, the word of God resounds with an incredible beauty and power. Some styles require the repetition of certain phrases, and I recall how a reciter of the Light Verse, when he came to the words *Nurun ala nurin* (Light upon Light)⁴³ repeated them again and again, literally cradling them in the embrace of the melody. Thus what appears to be anthropomorphism is a vivid metonymy: it is not God, but

His Word, that is cradled.

The following two stanzas express an ecstatic sense of exultation created by the recitation of the Qur'an, which draws on various images of mystical literature. But in the last two lines of the poem, the mood suddenly changes:

Barangkali mati di pantai hati
Gelombang kenang membanting diri

'Perhaps the waves of memory, beating themselves against the shore of the heart will die there...'

The contrast between these two lines and those preceding comes with such force as to show that far from being simply a change of mood at the end of the poem, they are implicit in its beginning. Earlier in this essay I referred to Amir's religious crisis: the loss of the instinctive religious fervours and sense of the presence of God that he knew in adolescence and early manhood. I understand the words *gelombang kenang* (waves of memory) as referring to the waves of memory surging from the time when he could feel God within his heart, pray to him, and by prayer be roused to ecstasy: a time that is no more. The sensible religious fervour, the emotional penumbra of an adolescent response to religion has vanished, and he aches with the longings aroused by its memory. Perhaps the memory too will die...

In this poem we have identified once again a profound, universal experience, orchestrated by points of contact with various traditions that Malay, in Amir's hands, expresses effortlessly, plumbing all their depths.

Not all of the poems in *Nyanyi Sunyi*⁴⁴ have the richness and tension of these two. Indeed, in the later poems in the volume one has the sense of passing from tension to resolution, from complexity to simplicity, indeed to a childlike simplicity, as in 'Ibuku dahulu', of which the argument is: just as when he was a child, and his mother, angry with him, refused to speak to him yet, still she watched over him; so God, father, mother and Beloved all in one, despite His silence, watches over him in the world. There is no longer the intensity of the earlier poems, but we are still confronted with the plaint of Kabir:

Hendakkah tuan selalu bisu selaku batu.

Lord, are you to be always dumb as a stone.

The simplicity is apparent in the final poem of the volume 'Istana Rela'.

ISTANA RELA

Tiada bersua dalam dunia
Tiada mengapa hatiku sayang;
Tiada dunia tempat selama
Layangkan angan meninggi awan

Jangan percaya hembusan cedera
Berkata tiada hanya dunia
Tilikkan tajam mata kepala
Sungkumkan sujud hati sanubari

Mula segala tiada ada
Pertengahan masa kita bersua
Ketika tiga bercerai ramai
Di waktu tertentu berpandang terang

Kalau kekasihmu hasratkan dikau
Restu sempana memangku daku
Tiba masa kita berdua
Berkaca bahagia di air mengalir

Bersama kita mematah buah
Sempana kerja di muka dunia
Bunga cerca melayu lipu
Hanya bahagia tersenyum harum

Disitu baru kita berdua
Sama merasa, sama membaca
Tulisan cuaca rangkaian mutiara
Di mahkota gapura istana rela. 45

Palace of Grace

We are not to meet in this world
My heart, do not grieve for this
The world does not endure forever
Cast your yearnings beyond the clouds

Do not believe the treacherous whisper
Which says there is only this world
Use your eyes keenly, sharply
Let your heart be prostrate in worship.

In the beginning there was nothing
Then, in time, we met
And after that, we parted
But at a certain time, will meet face to face.

If your love yearns for me
And your blessings support me,
Then the time will come, when we both
See our reflections in the flowing stream.

Together we will pluck the fruit
of good deeds done in the world;
Words of scorn will fade away
Only happiness will fragrantly smile.

There at last, we two together
will make out, will recite together
The bright writing set out in pearls
On the crown of the archway of the palace of grace.

There is perhaps an ambiguity in the poem. Given its place at the end of the volume, a superficial reader, knowing that Amir gave up a girl he loved in Java in order to marry an ugly princess of his family's choice might see it as meaning that he gave up his beloved in this world in the hope of seeing her again in Paradise. This would be unworthy of a man of Amir's integrity. It must express his resignation to the fact that he will not see God in this world. Here and now, God must remain, in Kabir's words.

Selalu bisu selaku batu - ever dumb as a stone

but that in the world to come it will be different: there he will see God.

This poem is set in the 'Garden of Heaven', to which he aspires. In an earlier poem in the collection, 'Taman Dunia',⁴⁶ he gives a contrasting picture of life in this world in which his Beloved, the Creator, has placed him. After showing him its beauties, the Beloved whispers to him '*Taman swarga, taman swarga mutiara rupa*' (The Garden of Heaven, the Garden of Heaven is in the form of pearls) and then vanishes. The poet is left desperate for the future meeting implicitly promised by this whisper.

The key stanza in 'Istana Rela' is the third: in the beginning there was nothing; then God created Amir *pertengahan masa kita bersua* (In the midst of time we met), then hid Himself from him *ketika tiga bercerai ramai* (At a third moment we parted), but finally at a predestined moment, they are to see each other face to face, in Paradise *di waktu tertentu berpandang terang* (At a certain time will meet face to face), and Amir's poem presents the picture of heaven revealed in the Qur'an: the rivers, the precious fruit, the lustrous pearls, the joy. This doctrine of the Beatific Vision that the just shall see their Lord is one of the central articles of the Islamic Creed; and the bitter polemics against the Mu'tazilites who denied this Vision lasted for centuries. The Traditions attesting it are numerous. The most famous of them is: 'And they shall see Him as clearly as they see the full moon on a cloudless night.'⁴⁷ It was with this article of Faith that he has to sustain his religious belief when God's silence exposed him to the

temptation to abandon religion altogether.⁴⁸

Jangan percaya hembusan cedera
Berkata tiada hanya dunia.

Do not believe the deceitful whisper
Which says there is only this world.

Understood in this way the poem shows us Amir's final resolution of his religious crisis, and as such is a fitting conclusion to the volume.

This is but an outline of Amir's intellectual growth. It attempts to show him as a man with a drive to communicate certain areas of experience, and who to do this, in reaching out to diverse cultural traditions to extend the verbal resonances of his thought and feelings, showed a masterly power of integration.

Taking his own Malay court tradition, and his membership of the community of Islam as starting points, he used his knowledge of Dutch to learn something of a wide range of religious belief and devotion. That he did this through reading is to his credit; indeed it is the practice of any poet who aspires to move beyond the oral tradition or the limitations of his own experience. John Press remarks: 'A naive prejudice still lingers on that a poet who draws upon his memories of books, or whose verse is filled with echoes of other men's words, is less original and virile than one who reproduces his memories of the external world. The truth is that almost every poet of merit has drawn upon his reading in order to enrich his experience of daily life, and to impose a coherent order upon the whirling images that clamour for admission to the body of his verse... poets as diverse as Coleridge, Virgil and Petronius all believed in vast reading as the mainspring of inspiration, a view shared by Milton who, although he dutifully attributed his flow of verse to the visitation of the Muse, prudently spent his evenings reading 'some choice Poets, by way of refreshment after the day's toyl, and to store his Fancy against Morning'.⁴⁹

This ability to absorb traditions and techniques and put them together to create out of them something new is an ability that Amir Hamzah has in common with Chairil Anwar. For Chairil too, although from a different social class, and familiar with a different dialect of Malay had the uncanny ability to relate to the experience in the work of poet in a foreign cultural tradition, and out of that shared

experience, to create something new in Malay. Both have in common the fact that neither went overseas: the traditions they met in exile, not on their own soil.

It was for later poets to meet the foreign tradition in its homeland - with varying results. The first, and in some ways the best example of these is Sitor Situmorang. His way of thinking is closer to that of the Malay tradition than was Chairil's; he was able to extend the flexibility and rhythm of the quatrain, and to make something new out of the Malay 'sonnet' which had become popular in the pre-war years, using it as a vehicle to communicate ambivalences and tensions whereas Sanusi Pané had only used it to paint pictures of physical sights or moods. To this he added his experience of and response to Paris and Europe: aided perhaps by his Christian upbringing. And in some of his poems and short stories he communicates a vivid sense of place and atmosphere far removed from Indonesia, whether it is an Italian mountain village, the Easter vigil at the Cathedral of Chartres in Spring, or the white carpet of snow descending over Paris in winter. Little reflection is needed to gauge the measure of this achievement in a linguistic medium fashioned in a tropical country.

It is instructive to compare the achievement of these poets, i.e. Amir, Chairil and Sitor, in enlarging the intellectual compass and cultural diversity of a modernising, integrating, 'extended' Malay culture with that of Rendra, which despite its colour and exuberance lacks the intellectual breadth, genuine cultural richness and verbal craftsmanship of the earlier authors.

In approaching a modern writing in Malay, the westerner is likely to be troubled by a sense of *deja vu*; that what he sees now he has seen before. Teeuw hints at this when he seeks to defend Pramudya from the criticism that the characters in his novels are 'flat' by saying 'flat characters were at first recognised as a typical phenomenon in Western novels and not only in the worst of these novels'.⁵⁰ This view seems to me to be the result of a misdirected historicism. The characterisation of an author such as Fielding and his intrusions into his narrative present no difficulty to the educated modern reader, who accepts the rhetorical form in which Fielding was writing, and appreciates his intellectual vitality, his art, wisdom and uninhibited sense of fun. Pramudya's presentation of 'flat characters' in itself is neither a strength or weakness; it is one aspect of his rhetoric. The strengths

and weaknesses of his novels have to be measured by other criteria. There is no room for an evolutionist simplicity in the study of literature.

It is true that on reading Amir's poetry, a westerner may feel 'it has been said before', and thus not perceive the nature of his originality. This is an occupational risk of Malay authors. If one took such a concept of originality too rigorously, one would probably dismiss Chairil Anwar simply as a minor poet writing in a style derivative from the French symbolists.

The problems that concern Amir: is God a merciful creator or an arbitrary tyrant; why did he create man to call on Him, and then not answer him when he calls, are not new. They were not prominent in western writing in the '30s when Amir was writing. Similarly the forms that he uses, the structure of his free verse, his association of images, and on the whole the conventional syntax and coherent sequence of ideals in his verse, if measured according to the changing fashions and perceptions of western poetry, does not belong in the van of the 20th century.

To find a figure in English poetry comparable in style and interest to Hamzah one must go to the 17th century, to George Herbert's 'Deniall', for example:

O that thou should's't give dust a tongue
to crie to thee

And then not hear it crying! all day long

My heart was in my knee,
But no hearing. 51

And this is the point. Changes in literary fashion do not have a qualitative value: and different styles in response to different circumstances and personality formation may exist contemporaneously and with equal validity.

Yet the westerner can only perceive this if he has a sensitivity developed to a wide range of poetry. This does not mean that he is to impose his expectations of poetry onto a different tradition, but that his sensibilities should be sufficiently developed to respond to that tradition, and thus look for common points of experience between human beings of different times and places. Thus it is simply because a reader can respond to George Herbert's lines that he can see the human

force and power of Amir Hamzah. That to find points of comparison to communicate what kind of poet he was and the kind of way he wrote, one has to go to the 17th century is irrelevant to the quality of his poetry.

The armchair western critic, comfortably settled in his suburban home needs to be keenly aware that the difficulties facing an author creating a new literature in Malay are much greater than those writing in an established literature; that it requires a much greater measure of talent to produce an achievement which may in absolute terms appear to be less than the westerner imagines he has a right to expect.

There is also, let me repeat, the problem that the author, asserting himself as an individual, may be misunderstood both by his own community as by foreign scholars; by his own community who see him only in traditional terms, by the westerner who perceives the important modernizing element in his verse, but does not understand the cultural system out of which the work has come to birth.

I have referred to the difficulties arising out of the absence of a common literary core culture to which an author can relate, in a sense forcing him to create his own out of elements of his own choosing. But there is one even greater problem.

In the west, for the past two centuries, by and large, the urban middle class has been the mainstay of literary life. In the Malay world a middle class in this western sense is only just emerging. Consumer demand for Malay language reading material is not high. The social habit which became established during the colonial period that the educated man would read a European language (English or Dutch) and that Malay was for the lesser educated lower classes, is still alive despite the efforts of educationalists and a small group of writers and other enthusiasts.

One may perhaps question whether the basis of middle class interest and support - as it exists at present - is sufficient to sustain a new literature. The challenge to authors is to learn to extend their appeal to and derive sustenance from social classes, such as the peasantry and fishermen, not traditionally regarded as belonging to the literate community. It is a mistake, I believe, to assume that social change in the Malay world is necessarily going to result in the emergence of a middle class of the type that has evolved in Europe over the past two centuries, or that a literature having a paradigmatic relationship to that society will evolve *pari passu* with it, and that

the steps towards that evolution are necessarily to be measured as progress. The situation is one which lays very heavy burdens on aspirant authors and aspirant critics alike.

I see the great power of Amir in extending the ambit of a literary culture in Maláy. The court tradition, the old romances and chronicles and Malay folk poetry - in which still survive elements of universal freshness and vitality - were his starting point. He showed that this world can be transmuted into an effective body of symbols meaningful to the contemporary Malay speaking community, and that much material for such exploitation still remains.

I do not accept the conventional view that he was an anachronism, that he brought old Malay back to life for a brief period of splendour, that his death at the hands of revolutionaries showed that the past is dead forever; the ebb and flow of cultural history is not to be predicted so easily. Although his creative talent operated in a way analogous to that of Chairil Anwar, he was exploiting a different vein of Malay culture, not looking to the past. In his own way he showed that Malay culture had an active, synthesizing character, that it could organise and make into something new a wide range of traditions without Malay itself degenerating into the mestizo language represented by the Jakarta weekly *Tempo*.

As a man and a Muslim he showed the integrating power that had made Islam into a world religion and a world culture without losing its identity, and that Islam with its profound courtesy and spirituality was a more than viable alternative to secularism. I believe he represented a full and genuine Muslim humanism with a great creative potential. It was to this rich Muslim humanist tradition that Pendita Za'ba too belonged, and because of it, the memory of his personality is as important as that of his achievements.

Appendix

A Dutch text of the Song of Solomon (1637) used by Amir Hamzah.

I

(Het Hooglied, hetwelk van Salomo is)

- 2 Hij kusse mij met de kussen zijnsmonds: want uwe uitnemende liefde is beter dan wijn

- 9 Mijne vriendin: ik vergelijk u bij de paarden in de wagens van Farao
- 15 Zie, gij zijt schoon, mijne vriendin! zie, gij zijt schoon, uwe oogen zijn duiven *oogen*

II

- 10 Mijn liefste antwoordt, en zegt tot mij (sic): Sta op, mijne vriendin, mijne schoone, en kom!
- 11 Want zie, de winter is voorbij, de plasregen is over, hij is overgegaan;
- 12 De bloemen worden gezien in het land, de zangtijd genaakt, en de stem der tortelduif wordt gehoordt in ons land.
- 13 De vijgeboom brengt zijne jonge vijgjes voort, en de wijnstokken geven reuk *met hunne* jonge druifjes. Sta op, mijne vriendin, mijne schoone en kom!
- 14 Mijne duive! zijnde in de kloven der steenrotsen, in het verborgene eener steile plaats, toon mij uwe gedaante, doe mij uwe stem hooren: want uwe stem is zoet, en uwe gedaante is liefelijk.

V

- 1 Ik ben in mijnen hof gekomen, o mijne zuster, o bruid! ik heb mijne mirregeplukt met mijne specerij, ik heb mijne honigraten met mijnen honig gegeten; ik heb mijnen wijn mitsgaders mijne melk gedronken. Eet, vrienden! drinkt, en wordt dronken, o liefsten!
- 2 Ik sliep, maar mijn hart waakte; de stem mijns liefsten, die klopte, was: Doe mij open, mijne zuster, mijne vriendin, mijne duive, mijne volmaakte! want mijn hoofd is vervuld met dauw, mijne haarlokken met nachtdruppen.
- 3 Ik heb mijnen rok uitgetogen, hoe zal ik hem weder aantrekken? ik heb mijne voeten gewasschen, hoe zal ik ze weder bezoedelen?
- 4 Mijn liefste trok zijne hand van het gat *der deur*; en mijn ingewand werd ontroerd om zijnentwil.
- 5 Ik stond op, om mijnen liefste open te doen; en mijne handen drupten *van* mirre, en mijne vingers *van* vloeiende mirre, op de handhaven des slots.
- 6 Ik deed mijnen liefste open, maar mijn liefste was geweken, hij was doorgestaan, mijne ziel ging uit van wege zijn spreken; ik zocht hem, maar ik vond hem niet, ik riep hem, doch hij antwoordde mij niet.
- 7 De wachters, die in de stad omgingen, vonden mij, zij sloegen mij, zij verwondden mij; de wachters op de muren namen mijnen sluijer van mij.

- 8 Ik bezweer u, gij dochters van Jeruzalem! indien gij mijnen liefste vindt, wat zult gij hem aanzeggen? Dat ik krank ben van liefde.
- 9 Wat is uw liefste meer dan een *ander* liefste, o gij schoonste onder de vrouwen! wat is uw liefste meer dan een *ander* liefste dat gij ons zoo bezworen hebt?
- B Dutch text of Psalm 69 probably familiar to Amir Hamzah.
- 2 Verlos mij, o God! want de wateren zijn gekomen tot aan de ziel.
- 3 Ik ben gezonken in grondeloozen modder, waar men niet kan staan; ik ben gekomen in de diepten der wateren, en de vloed overstroomt mij.
- 4 Ik ben vermoeid van mijn roepen, mijne keel is ontstoken, mijne oogen zijn bezweken, daar ik ben hopen de op mijnen God.
- 5 Die mij zonder oorzaak haten, zijn meer dan de haren mijns hoofds; die mij zoeken te vernielen, die mij om valsche oorzaken vijand zijn, zijn magtig geworden; wat ik niet geroofd heb, moet ik alsdan wedergeven.
- 14 Maar mij aangaande, mijn gebed is tot U, o HEERE! er is een tijd des welbehagens, o God! door de grootheid uwer goedertierenheid: verhoor mij door de getrouwheid uws heils.
- 15 Ruk mij uit het slijk, en laat mij niet verzinken; laat mij gered worden van mijne haters, en uit de diepten der wateren.
- 16 Laat de watervloed mij niet overstroomen, en laat de diepte mij niet verslinden; en laat den put zijnen mond over mij niet toesluiten.
- 17 Verhoor mij, o HEERE! want uwe goedertierenheid is goed; zie mij aan naar de grootheid uwer barmhartigheden.

References

1. Unless otherwise stated, Malay here includes Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia. The term 'the Malay world' likewise refers equally to the territories of the Federation of Malaysia and the Republic of Indonesia.
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3. A. Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature*, The Hague, 1967.

4. K. Foulcher, Doctoral dissertation submitted to Sydney University, 1975. Two other very useful works are: H.G. Aveling, "'Sitti Nurbaya": Some Reconsiderations' BKI Vol. 126, pt. 2, pp. 228-46, in particular the 'archetypal' analysis, pp. 232-6; B. Raffel, *The Development of Modern Indonesian Poetry*, State University of New York Press, 1967.
5. T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Sacred Wood*, University Paper Backs, Methuen, 1960, pp. 47-59.
6. T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition' (*The Sacred Wood*), p. 49.
7. Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, 'Modern Arabic Literature and the West', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, II, 1971, pp. 76-91, especially p. 81.
8. A. Teeuw, *Indonesian Literature*, p. 70.
9. Za'ba in *A History of Malay Literature*, R.O. Winstedt, JMBRAS, XVII, pt 3, January 1940, p. 147.
10. Za'ba, *History*, pp. 152, 153.
11. Ibid., p. 152.
12. R.O. Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature* (second edition of *A History of Malay Literature*), JMBRAS, XXXI, pt. 3, 1958.
13. Matheson, *The Tuhfat al-Nafis (The Precious Gift)*, A 19th-century Malay History critically examined. Ph.D. thesis submitted to Monash University, pp. 12 and 17, 1973.
14. See: R.O. Winstedt (ed.), *Sejarah Melayu*, JMBRAS, XVI, pt. 3, p. 191. The same passage also occurs in the 'Shellabear' version (reprinted Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1967). Chapter 34, p. 264.
15. Za'ba (*History*, pp. 145-50) notes that five romances, recited by Pawang Ana, a Sumatran who was unable to read or write, were 'put into shape' at Winstedt's behest by Raja Haji Yahya. These romances include *Hikayat Malim Deman*, *Hikayat Awang Sulong Merah Muda* and *Hikayat Raja Muda*, reprinted in the series *Sastera Hikayat*, by OUP, Kuala Lumpur. The series has since been discontinued.
16. These views are summarized in Teeuw: *Indonesian Literature*, pp. 102-3.
17. *Buah Rindu* (fourth edition), Dian Rakjat, Jakarta, 1969 (first edition 1941).
18. In 'Kenang-kenangan', *Memories (Buah Rindu*, p. 38) he writes:

'Dinda berbisik rapat ditelinga
Lengan melengkung memangku kepala

Putus² sekata dua:
 "Kunang² mengintai kita"...

I knock at the door of my youth
 wishing to enter it again;
 but the garden is locked, barred too,
 And I remain desolate alone.

In 'Sunyi', Solitude (*Buah Rindu*, p. 35) he writes:

Kuketuk pintu masaku muda
 Hendak masuk rasa kembali
 Taman terkunci dibelan pula
 Tinggallah aku sunyi sendiri

You whisper close to my ear
 while your arm cradles my head,
 softly word by word:
 'The fireflies are peeping at us'.

The neo-Ballad 'Hang Tuah' is in *Buah Rindu*, pp. 25-8.

19. Amir is fond of describing himself with such expressions as 'Musyafir lata malang berakit' (Cempaka Mulia BR p. 8); 'Ingin datang merasa sentosa/mencecap hidup bertentu tiju' (Berdiri Aku BR p. 43); and 'Susah sepah tersia-sia' (Pada Senja BR p.44).

The episode of the romance of *Hang Tuah* to which Amir's poem is related may be found in *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (ed.), Kassim Ahmad, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 1964, pp. 432-4. For Chairil Anwar's 'Diponegoro' see *Kerikil Tadjam*, Pustaka Rakjat, Jakarta (no date), p. 7.

20. *Njanji Sunji*, Poedjangga Baroe V5, 1937.
21. The rendering of the *Bhagavad Gita* was published in full in *Poedjangga Baroe* between 1933 and 1935 (P.B. Vol. I, nos 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12 and Vol. II, nos 2, 6, 7, 8). The excerpts from the Song of Songs, entitled *Sjiru'l Asjar*, appeared in 1934, P.B. Vol. I, no. 10.
22. *Setanggi Timur*, Pustaka Rakjat, Jakarta (no date).
23. The version of the Bible Amir used was a reprint of *de Eerste Staten Bijbel*: Paulus Aerts, Leiden, 1637.

See: *Nederlandse Bijbels en hun uitgevers 1477-1952*, J. Brandt & Zoon, Amsterdam (no date, privately printed and distributed). The text I have used was one printed for the British & Foreign Bible Society at Utrecht & London, 1903. Any later printing would only have differed in details of spelling.

The full Dutch text of the passages cited in this article and of the 69th Psalm are attached as an appendix. The English renderings of the Song of Songs accompanying Amir's text are taken from the Jerusalem Bible. There are, of course, a sprinkling of differences where the modern translation is an improvement

on the old one. There seemed little point however in translating into English Amir's version of a 17th century Dutch translation.

24. The Dutch text reads: Hij Kusse mij met de kussen zijnsmonds: want (Malay *karena*) uwe uitnemende liefde is beter dan wijn. (He kisses me with the kisses of his mouth: because your excellent love is better than wine.)
- Although the Hebrew text has *kî* (for, because), it reads awkwardly. Both the Jerusalem Bible (1966) and the New English Bible (1970) ignore it, and begin a new, vocative sentence: Your love is more delightful (NEB: fragrant) than wine.
25. The Dutch text reads: ik vergelijk u bij de paarden in de wagens van Faraö. (I compare you to the horses in the chariot of Pharaoh.) The Hebrew text has *susahîi* meaning 'my mare'. Hence the Jerusalem Bible rendering 'To my mare harnessed to Pharaoh's chariot, I compare you my love'.
26. The Dutch text reads: uwe oogen zijn duiven oogen. (Your eyes are dove's eyes.)
- The Hebrew text has *enaykh yonim* meaning 'your eyes are doves'. This is the rendering of the Jerusalem Bible '... how beautiful you are! Your eyes are doves.'
27. Amir Hamzah: *Radja Penjair Pudjangga Baru*. The full text is reprinted in H.B. Jassin, *Gunung Agung*, 1962, pp. 72-4.
28. *Njanji Sunji*, p. 30.
29. The English rendering is taken from the Jerusalem Bible.
30. *Buah Rindu*, 'Buah Rindu II', p. 13.
31. Jassin, *Amir Hamzah*, p. 213.
32. *Setanggi Timur*, pp. 5-11.
33. Ibid., p. 13.
34. Ibid., p. 14.
35. *Njanji Sunji*, p. 21.
36. *Setanggi Timur*, pp. 14-15.
37. Ibid., p. 28.
38. Ibid., p. 28.
39. *Njanji Sunji*, p. 5.
40. Merchant of Venice, Act V, Scene I, lines 90-91.
41. Teeuw renders the line 'Where you are'; Teeuw, *Indonesian Literature*, p. 265.

42. *Njanji Sunji*, p. 6.
43. *Qur'an* 24:35.
44. *Njanji Sunji*, 26.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 14. Amir is fond of the image of the garden. His childhood is a garden of refuge from which he is excluded by a barred gate (in 'Sunyi' BR p. 35). The present is a garden (as in this poem) in which he is desolate because of the absence of his Beloved. The Paradise to which he aspires to be with his Beloved in Istana Rela is of course The Garden *par excellence*.
47. Other traditions include: '... the Lord will appear to them and come to them...', 'then God shall appear to creation and meet them' (ibn Mas'ud) and 'God will come to them in whatever vesture He wishes' (al-Baihaqi from Abi Hurayra); and 'My Lord came to me at night in the finest of forms' (al-Tirmidi from ibn 'Abbas).
48. Sitor Situmorang endured the same experience, but with a different outcome. It is movingly expressed in 'Ziarah dalam Gereja Gunung', *Wajah tak bernama*, Pembangunan, Jakarta, 1955, p. 19.
49. John Press, *The Fire and the Fountain*, University Paperbacks, Methuen, 1966, p. 206.
50. Teeuw, *Indonesian Literature*, p. 179.
51. *George Herbert*, selected by W.H. Auden, Penguin's Poet to Poet 1973, p. 67.

THROUGH MYTH AND DREAM: THE INDONESIAN QUEST FOR REALITY*

One of my earliest memories is of the mask of benevolence and reason displayed by school heads before parents, and their pomposity and cruelty when left face to face with their charges. Was such a change of personality a case of reality versus facade? Was it conditioned according to the particular roles the man had to play? Or were these attitudes, of sadism and cordiality, integral parts of the man's personality? Pursued a little further, such a line of reasoning brings us to the problem of outer form and inner reality, and at length to the question of how far a person filling a certain role identifies himself with it, or to what degree he has an awareness of himself as a moral being, a personality, and realizes that in some of his official functions in fact he hides behind a mask. In saying this we know only too well how a man can unconsciously let himself become identified with his mask, live his mask and become transformed by it.

Traditionally, Indonesia is a land of mask, myth and ritual. The course of life is determined by a series of related but varying systems of social life and values which whether associated with Islam in most of Indonesia, or Hindu-Buddhism in Bali, regulate all family, personal and social relationships. Life is to a very high degree patterned; the individual exists for his society, the person is the role he has to play: in a phrase, the system is the message.

Even in rapidly-changing areas of society, in urban centres and among intellectuals, old habits of mind remain, and can result in curious inflexibilities of attitude: an inability to see individuals except through roles, and the acceptance of a peculiar system of classification, appointment, promotion and status.

Any attempt then on the part of Indonesian authors to create a genuine modern literature has to be seen as a series of attempts to find the man behind the mask, the personal values hidden within the myth, the emotion sublimated or concealed in a pattern of ritual behaviour.

Such an author thus faces numerous difficulties on a formal level,

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First published in *Quadrant*, Vol. 13, No. 5, 1969, pp. 25-34.

problems of a medium and of a public; on an emotional and intellectual level, problems involving a cultural environment inimical to and uncomprehending of his values and aspirations. This in fact is what modern Indonesian writing is about; a genre which first appeared in 1848, but which never got under way until the 1920s, when writers began to pit themselves against myth, mask and ritual in various forms, whether traditional or environmental and later the pressures of a pseudo-traditional political ideology.

Various attempts have been made to define the modern element in Indonesian writing, to detect the point at which one world ceased to be productive and a new one sought definition. In earlier essays I have taken up a suggestion of Lionel Trilling's that a definably modern attitude derives from a sense of spiritual horror,¹ from a fear that 'things fall apart', that chaos is overwhelming cosmos, that social life is held in being by rationalized cruelty. On further reflection this appears a negative view; the vocation of the writer can be understood more positively, and an author seen as a man who penetrates the mask, destroys the myth, and recognizes the arbitrary and inane in the ritual. This is what the Indonesian essayist Sitor Situmorang (b. 1923) meant when he wrote that the Japanese occupation of Indonesia had destroyed a whole set of illusions and falsehoods, and left man as naked as when he was created, and walked in the garden of Eden. Sitor was overstating the case, but at least for a time, a new set of perspectives had been revealed, and some posturings, stances, and conventions had been exposed as mere pretence.

This has been at the heart of all significant Indonesian writing. The persistence of the pattern of effort is striking. In effect two quite disparate characters such as Kartini (1874-1901) and the contemporary poet and the young essayist and poet Goenawan Muhammad (b. 1941) are face to face with the same problem. Kartini was a woman honoured as a pioneer of feminine emancipation. She was able to enjoy a period of Dutch education until she reached adolescence, when as custom, or ritual in our terms demanded, she was confined to her father's house, a building admittedly spacious. But she had the spark of individuality to ask why, and the only answer given was that she was a Javanese girl of a noble house. She realized that this was myth: it was perfectly apparent to her that the Dutch as well as Javanese convention and value systems was fraught with absurdities, and that any appeal to the pro-

priety of irrational behaviour based on criteria of race, was pure mythology. She saw that her father, who had to wear the mask of a Javanese aristocrat in order to preserve the respect of his peers, wished to help his daughter realize her ideals, but only to a certain point. And she could see his dilemma: the role he had to play, and the anguish of the man behind the mask. It was this threefold perception - intuitive rather than analytic - that gives such poignancy and importance to the letters written to Dutch friends by which she is known. In fact, she was able to realize little of her ideals. A sense of guilt at causing her father pain, made her incapable of any dramatic step, indeed led her to decline the offer of a scholarship to enable her to study in Holland. She came to terms with her society and married, hoping thereby to enjoy a measure of personal freedom not attainable in any other way.

Goenawan Muhammad, feeling stirring within him the vocation of writer, had to reject the values with which he had been brought up; yet abandonment of the life of his village home awoke in him a sense of guilt and impotence. And he saw in the myth of Malin Kundang a picture of himself - as though the struggle to emancipate himself from myth could be expressed only in terms of myth.

Malin Kundang was a youth who left home and his widowed mother to make a fortune. When he returned wealthy and his mother came out to greet him, he spurned her. As a punishment, the gods turned him to stone. To Goenawan, his conscious choice of his own individuality as a poet rather than a niche within the village society that had given him birth was tantamount to repudiating his mother; and that in doing this, he too was guilty of the sin of Malin Kundang. In arrogantly proclaiming 'One of the first freedoms achieved by a creative writer is liberation from the bonds of a collective existence', he too deserved to be turned to stone.

Thus far his predicament had been parallel to that of Kartini. Only his response had been different. Rather than yield to his society or conform, he was prepared to accept the status of a man accursed. Yet having taken this step, he was faced by far more complex dimensions of the problem. The very individualism which had led him to reject his regional home, put him in a position where he felt a foreigner in his own country. For it ran counter to the national philosophy of the Indonesian state as it was evolving in the late 'fifties. He did not

immediately realize this. At first it seemed that the ideology of revolution as Sukarno expounded it was capable of mediating the conflict between individuality and collectivity, but in the years between 1961 and 1965, the concept of revolution became more sterile and destructive. It became a myth in its own right, and through a plethora of verbiage rendered individual, analytic thought impossible; public activity was reduced to ritual, and the mask of xenophobic nationalism smothered all expressions of individuality. It was not until 1966, the year in which Sukarno lost his dominance, that this form of oppression, for a while at least, lifted, and writers like Goenawan were able to seek their bearings as individuals again. No wonder that writers eager to take advantage of the new atmosphere called themselves the 'Generation of '66', whatever the year of their birth or debut as authors.

Despite the understandable enthusiasm for the relative freedom of the 'New Order', the decision to regard it as marking the beginning of a new literary generation reflects a traditional disease among Indonesian literary critics: the compulsion to parcel up literary history into a series of generations, perhaps under the influence of the myth that a new name logically implies a new reality.

Almost any survey of modern Indonesian literature is dominated by a historical approach quite unnerving in its simplistic crudity. It begins with the Generation of the 'twenties, a series of popular melodramas purportedly concerned with problems of 'East and West', the majority of which were published by the Government publishing house Balai Pustaka. Then follows the period of the pre-war issues of the literary magazine *Pujangga Baru*, succeeded by the Japanese occupation, leading in succession to the birth of Generation of '45, the New Generation, the Newest Generation and finally the current Generation of '66. Perhaps as points of reference such terms have a use, but they are chronological not analytic. They hide rather than reveal any lines of development which might be detected in emerging Indonesian literature, and fail to observe what authors of different 'generations' might have in common, at least concerning the manner in which they felt their vocation as writers. One might compare such accounts to the view one gets of a receding landscape out of the rear window of a train.

In fact, however, Kartini in 1898 and Goenawan Muhammad in 1968, although marking the furthest limits of our period have precisely this in common: that they are attempting to come to grips with the same set

of problems. And it is the level of engagement with these problems and the measure of success achieved in grappling with them through the medium of one literary form or another that mark the milestones of achievement in modern Indonesian writing, rather than the generation or period to which a work may be ascribed. At all events this is what modern Indonesian writing is about, at least to the extent that it deserves the name literature. The number of issues which have served directly or indirectly to challenge authors are many and profound. They concern the whole range of tensions developing within their society and family structure, the increasing pitch of confrontation with the Dutch Colonial Government, the growing pressure of Muslim Action, and the ending of an epoch with the Japanese occupation - leading on to the Revolution, the failure of Liberal Democracy, Guided Democracy, xenophobic nationalism and most recently the explosion and blood letting of 1965-66.

It does not require any marked level of inventiveness to see how the struggle to grasp and interpret reality has informed the works of various writers, the level of success depending on the author's own personality and technical competence. The relevance of a particular work from this standpoint may not be immediately obvious. It might seem that everything that could be said about it has been said, and then a chance remark lets the work shed a new light on the central predicament of the Indonesian struggling to enter the modern world. One such a work, which figures in every list of Indonesian writing, is *Salah Asuhan* (A Wrong Upbringing) by Abdul Muis (b. 1890), first published in 1928.

This has usually been interpreted as a novel illustrating the pressures against a mixed marriage in a colonial society, and the disruptive effects of Western education. A view recently put forward by the Indonesian writer Balfas, however, sees new depths in the work: that the Indonesian, Hanafi, has all the educational advantages of a Dutchman, and is entitled to be classified as a Dutch citizen. He is so classified, and marries the Eurasian Corrie. The marriage fails, in part because of social pressures, but more crucial to the failure is Hanafi's immaturity which cannot accept the freedom with which Corrie moves socially. And Hanafi's suicide is in fact an expression of his inability to bear the demands made on him as an individual attempting to face the modern world.

A quite different turn of mind was revealed by the essayist Takdir Alisjahbana (b.1908), one of the founders of the periodical *Pudjangga Baru*. He was an enthusiastic Europhile who had the vision of the same spirit which had created and guided European material and spiritual progress, transforming Indonesia into a nation of the modern world able to take its part on equal terms with other nations. He saw this achieved through a system of education which would inculcate a thoroughgoing intellectualism, materialism and egoism to replace the passivity and inertia of the traditional value systems which brought up people to live as good-natured goats. Looking back, these expressions appear naive, not so much in their formulation - his vision had a genuine nobility and idealism - but because a quarter of a century later it is so clearly evident that Takdir had no real understanding of the complexities of the situation he confronted, the profound stubbornness and multi-faceted structure of the traditional world view, or the ways in which it could be manipulated and reinforced by contemporary political movements with a mass base, whether Nationalistic, Islamic or Communist. The ineffectiveness of his ideas in society at large as opposed to the rating of the 'nativist' mass organizations is illustrated in the abysmal eclipse of the *Partai Socialis Indonesia* (P.S.I. - a democratic socialist party of the Western type), the political party with which he was associated in the 1955 elections. This might seem to be measuring literary significance in terms of political success. Rather the reverse is the case. The weakness of individualism and nationalism evident in political activity and literature is symptomatic of the same fundamental problem.

Poetry presents a challenge of a different order. Much poetry was written in the 'twenties and 'thirties. As evidence of experimentation with new forms, it is important. But the most one can say of the best of it is that it is well done: there is a genuine craftsmanship. One pre-war poet, however, manages to touch exposed nerves with the same sureness of touch as Kartini, the same radical penetration to the heart of things. This was Amir Hamzah (1911-1946). His importance lies not so much in the forms he used - although many writers find it important to note that he used traditional forms, nor even the skill with which he used these forms - a skill which has not yet been subject to detailed analysis, but the extraordinary quality of personality that made him a poet, and at which one can point and

say: here is genius. One of the curious features of genius is that the spark which ignites it may be insignificant or banal. And yet that the spark itself may receive an interest out of all proportion to its incidental merits. The spark which set in motion Amir Hamzah's poetry was a frustrated love affair. His early poems reflect this directly: the very early ones unsure in their technical accomplishment, the later ones revealing a marvellous craftsmanship. As such they would not demand much attention. But the later ones, of Amir Hamzah's maturity (an early maturity, 26) are a direct confrontation between a man and his destiny. Why is he what he is? Why are things the way they are? And it is the way in which he faces this issue in all its starkness, alone - religion, society, friends unable to help him; family and custom implacably against him - that Hamzah shows his greatness. A short-lived greatness, alas: for he yielded, bowed to the demands of feudal custom, sacrificed himself by marriage to an ugly princess, and ceased to write poetry.

Armijn Pané's (b. 1908) novel *Belenggu* (Bondage) which appeared in 1939/40 is still perhaps the most accomplished prose work to appear in Bahasa Indonesia. The theme is simple: the eternal triangle - a doctor, his wife, and his call-girl mistress. Myth demands that the mistress should be inferior, virtue rewarded and unfaithfulness punished. Instead the mistress is a richer personality than the wife, and in a confrontation between the two women, instead of the ritual trouncing of the 'other woman' ritual and melodrama demand, she shows a decisive superiority. Even more striking in the Indonesian situation, if there is no happy ending, there is no tragic ending either. The novel ends with one episode in the lives of the three principal characters over: but the three of them continue living, each following the same muted purposeless pattern of life as when it opened. *Belenggu* unfortunately is Armijn Pané's only novel. Even looking back from 1969, it is imposing in style and texture alike.

The Japanese occupation in 1942 brought about a tremendous convulsion in Indonesian society. Earlier I mentioned Sitor Situmorang's remark that it was an event which stripped man of all pretence. To the extent that this remark is valid it is exemplified in the poetry of Chairil Anwar (1923-1949). It is difficult to pinpoint the time when Chairil decided that truth through poetry, or perhaps poetry through truth was his vocation. He began to write in 1942. He was

obsessed with a hatred of all convention which he regarded as insincerity compounded with deceit; in his life he disregarded every taboo and violated every ethical norm, consciously repudiating ties with any society, proud to be a wild beast rejected by and rejecting his peers. In doing so, he was deliberately creating chaos in an attempt to discover truth. The wild, not to say dissolute nature of his life was in inverse relation to the extraordinary craftsmanship of his poetry, reflecting his changing moods in his struggle with himself and his environment. Eventually a mood of resignation becomes dominant in his poetry as he realizes his goal is unattainable, and in 1949 he died at the age of 26 leaving behind only two slim volumes of poetry, and a few short pieces of prose. In absolute terms the achievement is small; in fact he successfully, brilliantly even, introduced symbolism into modern Indonesian poetry, and thus gave a permanent extension to its compass.

Despite his early death, it is difficult to see in what further direction he could have proceeded. It was his ambition to tear aside all masks, reject any and every mythology, make game of any ritual. Yet it would be misleading to regard him as a sensualist or hedonist. A sensualist does not spend nights under the columns of bridges. Rather he was impelled by an anarchic obsession with truth, to be discovered and expressed in poetry. To achieve this, everything had to be experienced. In his best poems Chairil displays a thoroughgoing intellectuality, rare among Indonesian authors; and a superb technique.

There is the danger that any attempt to survey Indonesian writing from 1945-68 will degenerate into a list of names. There is Achdiat Karta Mihardja (b. 1911) with his novel *Atheis* (An atheist, 1949), Utuy Sontani (b. 1920) with his historical novel *Tambera* (Tambera is a boy's name, 1949), and several plays; Mochtar Lubis (b. 1920) with the novel *Jalan tak ada ujung* (A road with no end, 1951); Pramudya Ananta Toer (b. 1925) with his stories and novels of the Indonesian Revolution 1948-54; Nasjah Djamin (b. 1924) with his novel *Hilanglah si anak hilang* (Lost is the lost son, 1961); there are the poets Rivai Apin (b. 1927), an associate of Chairil Anwar, Sitor Situmorang (also an essayist and short story writer) and Toto Sudharto Bachtiar (b. 1929). All represent assaults by authors on new areas of human experience, the problems of the emergent individual in an emerging society: Pramudya on the horror of war and destruction of human values in the revolution, Achdiat

on the loss of religious faith, Nasjah Djamin on the problem of the outcast, the man who will not conform. Yet in every author there is a serious flaw or even breakdown when he attempts to go beyond the short story. In fact one of the most puzzling aspects of the Indonesian situation to date is the lack of stamina among creative writers, as though the struggle to preserve their individuality were too much for them. From the mid-'fifties onwards we see the writers who came into prominence in the years immediately following the proclamation of Independence fall by the wayside - either abandoning themselves to collectivity which in practice meant the Communist literary movement, and sounding the brassy banalities of socialist realism, or else ceasing to write. Harry Aveling² has described the years of the rising tide of Sukarnoism (1957-65) as illustrating a kind of author's regress, as many writers followed back the course of Western literature from individualist existentialism, through Freudism to Marxism, and obsessive nationalism where they were safely back in the womb of collectivism from which they set out: such has been the case with Pramudya, Utuy, Sitor Situmorang and Rivai Apin. In fact, the period of creative life of all the authors I have mentioned so far, has been short, and their resulting oeuvre small.

The limitations of works on a larger scale are significant. Achdiat's novel *An Atheist* contains much that is impressive - in aspects of character, in description and emotional impact. The level of discussion between the two ideologues Hassan, the devout Muslim, and Rusli, the Marxist, has been described as undergraduate. This is no criticism if it is true to the facts. But it does suggest a more fundamental limitation to the stature of the book: that nowhere is there a suggestion of a profounder understanding of the issues between two men, and this results in an absence of dimension. A study of the work of Pramudya, although some of his novels are long by any standards, shows how he too works with limited resources. For although Pramudya can orchestrate emotional climaxes of great intensity and power, all depend on one and the same body of personal experience.

In some of his briefer works however, not a word is out of place. Form and content are perfectly balanced, and the whole is informed by a complex irony in the best tradition of the short story as a literary form.

It is difficult to write of the period 1961-65. Although serious

writing did continue, it was muted, and these years show the gradual takeover by Communist-sponsored groups of virtually every organ of literary and cultural activity. The most vigorous attempt at a stand by the non-Communists was represented by the Cultural Manifesto issued in 1963 - an attempt to declare that art had at least a definable autonomy in its own sphere. The Communists however gained the ear of ex-President Sukarno, the manifesto was banned, and the critic Jassin made an abject apology to the President. It was not until September, 1965, that this stifling ideological trend was for a time reversed, and the concept of a generation of '66 was born.

But even during the years of political direction, the same questing-yearning remained, even though it could not be uttered. Goenawan in the essay I referred to earlier has written poignantly of the horror of those years when as the result of a flood of axioms, slogans, revolutionary pneumonics, spells and jargon, language lost all precision, and as he put it: 'We were hemmed in with a structure of clichés, the automat language Ionesco speaks of, which impedes personal communication and stultifies discussion. The sole refuge was silence - which purged us of the terror of imprecision and which sheltered us from the pestilence of the official language as we sought to defend reality.'³ Myth was not to have everything its own way!

The poet most identified with the new era is Taufiq Ismael (b. 1937) who achieved an almost instant fame with his battle poetry associated with the student demonstrations against Sukarno's attempt in early 1966 to restore the status quo. These poems exist in two collections. *Tirani* (Tyranny) and *Benteng* (Stockade). Most are battle poetry pure and simple, but there is more to Taufiq than this. He began writing well before 1966, and Burton Raffel⁴ has discussed - not very favourably - poems of his included in an anthology appearing in 1964, complaining that they are addicted to 'over generalized lines of much rhetorical passion, but very little real feeling'.

Some of the later poems however show a genuinely moving simplicity, unclogged by superfluous verbiage.

The most relevant of his poems for the purposes of this essay, characterized by an extraordinarily deceptive appearance of simplicity is the following:

Simple Arithmetic⁵

During this period we have
constantly lived in uncertainty

And said:
Two plus two
- we hope -
still makes four

This was his comment on the corruption of language which left Goenawan Muhammad with only one option: silence. Yet it is this radical scepticism from which even the necessary truths were not exempt that constitutes the chaos out of which a new cosmos may emerge. Chairil Anwar, one might say, had a compulsion to create his own chaos. so obsessively was he afraid that he was hamstrung by his environment. Goenawan, himself a fine poet, and Taufiq found themselves in a world where nothing was sure. It is still too early to pass a final judgement on Taufiq's poetry: but his best work reveals an openness and lack of pretension that is significant. And the daring simplicity of 'Simple Arithmetic' suggests a perception and even brilliance that may herald important work.

There is however one name which spans the years 1958-68, and which illustrates in a particular way the general predicament of the Indonesian author, that of W.S. Rendra (b. 1935). In 1958 he was the coming name in Indonesian poetry, and had just published a collection *Ballada Orang-Orang Tercinta*, Songs of Lovers. These were poems of love and suffering - various kinds of love, of suffering and death. It is at first difficult to see any unifying theme in the collection. But one poem stands apart somewhat from the others: 'Ballada Penyaliban' (Ballad of the Crucifixion), a straightforward narrative of Christ's walk to Calvary and His redeeming Passion. Amid poems of guerrillas, rape, suicide and murder, it comes as something of a shock. Yet whether by accident or design it may be considered as providing a key to the meaning of the collection as a whole, and the shock produces a realization of the inner significance of almost all the poems: that it is Christ loving, suffering and dying in all who love, suffer and die. This perception is characteristic of Rendra's response to Catholicism. It is striking that Rendra, then barely 20, should have such a finely developed intuition, such an existential apprehension of the depths of the Faith in which he was brought up.

Rendra, in fact, though now a professed Muslim, offers the inter-

esting spectacle of an intellectual Javanese Catholicism - a kind of 'medieval', scholastic Javanism, blended with an existential Catholicism. The 'universalism' of his key motifs which appear in differing vestures, giving significance to the elements of these vestures is Javanese, at the same time his perception of Christ in the sinner and outcast is one of the emphases of modern theology, Protestant as well as Catholic. But what began as an intuition, and was expressed spontaneously in the images of his early poems, was to become increasingly rationalized and more and more a cause, rather than a quiet source of poetic inspiration. For Rendra's response was clearly, not to the Church as an institutional structure but to a complex of spiritual values flowing from the mystery of the redemption, guaranteed by a spiritual church of which the actual church is an imperfect image.

There is nothing original in this. It is a particular kind of modern spiritual commitment. It is striking to see it in Indonesia, but as it becomes explicit in Rendra's thinking as a result of quite wide travelling, he becomes less distinctively Indonesian. This is clear from his poem 'Nyanyian Angsa' (Swan Song) written in 1967, the story of a prostitute in the last stages of syphilis, rejected by the doctor (she has no money) and by the priest (she is morally too degraded), yet welcomed by Christ into Paradise (the Mary Magdalen motif). There is emotion in the poem but it lacks subtlety. The concluding lines are in fact typical of its style. The prostitute has died, and exclaims:

Dancing I enter the garden of Eden
To eat apples to my heart's content
Mary Zaitun is my name
Prostitute and bride am I.

Other recent poems show more technical skill; for example 'Rick from Corona' and 'View of Dusk', but are in fact only accomplished imitations in Bahasa Indonesia of the styles of some American poets.

Is Rendra's distinctively Indonesian originality for the time exhausted? For despite occasional lines of lingering loveliness, his poems are distinguished principally by the verve with which they are written. Is this yet another example of that failure of emotional and intellectual stamina that is an occupational hazard of Indonesian authors? This is an invidious way of putting the question, particularly in Rendra's case. For the very fluency and variety of technique,

range of theme and interest, and continuing productivity on the one hand is enriching the repertoire of Indonesian literary forms and themes; on the other, his future is clearly still open, and Rendra may turn out to be a poet whose parish is the world, or that rarity, an Indonesian poet who rediscovers himself in his maturity. If so, he will have pioneered a major literary breakthrough.

As early as 1951 Indonesian critics and intellectuals were complaining of a crisis and impasse in Indonesian literature, suggesting that since no major works were being produced authors suffered from a shortness of breath, and were incapable of handling themes or forms which made sustained demands on them. Their observation of the facts was correct, but their interpretation of these facts and their resulting concern was misplaced. It is not authors who are at fault; rather the particular nature of the problems they face would permit of progress in no other way. I have already spoken of the general Indonesian situation, and the factors inhibiting authors discovering themselves, including such elements as the suffocating grasp of social, cultural and political pressures, where a person has to be an Indonesian, a member of an ethnic group or family before he is a human individual. But equally important is the absence of a strong creative indigenous tradition with a broader than regional base. For to be an Indonesian is an expression with little definable content, if this is understood as having access to a cultural tradition in depth through a national language, in addition to loyalty to a particular state, or the regulation of social behaviour according to a particular set of conventions. Indonesian authors are in somewhat the position in which English authors would find themselves if English had become a modern language in the 1920s, and the only models authors had available were the Anglo-Saxon chronicles, Beowulf and the Sea-farer, and an established modern literature in, say, French. This absence of a tradition would not only be felt in technique, but in the lack of a common past, with its echoing footfalls reverberating in the imagination. How much power would be lacking in the English of today without the self-generating and renewing influence of Shakespeare, the Authorized Version and the whole Elizabethan tradition growing out of the Classics which by the end of the 17th century had culminated in a national English. It is this lack of a tradition which accounts for the fact that despite a sudden flowering of talent in Indonesian authors and the appearance of a few striking works, a

creative talent frequently disappears.

A great temptation in the study of Indonesian literature is to be side-tracked from a discussion of form, meaning and individuality into problems of relationship, progress and social significance. This has its place in the study of literature: it produces a heightened awareness of what one has a right to expect, a frame of reference in which a poem can be more precisely understood. It is not however a substitute for the understanding of a work of art as something unique, the product of a struggle with self-imposed conditions to express a concept in a particular form. In other words, in the last resort we need to start with a personality of whom we can say he is himself, that Chairil Anwar for example is Chairil Anwar - in Indonesia today, the principle of identity is still worth stating - and then to see of what this personality consists; what is the depth of its individual creations.

Why is this so? An important element is surely the absence of a tradition of literary criticism in Indonesia. Perhaps for natural reasons it has been dominated by the concept of historical divisions, the generation of the author and his general explicit cultural attitudes rather than by a study of the internal dynamics of his development as an individual, or his attempts to come to grips with concepts of form. More ink has been spilt for example on arguing whether Chairil Anwar had the right to be called a poet of the Generation of '45 than in detailed analyses or scrutiny of his claim to be a different kind of poet, writing in what for Indonesia was a new kind of poetry.

Both creative writer and critic therefore are face to face with the same problem and encapsulated in the same tradition. The author can only see character through a limited range of stereotypes, the critic can only pass judgement on the manipulation of the stereotypes. Neither has yet the capacity to set great chords sounding as he builds his work round important moral issues, to see inconsistencies, variation and development in character for the one, or the perception to encourage, guide and evaluate on the other. It is in this respect rather unfortunate that the general approach to literature revealed in A. Teeuw's *Modern Indonesian Literature* - dominated by the historical approach, illustrated by synopses, judged by commonplace observations on the prose sense of any form of writing, dominates all teaching of Indonesian Literature, whether in high school or university.

In any absolute, distinctive, intellectually definable sense,

there is no such thing as a Generation of '66. All that 1966 represents is a year in which a particular political mythology was removed. Bearing in mind the events which followed the abortive coup of 1965, some might query the expression 'all that '66 represents'. But it is important not to equate the opportunity to make a fresh start, or to continue openly work done in private with actual achievement. The 'Generation of '66' cannot yet be defined by its achievements. But at least there is sufficient confidence in the natural law not to doubt that tomorrow $2 + 2$ will still be 4. This is not to suggest that there should be pessimism at the pace of Indonesian literary development. It may be 30 years before the ravages in the education system caused by Sukarnoism are repaired. This means that on the one hand writers can still find little sustenance in the cultural tradition they are still trying to create, and on the other, that the formation of a public with which some kind of dialogue is possible is still remote. They are therefore even more liable to alienation than is the normal occupational risk of the writer.

In fact what the intellectuals of 1951 regarded as a crisis in the development of Indonesian literature was a normal pattern of growth, an inevitable consequence of the nature of the various traditions which had flowed into the making of Indonesia, and the slow, heart-breaking work of building a new tradition. Every writer one might say has had the experience of finding himself, losing himself, and then the struggle to discover a new identity and a sense of purpose. This is the challenge at the heart of Indonesian writing today.

Contemporary Indonesian literature has achieved a few gems in works of small compass, and a large body of writing in various genres of varying degrees of effectiveness and power, which are as much an essential part of a developing tradition as the unqualified successes; every passing year contributes something to the range and depth of this tradition. Writers such as Rendra and Goenawan Muhammad viewed in the light both of their understanding of their vocations and of their present achievement may well represent a new stage in the growth of a modern literature. It may be Rendra, it may be Goenawan, it may be someone unheard of, but sooner or later we may hope for an Indonesian author who will 'forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race'.

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FROM CARICATURE AND VIGNETTE TO AMBIVALENCE AND ANGST:
CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF CHARACTER IN THE MALAY WORLD*

The crucial question behind any historiography attempting to be more than a catalogue of events, concerns the understanding of change in human society. Every fact in the past of the human family belongs to a series. Such series are legion. And the crucial problem for a historian attempting to explain what is happening in history is to select a series which to him has significance, to place that series in its temporal and geographical extent and to explain as best he can the nature of its evolution, structuring his story around those points at which he discerns the occurrence of qualitative change.

Literature and thought constitute the series to be discussed in this paper, a series which has to do with modes of individual thought, perception and identification.

It is a field of study difficult and intractable enough in the best of circumstances, when the geographical region which is the locus of the study - such as China or Japan - has a long history of cultural identity, and when massive bibliographical resources are available.

In the Malay world of Peninsular and Insular Southeast Asia, the difficulties involved are particularly acute. One problem is to find a term to identify the region. The 'Malay world' is appealing. It has historical justification, it avoids the misleading use of the names of modern nation states such as Indonesia and Malaysia, even though not everything within the region is Malay culturally and there is no more uniformity in the non-Malay regions of the archipelago than should be assumed in the Malay regions themselves.

For the purposes of this paper it coincides fairly closely with Professor Roff's concept of a Malayo-Muslim zone.¹ Geographically this includes the Malay Peninsula, the island of Sumatra, the coastal regions of Borneo, the north coast towns of Java, and the great harbour of Makassar, now known as Ujung Pandang. The Malay language is diffused

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First published in Wang Gungwu (ed.), *Self and Biography: Essays on the Individual and Society in Asia*, Sydney University Press, The Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1975.

through all these territories: in some of them it is a native language, in others (the coastal regions of Borneo, for example) it was imposed as a culturally superior language, in yet others (as in Aceh and Makassar) it found a place by convention as a court language, over the regional vernaculars, Acehnese and Makassarese respectively, and elsewhere it served simply as a lingua franca. Thus speakers of Malay need not be understood as speakers of Malay exclusively. It follows that ethnically, not all of the peoples using Malay in these different ways and at different social levels were of Malay stock: but in their general attitudes to life and styles of living, they had much in common. The great majority of them were Muslim and by and large the foundations of their social and economic life depended more on entrepreneurial activities than on rice cultivation.

Another problem is that this region is not co-extensive with any great culture - Sinic, Indic or Islamic; and although each of these cultures has left its mark on areas of it, yet the continuity and intensity of the contact has not been sufficient to create a viable and self-generating literary tradition. Since it consists mainly of peasant-type societies, literary documentation is sparse and fragmented between places and cultures and languages, so that the organization of categories of study is difficult. Thus although this 'Malay world' is a happy hunting ground for the social scientist, for the student of comparative literature it yields its share of frustration and disillusion.

Yet another problem is that no history of Malay literature has yet been written. There are very few books devoted either to the traditional or modern aspects of this subject,² and in the main these are of value only to the extent that they are good catalogues, for no author has offered any principle of order which can render the literatures of the Malay world susceptible of coherent discussion.

Finally the number of Malay texts critically edited is few. Those rendered accessible to the general reader through translations are even fewer. And none have been analysed in literary terms.

My point of departure is that the Malay world is distinguished from the island cultures of the Pacific from early in our era by the generation of port cities which served as centres of diffusion for the cultural and economic forms of the maritime trading civilizations of Southern and Western Asia. Although this was sufficient to give the

region a character distinct from the island areas of the Pacific, yet it never created Southeast Asian counterparts to the great urban civilizations of East, South or Western Asia.

These coastal settlements were never far removed from their peasant base, and remained richly permeated by the ethos and ethic of the peasant substrata, no matter how complex or Brahminized became the inland ceremonial centres of the great rice plains such as those of Central and East Java (which lie outside this discussion) or how important the role of international trade became there. Thus the network of extended family relationships, characteristic of peasant family structures, continued to link town dwellers to the hinterland and served to spread, dilute, and restructure elements of the urban culture in ever widening circles, so what in the city became the heritage of a community sharing the theology and social organization of a world religion, in the hinterland was absorbed into village life styles that in Islamic times were to be known as *adat*, and understood and practised, in as far as they were understood and practised, as elements of *adat*.

At the same time, literary traditions - albeit fragmented and short-lived - did develop in particular urban centres, some belonging to and under the patronage of the court, some related to the scholastic tradition of Islam, and some perhaps - for we are on uncertain ground here - deriving from a middle class, the character of which is not altogether clear; these various strands both drew on and influenced the folk traditions of the region in which the city fostered them was set.

There have been various centres of Malay culture, some of which are better known than others. Among them Malacca takes pride of place, for it is the oldest of which we have a significant corpus of knowledge. This is why it is traditional to begin discussions of literature in our region with the Sultanate of Malacca, founded [±] 1400. The Portuguese who captured it in 1511 wrote lyrically of its wealth and splendour. Winstedt expresses the traditional view of scholars when he writes of its 'spacious days',³ and regards it as the source of all that is brightest and best in Malay letters.

The 'century of Malacca' coincides with the most creative period of the European Renaissance. During it, Venice, bride of the sea, and culturally a blend of paganism, Christianity and Oriental splendour, was at its most brilliant; the Medici family reached its apogee;

Leonardo da Vinci (b. 1452) and Michaelangelo (b. 1475) reached the height of their creative powers. It was the age of Pope Alexander VI and Machiavelli. And it was also the century in which the Turks captured Constantinople (1453).

From the accounts they have left, one could be forgiven for imagining that the Portuguese had discovered a Far Eastern Venice. In Tome Pires' description of the city, there is no hint of condescension or sense of cultural superiority.⁴ He reports its wealth, the extent of its trading interests and its superb location, echoing the words of d'Albuquerque: 'Never was a ship lost there'.

At first sight it would seem that one was dealing with the same kind of place, but in a different geographical location. Yet the European Renaissance, nourished intellectually by the rediscovery of Greek learning and economically by the discovery of the New World, had given birth to a new kind of European man; and it was the representatives of this kind of man who conquered Malacca, and established a European presence in the Eastern Seas confronting peoples with a very different view both of the world and of their own selves.

Yet what was the ethos of the city to which they had come; what among its inhabitants was the view of man as man; what was the character of its intellectual life?

These questions cannot be answered with any certainty. We cannot even be sure that the Portuguese were reporting precisely what they observed. Were they simply looking at a harbour crowded with ships, to which they filled in the general picture of what they expected such a port city to be? Were they trying to impress the home government? After all, one of their goals in capturing Malacca, and establishing a series of strongholds to dominate the seas, was to cut off the economic wealth of the Muslim powers in the Middle East and secure the riches of the Indies for the Christians of Europe, by-passing the Saracen middle men. It was in their interest to make sure that their achievement was not underrated.

The evidence of the intellectual life of Malacca from indigenous sources is at best fragmentary. The only work purporting to give a first-hand account of the city in its heyday is the *Sejarah Melayu*, popularly rendered in English as the *Malay Annals*.⁵ Internal evidence suggests that the oldest existing recension was prepared in Johore in 1612, a copy of which was made for Raffles in about 1812.

It is a work that enjoys a fame, perhaps disproportionate to its merits, largely on account of the antiquity - by Malay standards - of the period it treats, and its uniqueness.

Structurally, it is a dynastic list of the rulers of Malacca, interspersed with anecdotes of a certain wit and charm; it refers in a general way to Islamic matters and reflects the compiler's smattering of various cultures: Malay folk traditions of South Sumatra, south Indian traditions, enhanced by references to Persian stories of the heroes of Islam, and a few episodes from the romance of Alexander the Great which may derive from a written source. Yet all these elements are treated as though they were of equivalent status and reliability. They are woven into the text to form a kind of mosaic that is similar in structure to tales belonging to the folk tradition. What is clear is that it is not a Renaissance work, and it is evident that the world into which these Portuguese buccaneer merchants and crusaders sailed was very different from the one they had left behind.

Although the *Malay Annals* is not a history other than in the sense that its account of Malacca is given a chronological shape, it is a document of cultural interest, to which its loose anecdotal structure gives a certain charm and literary appeal. Part of this appeal derives from the character vignettes that appear in these anecdotes, some of them as sharply etched as the carved puppets of the Javanese shadow theatre.

One of them concerns a Bendahara (First Minister) with a Liberace style taste in dress. We are told that: 'He changed his clothes seven times a day; he had a thousand jackets of one sort or another; his headclothes stood ready-tied on blocks, twenty or thirty of them in constant use; he had a full-length looking-glass, and after putting on sarong, creese and scarf, he would ask his wife's advice on what head-cloth he should wear.'⁶

Another is about a Sultan's brother: 'He was so devoted to his pony that he had a stable prepared for it next to his own sleeping quarters, and would visit it two or three times during the night. Before riding out he doused the pony with perfume, and was so handsome that whenever he passed by the market, the women crowded round to see him, and those in seclusion peered through the shutters and doorways of the houses, and climbed on to roofs to get a glimpse of him.'⁷ The Sultan later had him executed for excessive womanizing.

Yet another tells of the reward promised to a holy man by a pretender for help to win the throne. The promised reward is a princess; but after the successful coup, the holy man receives, not the promised princess, but a servant girl, dressed up in fine clothes and jewellery.⁸ Yet another is about a ruler making the rounds of his kingdom at night incognito to investigate the effectiveness of his police force.⁹

An episode worth quoting at length tells of the rescue of a Sultan's favourite horse which fell into a cesspool:

One day it happened that the horse which Sultan Mansur himself used to ride fell into the cesspool, but though people quickly crowded round to get it out, no one would actually volunteer to go into the pool, and fasten a rope to the animal. When Hang Tuah saw what had happened, he plunged at once into the cesspool and secured a rope to the neck of the horse, which was then hauled up. When the horse was up, Hang Tuah himself came out of the pool, then went and bathed. When Sultan Mansur Shah saw that his horse had been pulled out of the cesspool, he was delighted; he praised Hang Tuah highly and presented him with robes of honour appropriate to his rank. 10

Finally, there is the pathos of the story of the chief minister who entering the audience hall, and hearing the door of the royal apartment slam in a gust of wind, imagined that he had fallen into the royal disfavour, and poisoned himself.¹¹

These stories are often of entertainment value. Whether any of them have a factual base it is impossible to say. Some are so vivid that one is inclined to say that if they did not happen then they ought to have. But much apocryphal material abounds in anecdotes of this kind. It is significant however that close attention to their structure shows that they derive from diverse, widely diffused traditions.

The motif of a ruler patrolling his kingdom incognito, or the retainer promised a princess for services to be rendered and given a servant girl, is commonplace. The figure of the prince so handsome that his passage through the market causes a sensation among all the women in the neighbourhood is equally widely known. One cannot always be sure whether there is a purpose for including any particular anecdote or vignette. The account of the Liberace type Bendahara appears to be simply of entertainment value. Others however illustrate the devotion of court officers to the person of the king; the Bendahara who commits suicide rather than live on, if he has, through some fault intended or unintended, given offence to the ruler, and Hang Tuah who

plunges into the cesspool to save the king's horse, exposing himself to ritual as well as physical impurity.

Some of the stories about the ruler himself indicate his dedication to the interests of his people, others his superiority to them, yet others that he is not bound by the same moral rules as ordinary mortals. The Sultan who passes off the servant girl as a princess is described as of high character, just, humane and discriminating.¹²

In attempting to judge the achievement of the work, it is suggestive to take as a reference point a characteristic passage from an Arabic anecdotal history, *al-Fakhri* by ibn al-Tiqtaqa, written in 1302.

'Abd al-Malik was of sound judgement, intelligent, learned, powerful, of great presence, of great political skill, and a good administrator of the things of this world. In his days the language of administration was changed from Persian to Arabic, and the mass of the people became Arabized. And he was the first who prohibited the people from speaking in the presence of the Caliphs, or from contradicting them, for previously they had dared to do that, as has already been described.

And it was he who gave authority to al-Hajjaj b. Yusuf who had invaded the Ka'ba and killed 'Abdullah b. al-Zubayr and his brother Mas'ab before this.

An ironic feature of the episode is that 'Abd al-Malik, when Yazid b. Mu'awiyah (his predecessor) had sent the army to attack the people of Medina, and then the Ka'ba, was extremely disgusted and exclaimed: 'would that the sky had fallen on the earth'. But when he became Caliph, he did that, and even worse than that. For he sent al-Hajjaj to besiege ibn Zubayr, and he attacked Mecca.

Now before he became Caliph, 'Abd al-Malik was one of the students of Medina, and he was called the pigeon of the mosque because of the length of time he spent reciting the Qur'an. But when his father died, and it was announced to him that he was Caliph, he closed the Holy Book and said: 'this is the parting of the ways between you and me'. He then devoted himself to matters of this world. And it is related that he said one day to Sa'id b. al-Musib: 'O, Sa'id, I feel I used to do good, and found no joy in it, and now I do evil, and suffer no harm from it.' And Sa'id said to him: 'Now the death of the heart is complete within you'. 13

There is immediately evident, even from this brief episode, a very different level of intellectual perception and judgement than is to be found in the Malay work. True both have in common the presentation of character through a list of qualities. But the Arabic account is concerned with historical realities, presents the characters involved in

these realities, lists the personal qualities of each one whether good or bad, illustrates them through his actions in specific situations, then passes or implies judgement.

Such a measure of control does not exist in the Malay work; it does not achieve an integration of character, anecdote and moral judgement. Rather the anecdotes, in many cases, are reworked presentations of motifs from various sources including the folk tradition, to teach a moral, to give an example or to entertain, which hardly ever have anything to do with the individuality of the person described. In the Arabic extract the character of the person presented is primary, the anecdote is subordinate to and an illustration of character. In the *Malay Annals*, the anecdote is inserted for reasons other than the individuality of the person with whom it is associated: thus it is not overstating the matter to say that the anecdotes when not moralizing are playful, and make no pretence of illustrating a relationship between individual, personality and action, or that the cultural milieu out of which the work evolved is not so very different to that of the heroes and buffoons of the Malay folk tradition.

From a historical point of view this perhaps suggests that the role of Malay culture in Malacca has been over-emphasized, and the Portuguese assessment of the significance of Malacca as a Malay Kingdom likewise. Rather, it seems, the bustling metropolis described by the Portuguese was largely a concourse of foreigners engaged in activities in which the Malays played a largely ceremonial role, and in which the Malay language - in the linguistic diversity which reigned, never achieved a broad diffusion other than at the level of a lingua franca. During this early period it had perhaps not yet achieved the cultural status it was to enjoy with the rise of Aceh, or won the general acceptance of foreigners such as Tamils, Chinese, Gujeratis and Arabs. Despite its usefulness, it did not stir far from its peasant roots, and remained dominated by the oral tradition.¹⁴

From the point of view of literary history, it shows how far removed the *Sejarah Melayu* is from the skills and perceptions that can properly be called literary: there is neither concern for the personality of the individual nor the realities of his life. For the vignettes that study the *Sejarah Melayu*, despite their occasional sharpness of focus, are discrete, limited; they are presented visually; one feature of behaviour follows another. But there is not analysis of character, nor awareness of complex motivation, nothing that adds up

to personality. One might in fact characterise parts of the *Malay Annals* as simply dressed up tittle tattle.

There are several literary works which have been ascribed to the Malacca period. The most famous is the romance of Iskandar dhu'l-Karnain (Alexander the Great), and there are two other romances mentioned in an account in the *Malay Annals*, of a court scene the night before Malacca falls to the Portuguese.¹⁵ It is not certain however whether this reference belongs to an early draft of the work, no longer existing, or was simply inserted in the 1612 recension, after the rise of Aceh.

Worth discussing in detail is one work, the *Hikayat Bayan Budiman* (The Tale of the Wise Parrot) which could date back to the time of Malacca, although more probably it derives from the Aceh period. A fragment of it was brought to Britain from Aleppo, perhaps before the turn of the seventeenth century.¹⁶ Although deriving from a Persian source, it is a work of such distinctive character and liveliness, that an attempt must be made to place it in a social setting. It is a frame story, and at first sight frame stories are not particularly promising. Several examples of them have found their way to the Malay world and as a rule they do not grip the reader's attention. This, however, is one of the very few literary works from the Malay world distinguished by scepticism and wit, a level of integration of structure, and clearly rooted in the world of commerce.

The principal characters in the story are a merchant, the parrot and the merchant's wife.

The merchant sees the parrot offered for sale for 1,000 gold pieces in the market. He takes an option on it because the wise bird gives him a sound business tip: that a caravan will be coming to Iran within three days in search of spikenard. If he buys up all the spikenard available, and corners the market, he will make a huge profit and be able to afford the price. The caravan arrives as foretold. The merchant makes his profit and closes the deal. Having had proof of the bird's ability in economic matters, he decides to use it for domestic purposes, and entrusts his wife to its keeping when he travels overseas. He continues his business dealings overseas because 'capital decreases in value unless one continuously adds to it'.

The parrot accepts its new responsibilities in company with another pet, a mynah bird. After the merchant has departed on his

travels, his wife, sitting on her balcony sees a handsome prince passing along the street below. 'He looks up at her, and she looks down to him.'

An assignation is arranged through the good offices of an old woman. Night falls, and the wife prepares to set out to the prince's palace. However, before departing she asks for the mynah bird's view on what she is about to do. The mynah bird beats its wings against its breast in horror, and tells her how evil is what she proposes. It meets the just deserts for its tactlessness. The woman in a fury takes it out of its cage, and hurls it to the ground with fatal results.

The parrot feigns sleep, and pretends to wake with a start when the woman approaches him. He enthusiastically approves of her plan, telling her how fortunate she is to have a tryst with a prince, and that in no circumstances should she keep him waiting. He warns her not to tell the mynah bird what she is about to do, for being female, its tongue cannot be trusted. The situation, the parrot continues, reminds him of a story. The woman's curiosity is aroused. She insists on hearing the story in full, and remains listening until the new day dawns, and it is too late to set out. The parrot uses the same device successive nights, until the husband returns to find the virtue of his wife unsullied.

Some of the stories have a gusto and bawdiness that is reminiscent of Boccaccio. As for example the story of the woman with a husband who was never jealous because he had committed adultery with a woman whose husband was always jealous: whose husband was able to take whatever shape he chose; who on one occasion changed himself into an elephant and carried his wife on his back, then fell asleep under a tree, thus providing an opportunity for the lover in the tree to have his way with her on her husband's back. She then produced a string from her pocket with thirty-nine knots in it and added another, bringing the count of her infidelities to forty. It is worth pointing out that this is a story set in a story set in a story! But this technical virtuosity apart, the work is striking for various reasons: the clear mercantile ethos that infuses it, the attitudes to capital it reflects, the gambit of cornering the market that it describes; the careful arrangement of the stories within the frame, and the gradual change in the wife's moral attitudes that adds an integral character to the work; the use of magical elements simply as technical devices; the scant respect for

king and clergy, and a wordly-wise attitude to human greed and weakness. There is a sharp-etched perception of character, the same detached and slightly cynical comment on human nature, that one finds in *The Decameron*. True, the character perceived is not that of an organic complex of conflicting drives, but personal roles are created which are not only consistent in their presentation, but are manipulated with skill and a certain wry detachment.

There are other examples that could be discussed: tales of simpletons, stock types that lived on everyone's lips, romances of wandering story-tellers of the folk-tradition, the relatively well-established Muslim scholastic tradition of Aceh, which included as early as 1603 a version of a panegyric of the Prophet Muhammad. But these would not significantly modify the judgement that there is no development of a personality for its own sake; nothing either in the nature of a biography or an autobiography, forms which were in fact well established elsewhere in the Muslim world, even though these were not literary biographies or autobiographies in the modern sense. One need only think of the massive bibliographical dictionaries, the biographies of the Prophet Muhammad, or that work of such remarkable inwardness and perception, al-Ghazali's *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl* (Deliverance from Error)¹⁷ which were but a part of the Muslim literary tradition.

In a way this is surprising, for Islam allows considerable scope for the development of individuality. Indeed an important element of Muhammad's genius was his ability consistently to reform and re-think Arabian tribal custom in such a way as to give scope to the individual. Plainly this individualism was not so far-reaching as that developed in Christianity on the basis of Hellenism, but it was far removed from the restrictions placed on the individual, as much by Malay custom as Arab tribal custom. It appears then, that certain elements of Islam civilization simply did not 'take' in the Malay environment in the Malaccan period, among them the development of an individual-oriented literary culture. One can only conclude that even in the fifteenth century there were sufficiently articulated mechanisms in Malay family and clan, which while not as strongly developed as, say, those of Confucianism, did limit the acceptance of foreign literary forms, and the development of specific perceptions of the self.

Thus it is not surprising that the first significant manifestation of an individualism should have been mediated through Islamic culture,

or that the first autobiography in Malay should be the product of a community of Malay speakers with an only marginal association with traditional Malay culture; a middle class community with a strongly developed mercantile base, self-consciously Islamic, and proudly so, and with extensive family and economic links with a Muslim network extending through various port communities on the Indian sub-continent to the Yemen, the holy cities of Islam, and the broader currents of Islam in the Islamic heartlands of the Middle East.

This is the significance both of the achievement and background of Abdullah Abdul Kadir' Munsyi. He was born in Malacca in 1797. His grandfather, of Yemeni descent, had migrated there from Mysore in the early years of the eighteenth century, and married a teacher in a local Qur'an school. Abdullah then had a background which gave him an opportunity to develop himself, and to express himself as an individual, through a formal and informal training, that the collectivist pressures of a traditional society could not stifle. And we see the fruit of this individuality in his autobiography, *Hikayat Abdullah* (The story of Abdullah), virtually the first autobiography written in Malay, published in 1849.¹⁸

An autobiographical work may of course be many things. It may be an account of the times one has lived through, one's role in the making of them, or what they have made of one's self; yet again it may be a view of the whole of one's life viewed from the perspective of old age, or simply key episodes seen from one's prime or summit of achievement. Abdullah's work does not fall into any of these categories. It does not have the sweep of a literary work, or the analysis of personalities in conflict and development that one would like to expect. Formally, it is more an arrangement of notes and jottings than an integrated piece of work. Yet it reflects the personality of the author, and reveals something of his inner attitudes in a way that had never been done in Malay before. And it is this that gives it both interest and charm. It tells much of the time in which he lived and the mannerisms and eccentricities, the vices and virtues of the people he met. His vision has cut a swath across the world before him, and he relates what he sees as a chronicler rather than a thinker or analyst. To this extent then, he is a child of his time and of his own traditions. He is attracted more by external idiosyncrasies than true individuality - in the manner of the compiler of the *Malay Annals* - and recounts with

fascination the time when a tiger leapt at Mr Farquhar mounted on his horse at full gallop and only knocked off his hat (p. 70), and Raffles' habit of lying flat on his back on his writing table, jumping up to write, and then lying back to think again (p. 75). He catalogues a person's characteristics in the Arabic manner: A good person is wise, forbearant, generous, intelligent, learned; an evil person is cruel, mean, or simply stupid.

Of his personal attitudes, we find material of interest. His understanding of religion is enlightened and untarnished by superstition. He has a clear sense of the creative power of God and the moral responsibility of man - for which he can hardly be regarded as indebted exclusively to the British, for he belongs to a clear line of Muslim tradition. Perhaps not all of his attitudes would be regarded as enlightened today. He had an adamant respect for parents and schoolteachers which was able to withstand the cruel treatment he received from both. His account of this teaching is hair-raising. He writes: 'Many writing tablets were smashed in pieces when they were used to hit me on the head. Many canes were broken on my body', to which he blandly comments 'Mark well how difficult it is to aspire to knowledge, wisdom, skill and learning.'¹⁹ Not the complete plaster cast saint, he admits to praying frequently that his teacher's days would be shortened, but looking back, he realizes how good this pain has been for him. He argues:

Knowledge and skill are the ladder to riches, and riches lead to greatness. Of a truth, all things created by Allah in this world have their value which can be reckoned in terms of money; learning alone commands a price which no man can determine. Moreover the wealth of this world, its riches and its greatness are ephemeral things, like a fickle woman changing her affections from one to another, as she pleases. But knowledge, on the other hand, is steadfast and sincere. Bright is its countenance, the best of companions for a man of discretion, never forsaking him while life remains in his body. It is the most wonderful of the things created by Allah. It is not devoured by worms, damaged by rain or sun, or able to be stolen by other men.

And so:

Now when I remember how I was struck, beaten, slapped and admonished, the many tablets broken over my head, the stern and angry looks, the nagging and scolding of all my teachers, I realize that each blow of the cane on

my body has now become a lamp to guide me, each slap a pair of spectacles to my eyes. Had there been no lamp to my hand, no spectacles for me to use, doubtless many times I would have stumbled into the furrows and channels which lie thick on the highways and byways to knowledge, for without lamps to guide them many men before me have stumbled hither and thither, falling and jumping up covered in mud and filth, their limbs broken. 20

The reader should not be put off by the prolixity of expression, or by the curious mixture of tags from Islamic ethnical treatises and Malay proverbs which characterize the book as a whole. They appear to stamp him as a type, and to hide his individuality. Yet we would not be doing him justice if we saw him simply as a middle-aged Asian Gentleman, a little full of his own self-importance. He had an exceptional concern with the world about him; even when his house was burning down, with all his possessions in it, he was seen scurrying around with pencil and paper taking notes. He had a healthy sense of humour and could laugh at himself. And in his description of his feelings after the death in childbirth of the wife to whom he had been married for twenty years, veiled by the verbiage and conventional metaphors, there is genuine intensity of grief, and he sells his house for a fraction of its value because in it, wherever he turns, he is haunted by his wife's face.²¹

Abdullah has been called an Anglophile. True, he ends one chapter of his book: 'Long Live Queen Victoria'; he had scant respect for the Malay court and for those Malays who could not be aroused to any interest in their own cultural heritage. Yet he reacted in this way because he was his own man. He had a sense of the world, beyond the borders of his homeland. He knew in addition to Malay and English, Arabic, Hindustani and Bengali; he began to study Chinese. Although he knew many distinguished British administrators, from Raffles onwards, he was also in regular contact with Shaikhs from the Yemen. He had none of the inhibitions or prickly defensiveness bred by a further century of colonial rule, and although a devout Muslim, the only objection he had to missionaries he was helping to translate the gospels into Malay was their obstinate insensitivity to the rules of Malay grammar. Perhaps we can see in him a representative, a pioneer of the new intellectual era that Muhammad Ali ushered into Egypt in the first decades of the nineteenth century. And although he founded no group sharing his ideals and interests which could ensure further progress,

he at least was able to say: I am a man and a Muslim, and I stand here in my own right.

Abdullah died in 1854. We have no record of a similar expression of individualism until the time of Kartini, the daughter, by a secondary wife, of the Regent of the north Javanese town of Jepara in 1879. She was a girl who was sent by her father to a Dutch school until she reached adolescence, and who then, for a period of four years, was confined to her father's house. There, according to Javanese tradition she should have remained until she married. But her firm refusal to marry, and the eagerness with which she devoted herself to study led her father to relent, and to allow her to see the world again, going against Javanese tradition in this, as he had gone against it in allowing her to go to school. This period of confinement developed a rich inwardness of personality fostered by a wide reading in Dutch literature of many kinds. At about the age of twenty she began writing to various pen-friends and acquaintances in Holland and the Indies. Letters, in the Western tradition are a key to the inner recesses of men's minds. Acton remarks in his *Lectures on Modern History* 'that the great figures of the Renaissance were excellent letter writers... in hundreds of volumes - from Petrarch to Sadolet and Pole - we can trace every idea, and mark every throb... it was the first time that the characters of men were exposed with analytic distinctness; the first time indeed that character could be examined with accuracy and certitude'.²²

Those of her letters which have survived editorial selection and the passage of years amount to a small volume.²³ Yet despite the limitations of her formal education, she revealed perceptions of her inner life that Javanese polite society refused to acknowledge; she saw that religion, creator and guardian of moral values, could be a cause of war and suffering; she realized that love could be both heaven and hell: without her father's love, life would be meaningless to her - because of that love, she had to sacrifice her freedom. In realizing this ambivalence of love, she was able to express in a letter to a friend thoughts that she would never have dared utter in the family circle: why should her father heed the voice of the world, and not that of his own heart. And, realizing the burden that being a girl imposed upon her, she longs for the day when boys and girls will be able to associate with each other as equal human beings.

Her perceptions, particularly when they concern personal relations, are deeper than those of Abdullah, even though they are reached intuitively rather than intellectually; yet the fact that we have to look back to Abdullah to find a point of comparison with her simply highlights what a rarity she was, and how little direct influence she too had; how slow was the transformation in the way of thinking, that she represents, to awaken any imitation or response.

Somewhere between the extrovert character of the writing of Abdullah - who could never bring himself to criticize parent or teacher - or who perhaps never felt any need to do so, and the extremely personal disclosures of Kartini can be placed an autobiographical fragment by Muhammad Radjab *Semasa Kecil di kampung*²⁴ (A village childhood), published in 1950. He was born in 1913, nine years after the death of Kartini. The fragment covers the years 1913-28 - the author's childhood and early adolescence. In some respects his background is similar to that which produced Abdullah. Radjab - or Ridjal as he calls himself in the narrative - was the son of a Muslim religious teacher in a village in the mountains of West Sumatra, a region in which education (religious or secular) and trading are the two preferred areas of activity. The extended family system provides a means by which the bourgeois economic orientation of some members of the family supports the educational, religious aspirations of others. Such a close association between the 'ulama' and a 'bourgeoisie', although not necessarily within a clan or family structure, is characteristic of the Islamic urban ethos. Radjab then, was formed in a cultural milieu similar to that of Abdullah.

The style of his book too has something of the extrovert character of the earlier author, although, limited to the first fifteen years of its author's life, it deals much more fully with his childhood. But a nostalgia infuses his memories, a kind of romantic longing for things past: for his mother's grave, and the majestic line of mountains that passes through Sumatra - that does not occur in Abdullah. And his style, though far from accomplished, is not burdened with the excess baggage of conventional wisdom characteristic of the earlier author. The book opens on a questioning note: 'Why I was born into this world, I do not know; why I was born in Minangkabau, I know even less. These two questions have bothered me since my earliest childhood - but there is no point in grappling with unanswerable problems.'

True, he does not take up philosophical questions of this kind. True he does not give us any details of the process of his mind, or the paths by which he takes up positions on particular issues: but there are issues on which he stands apart from his father and his father's values (he does not justify them, as did Abdullah), issues on which he stands apart from the norms of his society, issues on which the teaching he received at the government school set him at odds with the teaching he was given at the religious school. Yet, and this is both a characteristic and limitation of the work, these positions are presented as clearly defined, as understood with crystal clarity at the moment they are acquired. Radjab, writing at the age of thirty-seven, has projected backwards the view he has formulated since. Thus we discover in his story no sense of process, search, or intellectual growth.

Many of the scenes from childhood are delightful: first days at school, games of hide and seek, expeditions up the mountain, the celebrations following the completion of study of the Qur'an, the retribution that follows being caught peeping at the girls bathing (during the fasting month!) and a graphic description of the violent earthquake of 1926. In their confusion, people came running to his father as a pillar of the community, only to receive the cold comfort: there is no hope. Judgement Day is come. Recite together the profession of Faith: there is no god but God, Muhammad is His prophet.

Radjab's father was eager that his son should follow in his footsteps as a teacher of religion, and learn from him the secret knowledge that had been handed down in the family from generation to generation. Radjab had no interest in this learning, but to please his father, he agreed to study it from him. His father was overjoyed, and after making him swear never to use it for evil purposes, taught him the techniques of Minangkabau boxing, and various magical spells: spells to treat diseases, spells for self defence, spells to win a woman's love for one's self and to make her hate one's rivals, spells to make a man married to a girl one loved to suffer continually from colic and the need to pass water, spells to prevent the rice being prepared for the rival's wedding ever being cooked, no matter how many faggots of wood were burnt under the pot.

He recounts how he tried to use this knowledge to make a girl fall in love with him. At midnight he took an incense burner, a needle,

charcoal, thread and a lime. He hung the thread from a crosspiece over the incense burner into which he put some glowing coals and a few grains of incense. Clouds of incense smoke billowed upwards. He concentrated on the lime, and pierced it repeatedly with the needle, twisting it round as though it were the girl's heart, at the same time declaring: 'I love this girl; she does not love me. She must love me. If she refuses, let her suffer agony, through the virtue of Muhammad the prophet. *Lā ilāha illa'llāh.*'

The spell was ineffective. The most interesting feature of the story is the ambivalence in the boy's mind: common sense telling him that the rite was nonsense, his hope against hope that it would work, and then his attempt to discover why it had been a failure. He appears not to have felt any guilt at the experiment, but never repeated it. Nor did he ever tell his father he had no confidence in his magic.

The scenes set in the religious school give an idea of the conflict between what he was taught there, and what he was taught in the secular school. Mornings Radjab went to the government primary school from 8 to 1. Afternoons he went to the religious school to study Arabic and religious works from 2 to 5, and the Qur'an from 9 to 11 p.m. The lessons in Arabic were merely unintelligible, but lessons on geography and cosmology were bewildering. The religious teacher taught him that the earth was flat, and rested on an ox; that the sun revolved around the earth; and there were four skies, each so thick that to walk across it would take 500 years; the first of copper, the second of silver, the third of gold, the fourth of diamond, above which was the sun drawn with chains of gold by thousands of angels.

Radjab asks (it is obvious that he has edited his remarks):

"Since copper is opaque, and is of such thickness, how does sunlight reach the earth?"

His uncle replies:

"Oh" [Radjab presents himself as replying], "So this does not depend on the nature of copper. Then why is it that sunlight does not penetrate the tiles of our roof, which are so thin?"

"Because it is Allah's will that we should not suffer from the heat."

"But if we made our roofs of glass, we would suffer from

heat. Why should Allah's will be one thing in the case of clay, and another in the case of glass? I don't believe you."

"You are an unbeliever, you will go to Hell for thousands of years."

"I am not an unbeliever, I'm only asking for something to be explained. And if everything is a direct consequence of God's will, is not this question of mine also prompted by God's will." 25

The dialogue, for all its vitality, shows a skill in dialectic and a confidence in standing his ground, unlikely to be found in an eleven-year-old boy in his community. One wonders whether in writing it in this way, Radjab wished to settle old scores, or was not aware of, or simply was not able to express, the process of change in intellect and personality from child to man.

He attributes to himself an equal dialectic skill when he happens to attend a discussion of advanced students of ritual law attempting to give rulings on the following problem:

i) Suppose one were to tread accidentally on a severed penis lying in the middle of the road. Would one's ritual purity be broken, and the performance of ritual ablutions be required?

ii) Should one pray over the penis, as one would over a corpse, and should it be wrapped in a shroud before burial?

Again there is the obvious projection backwards, not only in the use of dialectic but in his mental judgement: that the minds of these aspirant legists were so dominated by the importance of reference to authorities, that it never occurred to them to think for themselves.²⁶ It will be noted that here is the beginning of a radical critique of social behaviour, and that Radjab is in fact formulating a new epistemology, and a new attitude to individual judgement. But having made the point, he fails to develop it.

The account of the book so far has illustrated the liveliness of the author's mind; and from this point of view the anachronisms, the equivalent of what one wishes one had said on the way home from the party, do no harm. Yet if we are concerned with exploration of the mind, and the inner aspects of personal relationships, we will find in the registration of emotional responses that can be read between the lines, a surer guide to the boy's personality than in the speeches he puts into his own mouth. Radjab is a facile writer without any pre-

tensions to intellectual depth. Yet there is a level to his story of which he was perhaps not consciously aware; an expression of a deep tension between father and son: the father longing for the boy to succeed him as head of the religious school - the boy unable to accept the aridity of the religion taught him by his uncle, and his longing to share the independence enjoyed by his peers who had left the village for further study, or gone to learn petty trading - in soap and cigarettes.

Between the sixteenth-century 'Tale of the Wise Parrot' the seventeenth-century *Malay Annals*, the nineteenth-century autobiography of Abdullah, the letters of Kartini of the turn of the century, and the twentieth-century autobiography of Radjab, certain changes made their appearance in the Malay world. It is to these changes, whether educational, social or technical, differing in scope and intensity from region to region, that we must attribute changes in the forms of personal expression that we have discussed. Among the technical innovations was the introduction of the printing press in the mid-nineteenth century. This had an important part to play in the evolution of a written language of discourse and description, liberated from the limits inherent in the oral tradition of what listeners can absorb, which place severe restrictions on the rhythm and texture of argument and narrative.

It is a change in perceptions of the self however, deriving from educational and social change, that have resulted in the different kinds of writing that we have been discussing.

These changes in the perception of and attitude to the self, have been accompanied by a changing ethic of what personal matters should be revealed and what hidden: and this in turn has affected the degree to which an author's work is inner or outer oriented.

They are changes which affect the relation of an author to those things which in a traditionally tempered society are most crucial to him: family, soil and religion, and which are lived in a kind of hypostatic unity. For religion in the traditional world view is not simply a moral code, or set of beliefs. It is part of the texture of family relationships, and serves to justify and maintain a hierarchical principal of order within those relationships. Likewise family life - the life of the extended family - which is an expression of the religious order, is part of a stable and continuing relationship with the soil

from which the community wrests its livelihood, into which every individual is born, on which he depends, to which he contributes, and without which he cannot live and die as a *man*.

For the European, this nexus is not so rigorous; and the ability to maintain each component separately is epitomized in the figure of Robinson Crusoe: the man who, separated not only from family but any kind of community, in an alien environment, draws on the moral resources of religious belief to maintain his status as a man: to clothe and house himself, to provide a supply of food longer than for the day, to measure the passing of time, and to maintain a journal of his activities. The same forceful individualism that enables Crusoe to maintain his clearly-articulated religious beliefs - very akin to those of Abdullah - and to subject the natural environment of his island to serve him without the help of any other human creature (until he meets man Friday) is to be seen in Fielding's characterization of Joseph Andrews. Here religious principles and a moral positivism are used by a child to pass judgement on and reprove his parents. At the point in the story where Joseph's sister has come into a fortune, and his parents tell him that he should therefore look for a more worthy betrothed than his lowly-born Fanny, Joseph responds with spirit:

I know not,... that my parents have any power over my inclinations; nor am I obliged to sacrifice my happiness to their whim or ambition; besides, I shall be very sorry to see that the unexpected advancement of my sister should so suddenly inspire them with this wicked pride, and make them despise their equals. I am resolved on no account to quit my dear Fanny; no, though I could raise her as high above her present station as you have raised my sister. 27

Both of these heroes held, and still hold, the respect of the reading public, even if not all the members of the public would have the personal resources of Robinson Crusoe, or as parents be prepared to tolerate the vigorous self-assertion of Joseph Anderews. Unmixed admiration would not be a traditional Malay response to either of these heroes: an element of pity and anxiety would colour the response to the one - what if he fell ill? and indignation - what does he know, a child who can't even keep his nose clean? to the other.

Self-assertion hardly had time to reveal itself in a literary form in our region before it was overtaken by its obverse which is angst and ambivalence, as though in the last resort the weight of

individual responsibility were too much to bear, freedom from external restraints resulting in a loss of inner orientation.

In this situation religious faith ceases to be an anchor, a foundation for every activity, and becomes instead - if it is maintained at all - a kind of balancing pole as man walks a tightrope of uncertainties; its infra-structure of dogma dissolves into a blurred perception of values, a tantalizing vision of an eschatology to be realized, which only occasionally comes into focus.

The pursuit of this vision often means the rejection of every value of the here and now because of a sense that whatever may give comfort and assurance in life deserves no more trust than the answers given to children's questions so that they will not be afraid in the dark.

It is the appearance of ideas of this kind which are necessary for the development of a modernizing literature in the western sense, for this literature derives from the projection in various guises of the personality of an author in his encounters with his life and his own self. In Indonesia this new literary development took two main directions. One is illustrated by the work of the poet Chairil Anwar (1922-49), an epitome, almost of the poet maudit, leading a life of libidinous sensuality, and writing a free verse characterized by an economy of language, taut control, and musical balance. He is best known for a poem, written in 1943, in which he rejects society:

When death comes
No one will mourn for me, I know,
Not even you...
I do not need your grief.

I am a wild animal,
Wounded, one that the herd has left.
In pain I turn challenging the wind.

With the poisoned wound I'll fly
Until the wind has cauterised the pain.

I shall bear the agony and live on
Another thousand years. 28

The prose sense of the poem is clear: the poet rejects his society and all its sanctions, and wants no-one to mourn him when he is dead. Such protestations do not amount to much more than posturing in western society. To the instincts, even of the modern Indonesian however, they are a scandal. To *want* to die alone and unmourned; to dis-

regard the judgement of society whether alive or dead, is a terrible thing. To die without taking leave, asking pardon of none, is a guarantee of an appallingly protracted death agony and the punishment of the tomb.

Perhaps Henley intended his declamatory poem 'Invictus' to be 'blasphemous' in something of the same way:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud;
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the Shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

But despite the superficial similarity in sentiment, there is nothing in common between the two poems. Apart from any question of poetic worth - the best that can be said of 'Invictus' is that it is 'good bad poetry' - 'Invictus', in any case, was intended to win approval, not to shock.

Chairil on the other hand is introducing a new sense of the self into his poem; a sense new for his environment, and new for the linguistic medium in which he expressed it. I suggest that he became the kind of poet that he did because of the perception that somehow he was different from other young men. They would write poetry for love of a homeland far away, or for the coming of first love. Romantic love was alien to Chairil, and this perception of it as alien became the theme of his early poetry. He could sit face to face with a girl coming to him with flowers, with romance and simplicity, and find an invisible but impenetrable barrier between himself and her; he saw himself unable to accept the conventional bourgeois idea of love, marriage, children and stability, and thus condemned to be a wanderer across the face of the earth, cursed by Eros. He reveals a neurotic base for this kind of

inability to communicate. In one poem, for example, he sees himself in the darkness of his room, first oppressed by sexual loneliness, and envy of his peers, and then a small boy, frightened of shadows in the corners of the room, and sobbing: 'mother, mother'.

These and others like them reveal the agony of isolation - the punishment for his *hubris*, and a typical example of the effect of a dominant mother figure in Freudian psychology. That this was the nature of Chairil's relationship with his mother is shown by biographical evidence.

The originality of Chairil lies both in his inner exploration and in his shameless revelation of what he discovered within himself.

In seeing him, and in seeing the individuality revealed in his verse, it must be remembered that he was a deviant in terms of his society; an aberration rather than a representative of it; an example, brief but brilliant, of an individuality, 'western' in his perceptions and responses which he expressed brilliantly in Indonesian Malay, revitalizing the language without doing violence to its native genius.

At the same time he found a kind of cover throughout his career by a technique akin to feigned madness which saved him from total ostracism: he contrived, by accident or design, that he should be treated as a small boy with whom no-one could be really angry - whether he outraged the etiquette of the fasting month, or simply walked off with a clock from the house of his uncle, Sutan Sjahrir, at a time that the latter was Prime Minister of the country.

His persona has hidden his true personality, and much in his true personality has remained unintelligible to many of his fellow countrymen, who persist in reading him and interpreting him in ways determined by tradition. This, I think is the reason for the simplistic terms in which Indonesian critics see him: on the one hand as the Indonesian hero who espoused the ideals of the Indonesian revolution but who later besmirched his character by plagiarizing foreign poets; on the other as the radical, dedicated to vitalism, opting in his youth for Europe and individualism, who as the shades of death gathered round him at the early age of twenty-seven rediscovered and became reconciled with his traditional culture.

His last poems are seen as written in traditional forms, barely disguised, expressing the traditional Indonesian virtues of humility and acceptance of fate. Were this so, it would be tantamount to a

renunciation of the ideals expressed in the poems we have quoted. However, the way in which he is misunderstood is an illustration of the way in which his concept of the destiny of the individual is alien in his country. In Indonesia, everyone is expected to come home to die, to repent, to resolve all bitternesses and seek mutual forgiveness from all one's kin and acquaintances. A sound reason for this is given in Muslim teaching: some sins are forgiven by God, others can only be forgiven by those against whom they have been committed.

This sense is so strong among Indonesians, the stories of a death agony hideously protracted until the last forgiveness has been offered and accepted, that it is virtually impossible to see a dying man in his right mind opting out of this final peace-making, and acceptance of social obligation. Yet Chairil does exactly this. In his last poems he faces death and dissolution calmly.

He looks back on his ideals and hopes, both for himself and his poetry of only seven years before, as if from a distance of centuries. He had seen himself as a man who would play on the instrument of life, not the instrument on which life played; he had seen his ideal, set out for it with a great surge of confidence and an inexorable honesty; then is struck by the foreboding that what he seeks is far away on an island that he can never reach, a foreboding that hardens to the certainty that every struggle ends in defeat. He accepts the fact, with a stoic dignity, and without regrets. The struggle had not taken him as far as he had wished; but there is no turning back.

The novelist Pramudya Ananta Tur (b. 1923) took another path. The two men in any case were very different. Chairil Anwar is the universal humanist with his attention oriented to the culture of the whole world, a voracious reader never seen without a book, the man concerned with meticulous accuracy in his choice of words, constantly re-writing and correcting his work. Pramudya is very much the country boy come to town, his sensibilities and perceptions formed largely by the Javanese village culture in which he was brought up, and knowing very little of world literature. Chairil, the individualist who cared nothing for society, Pramudya who cared deeply for society, and needed the support of society, yet was repelled by weaknesses in society as he saw it. If Chairil then even in the face of death stands alone, disdaining to ask anyone to help him, abandoning traditional society, Pramudya can be regarded as representing a type of neo-traditionalism: neo- because

he uses the forms of modern literature that he has observed from the West, such as the novel and the short story, traditional because of his attitudes to society and the community, and the inner structure of his works is shaped by the traditional world. His work is particularly relevant because he is a primitive: his novels are directly formed and projected by his subconscious with very little mediation of conscious craftsmanship.

This is why the structure of his novels is suggestive of that of a form of the traditional Javanese shadow theatre, in particular the shaping of the chapters according to change of scene, the role of dialogue and introspection in the unfolding of plot, the relative unimportance of action and location, the stasis of his characterizations and the relationships of the characters to each other, and to their archetypal reference points. These reference points when effective are probably not consciously chosen, for they are determined by the cultural formation of his childhood which is ultimately responsible for the classificatory system within which his moral judgements about them operate.

In his novel *Keluarga Gerilya* (A Guerilla Family)²⁹ all of the characters play predetermined roles, the mother, the children in relation to the mother and each other; the oldest brother Saaman in relation to four of his younger siblings, asking from each of them in turn their successes and failures at school, giving moral advice; the fiancé of the oldest girl, playing the role of mentor and guide to the family after the murder of the father, and the arrest by the Dutch military police of Saaman. These roles are played within the conventional hierarchy of family relationship. The morality which infuses the family relationships in their shanty home in Jakarta, regarded as 'liberated territory', is that of the holiness of the revolution, the sacred struggle of the new people of God to be brought to birth in the new nation Indonesia. It is in this pseudo-mystical attitude that the stature of the hero Saaman is rooted. There inheres in him the quality of *keramat*, of spiritual strength; it derives from his renunciation of the privileges that are his due because of his education, in order to work as a *becak* driver - his cover while he acts as an underground resistance leader. After his arrest he is kept in a cell where sunlight cannot penetrate, where he is surrounded by concrete and sleeps on concrete without a thread of cloth to protect him from the damp and

the cold, totally isolated from family and loved ones. This isolation he uses to develop an inner strength. This is a technique well known in many parts of the world, and the obvious reference point is to Arjuna, the greatest ascetic and lover in the Hindu-Javanese tradition.

After three months of imprisonment Saaman is tried and condemned to death. The sentence is tantamount to a transfiguration. His personality dominates the prison block, which falls silent as he performs the Muslim ritual prayer. The prison governor, van Keerling, comes to visit the condemned man, intending to mock. But when Saaman looks him in the face and tells him that the only difference between him and the prisoners in his jail is that he is a criminal protected by the law, his arrogance collapses, and he admits that he too is a guilty man. He offers Saaman three ways of escaping execution which may be seen symbolically as three temptations: to escape, to lodge an appeal, or to ask for pardon. Saaman is proof against each of them. His only request is to be executed the following day. In death he finds his fulfilment. By accepting it willingly, on his own terms, and at a time of his own choosing, he realizes a great spiritual power, and at the same time atones for the violence he has done to his humanity by the murder of his stepfather and the killing of his enemies. The stepfather, it should be added, is a grotesque figure. He chooses the Dutch side, and the day that his son and stepsons decide to slay him staggers home drunk on the back-pay dispensed to him by the Dutch colonial army, and vomits whisky, chocolate and other ill-gotten luxuries over the floor.

In the prison scenes various archetypal reference points overlap reflecting a syncretism typically Javanese. I have already referred to the role of the Hindu-Javanese tradition, and to the asceticism of Arjuna. This is susceptible of further development. For the philosophical overtones of the book are reminiscent of those expressed by Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, when the armies are drawn up in battle array at the beginning of the great war. He is perplexed and anxious because he must fight and slay his cousins. And even though he is fighting on the right side against evil, the guilt of slaying his kinsmen still lies heavy on his conscience.

The temptations to escape may be seen as parallel to the temptations of the nymphs who attempt to break Arjuna's concentration, when he is meditating in the cave of mount Indrakila.

But since the figure of Christ also occurs as a reference point, the three ways the prison governor offers to Saaman to escape execution may be seen as corresponding to the three temptations the devil offers to Christ. Taken in isolation, reading the text in this way might appear far-fetched. But there are two other scenes where Christ is clearly the reference point. Saaman facing the prison governor is a type of Christ standing before Pilate, who although standing before him as the criminal is in fact standing in judgement upon him. And Saaman's cell between those of two criminals is reminiscent of Christ between two thieves. For of these two criminals, one is an honest rogue, who knows and acknowledges that he is a rogue, and from Saaman he receives comfort. The other is a traitor who as a result of his confrontation with Saaman hangs himself.

The third cross-cultural reference is to Socrates. Pramudya attempts to render Saaman as a type of Socrates, about to drink the hemlock, and the prison governor as Crito. Of the three, this is the least successful, because it is so explicitly laboured.

There is a certain symbolic grandeur in the description of Saaman led to the place of execution flanked by two warders as a bridegroom escorted to the bride's home. The significance of the scene is that Saaman is unmarried, and in the traditional Javanese world view a man is not truly adult with the right to play a full role in social life until he is married. His execution then is a model of self-fulfilment.

Pramudya is nothing if not far-reaching in his use of reference points. For when Saaman is buried his grave is invested with the magical *keramat* quality of the graves of holy men in the folk tradition. To visit it brings comfort to the surviving members of the family, but punishment of the fiancée who repudiated him because he worked as a *becak* driver.

The figure of Saaman in fact dominates the book. He does so from beginning to end. There is no unveiling of his character, there is only an unveiling of the belief that he lives by, the belief in Indonesia and its holy revolution. He lives according to this one belief: that he has fought for the revolution; he has sacrificed his humanity for the sake of this revolution; he must therefore be put to death. In his mind there is no wavering, no doubt, no thought of what else could, or might have been. His death then is the climax of the book and the resolution of the plot. It is not tragic, there follows no catharsis.

Pramudya, in effect, creates figures who play roles, not characters. The role may be heroically orchestrated with the various resources of the Javanese tradition in all its eclectic variety, but it remains a role.

This discussion may well appear highly selective and impressionistic. Given the nature of the field, its lack of a continuing tradition of literary works in any genre in which an internal line of development can be traced, this is inevitable, and any general discussion is inevitably liable to this weakness. What conclusions then can be drawn in seeking to discover a change from a traditional to a modern perception of character derived from chronicles, frame-stories, autobiographical type writings, a collection of letters, the work of a poet, and the work of a novelist: a disparate collection of materials ranging over some four hundred years?

For the older period, we have seen that even a chronicle as highly regarded as the *Malay Annals* is largely a patchwork affair, a characteristic in part to be explained by the compiler's desire to bring together traditions, records and stories of various kinds.

It is not until the mid-nineteenth century that one can discern a change - or rather not perhaps so much a change as the appearance of something new: an autobiography. It is, of course, not new when considered in relation to works of a similar kind in other parts of the Muslim world. It shares their strengths and their weaknesses. For although the sense of the role of an individual as an individual in Abdullah's narrative is clear, the internal dynamics of the individual are still understood in a relatively simplistic manner. There is not that sense of inner conflict so clearly diagnosed by Plutarch, no probing of that tension expressed by Marlowe in Part I of 'Tamburlaine the Great':

Nature, that fram'd us of four elements
Warring within our breast for regiment
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds...
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And always moving as the restless spheres.

It is this discovery, and the exposure of this discovery in her letters that makes Kartini such an important figure. Even so it is rare that any author of fiction or any poet expresses this inner conflict, this pulling of the knot of love and hate so tight that it hurts, comes close

to Kartini in communicating this pain. Kartini however is a signpost, an index of the distance travelled, and the distance that remains to be travelled. For she, Radjab, and the poet Chairil Anwar have achieved an awareness of the individual self far deeper than anything discovered in earlier times and in traditional attitudes. And in this theme is evidence of a qualitative change.

There should be no misunderstandings. It is not a point of this essay that in the earlier literature there were no expressions of sorrow or world weariness, or loneliness. These certainly there were. But this weariness was not expressed as a result of inner conflict, and the representation of it is not the representation of the plight of an individual, but as one of a class. A man might be *sebatang kara* (alone in the world), or a *musafir lata* (a distraught wanderer). But these terms tell us nothing of the inner life of the individual, the expressions are group classifications.

It was Chairil's originality that he perceived and revealed things about his person and an inner emotional life that no-one writing in Malay had revealed before: his poetry being a revelation of his exposed nerves. In a somewhat different way, the same is true of Pramudya.

With both of these authors, and a handful of others whom they may well be taken to represent, we have to acknowledge a shortness of breath, a relatively limited span of creative life. The problem is that any individual in the Malay world has to fight a relentless battle to maintain himself as an individual. The whole structure of the society, the weight of its past is against him. To compound this problem, there is no common tradition of *literae humaniores* with which an author can identify, which he can extend and from which he can derive support.

This generalization is illustrated by any author that one cares to mention: practically every talent of note has died, stopped writing or turned to other areas of activity. It is in terms of this general picture, in the final analysis, that I have seen Chairil and Pramudya illustrating two different paths of literary development.

Chairil is above all the individualist, the internationalist; the man who identifies with the experience of the poet behind any work he reads, and who takes advantage of this encounter to write his own poetry. The breadth of his reading, the intensity of his experience, and his obsessional jealousy of his own self sustained him even in

writing the last few poems he produced before he died. Where he might have turned, or what achieved had he lived, is a futile question. But it is sure that he would not have surrendered his own self.

It is precisely at this point that Pramudya shows the other alternative, and one which the majority of his peers took. His personal experience and memories of his childhood could only sustain him as a creative writer for a short period. This might have had no worse effect than that he stopped writing, or that he wrote work lacking in interest. But more profoundly in my view, he found himself unable to bear the pressures of standing alone. The strong moral and community sense that had made him a writer, combined with the community-oriented pressure of society, forced him to take up a community stance. Not a stance shaped by the requirements and taboos of a village community and family propriety, which in various of his short stories Pramudya has seen as based on cruelty and shot through and through with self-deception, but revealed through the new collectivism of the workers and peasants within the framework of Mao's China: where class distinctions have been swept away, and the smug hypocrisy that has sustained the family unit for so long has been shattered by the Thoughts of Chairman Mao. Pramudya then has followed a path from an intense neo-traditionalism in his early work to a brash new-collectivism in his last writings. In the neo-traditionalism, the individual as an author uses new forms, but still retains the personality formation that the society which reared him has fashioned for him. But this neo-traditionalism contains the seeds of its own destruction, because although the cast of mind that it imposes cannot be cast off, the values which sustain it have lost their efficacy - it is only too easy to see their lack of meaning in a Marxian world. And so Pramudya, psychologically unable to stand aside from society, let down by the structure and values of family life known by his parents, has turned to the vision of the new state created by Mao, where he can, with the workers and peasants share common ideals, and together with them build a new society. In place of family attitudes, Politics, acting for the whole community, is the leader.

It has been remarked we have come to a period of history when the renaissance view of European man has run its course, and the economic, social and artistic individualism that reached its apogee in the nineteenth century is in decline. If this is so, then perhaps this type of individualism has found its way to the Malay world too late to spread

its wings; and the authors that we have seen come to an early end in their creative life have in fact been crushed between the forces of neo-traditionalism on the one hand, and those of the new-collectivism on the other. For let it never be forgotten that in many ways the authoritarian, levelling conformist-oriented policies of the new-collectivism are closer to the traditional structures of peasant life in societies which demand conformity with an equal ruthlessness, than the individualism and particularistic foci of European humanism as it has borne fruit over the past five hundred years.

It may be that the type of humanism that has inspired our traditional approach to the humanities has had its day. Whether it leaves an heir that can in the short term bring about a better world than the one we have known, is an open question. But until a new personalism can establish itself, borne by the human spirit, out of collectivist pressures, the least we can do is dutifully to cultivate our gardens.

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28. Translated in Ahmad Ali (ed.), *The Flaming Earth: Poems from Indonesia*, Karachi, 1949, p. 11. See also Burton Raffel, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Chairil Anwar*, State University of New York Press, 1970.
29. Pramudya Ananta Tur, *Keluarga Gerilya*, Jakarta, 1950.

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