SARE

SOUTHEAST ASIAN REVIEW OF ENGLISH

NO: 37 / DECEMBER 1998

KDN PP 4013 / 8 / 97

SOUTHEAST ASIAN REVIEW OF ENGLISH

No. 37 December 1998

Chief Editor
Lim Chee Seng

Editorial Board
Margaret Yong
Su Soon Peng

Guest Editor
Leonard Jeyam

MACLALS
Department of English
University of Malaya
Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia

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

Copyright @ 1998 by Maclals
ISSN 0127 046X
KDN PP4013/8/97

Contents

The Postcolonial Diasporic Chinese Women Writers: A Journey of Identity
by Sim Chee Cheang 1

The Woman Warrior: Voicing the "No Name Woman"
by Yap Yoke Lin 9

When the Stable is Necessary: The Architectonic Presence in K. S. Maniam's *The Return*
by Andrew Ng Hock Soon 21

Faulkner and Christian Humanism in *The Sound and the Fury*
by Agnes Liau Wei Lin 42

The "Gay" Spinster of Glorious Hill: A Queer Reading of Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke*
by Neil Khor Jin Keong 57

"These women are shrewd tempters with their tongues": Women, Speech, and Power in Shakespeare's First Tetralogy
by Veronica Lowe 74

"And beyond it, the deep blue air": Philip Larkin's Momentary Contact with Transcendence
by Leonard Jeyam 93

The Postcolonial Diasporic Chinese Women Writers: A Journey of Identity

by Sim Chee Cheang

In the course of dismantling imperial history through the telling or re-telling of histories, the post-colonial text not only attempts to re-write history or "her/story" but also to create an identity which mirrors the ambivalence, uncertainty, fluidity and variety of the postcolonial experience. The diasporic Chinese women writers of English fiction deliberate their counter discursive ideas in the form of a journey. The metaphor of a journey provides the postcolonial diasporic Chinese woman the freedom to shape and create an identity free of a colonial and patriarchal past. Its fluidity hints at the uncertain chameleon-like experiences of the Chinese diaspora. The personas are often cast as "travellers" over land or sea or in an invisible route of the mindscape. The journey motif is strongly brought out in Chin Woon Ping's *The Naturalization of Camellia Song* (1993), Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), Shirley Lim's *Monsoon History* (1994) and Beth Yahp's *Crocodile Fury* (1992).

The physical journey in all these novels traces the migration from homeland China to the adoptive lands of either Malaysia, America or Australia. But the physical voyage also signals the spiritual transformation of the diasporic individual. As the individual bids farewell to the homeland like the persona in Shirley Lim's "Bukit Cina", she is also bidding farewell to any and all patriarchal instituitions, the remnants of her past in her former homeland. The persona in "Bukit Cina" is seen paying her last respects to her father's grave but she says she will "pour / No

brandy before memory" (Lim 3), indicating her intention to seek and provide an uncoloured view of her past in her bid for freedom. The persona has mapped out her reverse journey back to the homeland in the first poem as a journey in search of "truth". Similarly, Chin Woon Ping's persona Camellia Song begins her diasporic journey with a song of farewell in the titular poem "The Naturalization of Camellia Song" (Chin 9). The persona in this poem bids farewell to his parents and wends his way out of his village. It is at this point of farewell where the post-colonial journey ironically begins. The individual abandons traditional and historical pillars of social existence in order to sever the ties from ontological securities such as an identity, country and history. The journey eventually leads to a post-modern acceptance of the self as rootless, alienated and history-less. The personas in all these texts begin their journey as rootless, deracinated individuals searching for a place to "dock" and at the same time discover who they really are. They are orphans without a country, history or language to call their own. Brian Oxley provides an appropriate definition of the diasporic condition in his definition of orphanhood. An orphan, according to him, is "a child of transgression of tribal boundaries, an outcast in search of a new group and a new identity" (Oxley 399). Free of ontological forces, the individual is now ready to build and create a truthful representation of his/herself which will reflect the extreme myriad composition of a diasporic individual.

The diasporic journey takes the individual to the tributary of revisiting history or personal history in search of a new identity. The currents of the symbolic journey are not linear but loop back and forth from the past to the present and vice-versa. Amy Tan's persona Olivia, the recalcitrant step-sister of the mysterious Kwan, makes the journey in the reverse from America to the heart of China, a place called Chiangman where she had lived in her first life as Miss Banner. Kwan is a changeling who appears to live in a nether world with different dimensions which include the ghosts of

her past. Unlike Olivia, her step-sister born in America does not possess the vision which can set her free from the numbing effects of a disparate life in America. Kwan not only fills the gaps in Olivia's perception of her past and personal history but also challenges her to confront the "truths" of her past which is filled with betrayal. Kwan appears to be the essence of a past, memory's changeling, whom Olivia tries to deny in her present existence. Olivia finds it difficult to resist the powers of a past which draws her closer and closer to the "truth". She finally undertakes a voyage back to China. The voyage recalls the experiences of the many generations of Chinese — a kind of rejection, loneliness, deracination and alienation. These "truths" assail her when she is symbolically lost in an abbey of rocks and caves. These are the "truths" of a diasporic past. After the confrontation with her past, Olivia appears to be "renewed". Her thirst for life is rejuvenated through her creativity with her camera and her relationship with her husband is mended. The journey in Tan's novel is technically an instrument to tie the past to the present. But, more importantly, the journey exemplified as a search for personal "his/ herstory" has engendered an encounter between the past self and the present inner self. After her confrontation with the "truth", Olivia becomes sensitive to her surroundings and her inner self. Her new found sensitivity allows her to reconcile her past with her present and thus form a personal history. The excavation of the past not only brings the diasporic individual to the "truth" but also to an inner "truth". Olivia recalls that she was betrayed by colonialism in the form of a mercenary General Cape and denied a consummation with the other (Chinese) half of herself who is Yiban. The reincarnation factor in Amy Tan's novel pairs up well with the journey motif as it suggests that the post-colonial journey takes us into the self in search of "truths" which ultimately unveil the past self.

Like the pebbles at the bottom of a river, the waters of the postcolonial diasporic journey seek to refine and re-define the "truths" that have been upheld. The " truths" uncovered are self-centered and driven by the realization that the "self" also plays the deceptive game of memory. Section IV of *Monsoon History* explores the lyingself-image which we project as it is the only "truthful" image within the grasp of our reality. Shirley Lim's persona figures that "All poetry necessarily begins with a lie"(89) because there is no real "truth" to be had. The painter in "The Painter" (89) paints "...nothing but mirrors and fill[s] his house with reflecting candle" (89). By searching for the real "truth", the persona reaches out towards a more hopeful beginning in the mindscape of the imagination.

In "The Look Turned Inwards" (79) the persona discovers that the past which lives within her is dying like an old decrepit male teacher and her womanhood finds freedom which had been stifled in the past. The tool of freedom is the imagination which grips the poet in "A Life of Imagination" (80). The imagination uncoloured by the world is not limited by the boundaries of time. Through the imagination the postcolonial writer creates an identity, a history/herstory and a country. The writer is ready to "...estab[lish] authenticity for a society dislocated from the imperial centre and, simultaneously, alienated from the local land and indigenious culture" (Gilbert and Tompkins 113). The journey now takes a turn to move across paper where the act of creation begins through the act of writing.

The second part of the postcolonial journey is marked by the departure from the homeland or adoptive land to a new landscape. The physical breakaway from the past mirrors the spiritual gap which is widening between the postcolonial individual who is determined to create an a-historical identity distinct in itself. Amongst postcolonial diasporic Chinese women

writers, the creation begins with the kind of stories told by different generations of women. Weaving in and out of the boundaries of time, the story-teller fuses the different time zones and realitites into one abstract fantasy. It is, as Tompkins and Gilbert conclude, "a historical 'fantasy' which is much less concerned with documenting a life than with dramatising a legend in ways which might inspire... women to reposition themselves in society and history" (123). A fine example can be found in Beth Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury* (1993) which binds together the stories of the grandmother, mother, daughter and a mysterious, beautiful woman. The stories culminate in the transformation of the beautiful woman into a surreal creature which is part dragon and part woman, inhabiting both the sea as well as land. In Beth Yahp's article entitled "Place Perfect and the Other Asia" (Westerly 1996), she explains her objectives in creating an identity so diversified and radical. She explains the "identity" of the postcolonial Chinese woman writer in the terms of the "Other Asia":

> The Other Asia is a creature of the dark, only when it's dark can you see her clearly. The night is her element... [O]ver the washbasin you may watch her take off this face. In the daytime, like Dennis O'Rourke and numerous Australian filmgoers to "The Good Woman of Bangkok", you may watch as she puts on another. Or another. And another. (63)

Through the telling of the fantastical stories, the author has revised history or "her/story" in which women are the central characters and celebrated for their diversity. Camellia Song sings a myriad of songs which include her mother's past, the effects of a western education and the influence of the Malay language. The incongruity and mythologising of the plots and characters are designed to question historicity's claim to "truthful depictions". The unification of these mythical elements is the focus of the

journey which ensures autonomy for the post-colonial individual to dictate what she herself wants to be which is the evasive, intangible, impalpable, transient, and devious figure. The fantastical structures also suggest that history like any other story is a prejudiced and fabricated "truth".

Rana Kabbani in Allison Broinowski's "The Yellow Lady" (1992) calls the postcolonial diasporic Chinese woman a "shape shifter", a "slogger", "recent-arrival", "invader", "job-stealer", victim", "wife", etc. (66) The multiple roles of the postcolonial Chinese woman warrants the multiplicity and the incorporeal identity which takes shape through story-telling thus opening the door to real truth. The postcolonial diasporic individual ironically journeys into the realm of fantasy in search of truth.

By telling the story, the post-colonial woman is no longer standing in the margins of patriachy or colonialism but in the centre of her story. She is in command of her own life and has the power to define herself as she wishes. Although some Chinese women writers feel that their women tell stories so as "to save lives, to win their men, to reclaim lost love, [and] for solidarity" and "redemption and escape" (Star Dec 29 1996), there is evidence that shows that postcolonial diasporic Chinese women tell stories to break free from the past, to transform themselves, having confronted the "truth" they have discovered in themselves as they journey into the past. Nancy Mellon observes that:

> Storytelling helps us to picture the healthy potentates within us who take life in a stride. Standing at a refreshing distance with them. we can look out over familiar vistas and enter new territories. (158)

Mellon's observation aptly describes the "destinations" of the post-colonial diasporic journey. While the fluidity of the journey motif allows for the uneasy coalition or fusion of the variety of visions, stories and mindscapes which reflect the post-colonial hybridity, the post-colonial diasporic embraces the postcolonial journey as its identity because it offers the unconventionality of constant change. The postcolonial diasporic is not a citizen of a fixed country but belongs to an ever-changing new landscape, seascape or mindscape. In the poem "What it means to be a Patriot" (49), Camellia Song sings about shunning "pure platitudes" which refer to purities of identification such as nation, race and language. Instead she implies that she is a "patriot" (49) of the journey: "the country of surreptitious moves" ("Invitation to Voyage" 54-55). Journeying becomes her "country" and her identity as it allows her the freedom to determine her constantly changing self in terms that do not bind or overwhelm. Both Kwan and Olivia, as well as Camellia, and Shirley Lim's personas experience a spritual metamorphosis as they journey along postcolonial lines.

The journey in all the four texts has been interpreted as a quest for truth, a purge of untruth, a catalyst for the encounter between the past and the present, a timeless weaving of personal his/herstory and the scion of unpredictable destinies: all of which are pertinent to the post-colonial diasporic identity. Its fluidity leaps over time and physical boundaries of a country, culture, religion or language while its unpredictability assumes a creative freedom unleashed.

Works Cited:

Brownowski, Allison. *The Yellow Lady: Australia's Impressions of Asia*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Chan Yuen Li. "Charming Lim Makes her Statements Plain." *The Star*, 29 December 1996.

Chin Woon Ping. *The Naturalization of Camellia Song*. Singapore: Times Book International, 1993.

Gilbert, Helen and Joanne Tompkins. *Post Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice and Politics*. New York: Routledge,1996.

Lim, Shirley Geok-Lin Lim. *Monsoon History*. London: Skoob Books Publishing, 1994.

Mellon, Nancy. *Storytelling and the Art of Imagination*. Brisbane: Element, 1993.

Tan, Amy. *A Hundred Secret Senses*. London: Flamingo, 1996

Yahp, Beth. "Place Perfect and the Other Asia". *Westerley*, Autumn 1996, 1.

Yahp, Beth. *The Crocodile Fury*. Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1992.

Sim Chee Cheang is Lecturer at
the Department of Languages
Universiti Sabah Malaysia

The Woman Warrior: Voicing the "No Name Woman"

by Yap Yoke Lin

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is a poetic piece of literary composition which fuses the worlds of fiction and fact through the dual use of autobiographical and biographical conventions. It can be seen as a sensitive work of art that delineates the confusing nuances and cadences of an individual caught between worlds which impose specific social practices and regulations on how to be a woman, a Chinese and an American. Words then become a means for the author to explore, to voice out and even attempt to amalgamate her dilemmas as well as confusions while seeking her individual self which is paradoxically separate yet subordinated to social criteria. Thus, the concept and idea of voices are important tools in the book. In this paper, however, I will attempt to examine the use of narrative voices by the author and how she uses them as mediums for the subversion of patriarchal norms for women in Chinese society in "No Name Woman", the first section of the book.

A voice can be viewed as the articulation of sounds produced by the vibrations of the vocal chords. Linguistic in nature, this definition points to the power of speech and utterance through words and language. A voice then is decisive as the instrument of expression or mouthpiece for the individual or group. Yet the ability to voice and utter can also be contemplated as a source of power for man. With this empowerment, humans are able to articulate, to assert, to air and to give names to things as well as needs. The capability to articulate is important for it reveals human ability to control and regulate his environment and relationships with other members of his group. The literary point of view,

nevertheless, presents different and yet similar notions about the idea of the "voice". According to both Plato and Aristotle, narrative voices are divided into three. Firstly, we have the speaker, the poet or the writer who uses his own voice. Secondly, we have one who assumes the voice of another person, and speaks in a voice not his own. Thirdly, we have one who uses a mixture of his own voice and that of others. Therefore, the ability to give pronouncement to ideas and emotions is a force which gives birth to the uniqueness of the individual. On the one hand, to have a voice fleshes out the speaker, colouring him or her with complex shades of human nature, giving him or her an identity and self. It is an identity which separates the individual from the voiceless mass in societies that extract conformity from their members. On the other hand, the individual's voice is still subjugated to the larger authority of social voices in the manner of behavioural rules and norms. Thus, the taut tension existing between the individual and society in the articulation of the "voice" is important and interesting occurrences can be examined in Maxine Hong Kingston's book. Here, she uses the third concept of the narrative voice as defined by Plato and Aristotle, as channels to divulge her "voice", her mother's "voice" and ultimately the "voice" of the "No Name" aunt. These voices become the ways by which she re-examines and subverts patriarchal conventions that seek continuity in the society by imposing silent obedience from its female members.

I will first consider the mother's narrative voice which functions as an important instrument to perpetuate and enforce obedience to patriarchal norms. Interestingly, the mother is not named until much later in the book. This merely enhances the role of the mother as the archetypal nurturer, protector and teacher; the perfect agent to disseminate masculine social practices. It is therefore an irony as well as an interesting phenomenon that Chinese social conventions which seek to silence its female

members do so through the very same members "One of the weakest parts of the Chinese social fabric is the insecurity of the life and happiness of woman, but no structure is stronger than its weakest part, and Chinese society is no exception to this law" (Arthur H. Smith, quoted in Margery Wolf's "Women and Suicide in China" 218). The effectiveness of the mother's voice is reinforced through a series of negative and imperative statements that demand immediate obedience; which are peppered throughout the chapter: "You must not tell anyone," my mother said, "what I am about to tell you" (11), "Don 't let your father know that I told you. He denies her... Don 't humiliate us" (13), "Don 't tell anyone you had an aunt. Your father does not want to hear her name" (21). Such negative admonishments are powerful forces which not only succeed in silencing the questioning voice of the author into fearful compliance but also negate the identity and voice of the "No Name".

The silence and the voicelessness of the aunt point to the authoritative nature of Chinese society that explicitly or even implicitly punishes any member who transgresses its social practices. The explicit punishment of the aunt is thus revealed through the mother's narration where she describes a bizarre and horrifying blood ritual of destruction[1] the villagers undertook to nullify and exorcise the personal and communal status and existence of the aunt, reducing her into an animal (pig) and then a ghost (Maxine H. Kingston 11- 12). The implicit punishment is by far the more cruel of the two; the family denies her existence through the deliberate erasure of her name and status in the family which gives her individuality and identity — "We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born" (1 l), "Don 't tell anyone you had an aunt. Your father does not want to hear her name. She has never been born "(21), "The real punishment was not the raid swiftly inflicted by the villagers, but the family deliberately forgetting her" (22) and "there is more to

this silence: they want me to participate in her punishment. And I have" (22). By denying the author the voice to question about her aunt — "If I want to learn what clothes my aunt wore, whether flashy or ordinary, I would have to begin, ' Remember Father 's drowned-in-the-well sister?' I cannot ask that" (l 3) — the writer has participated in her aunt's punishment. Thus, the mother's voice is one which is devoid of positive nuances, containing the essential facts which are conveyed with a censoring tone for the specific purpose of containing the daughter's budding sexual behaviour within the confinement of patriarchal mores. The "No Name" aunt merely becomes a two-dimensional, voiceless and ghostly figure without name, without identity, being neither an individual nor a member of the family.

However, the narrative voice of the writer is one which is often filled with an anxious and apprehensive confusion. She is caught in the confusing dilemma of separating and choosing between what has been “marked” by her mother as traditional Chinese mores of behaviour and a heightened sense of grotesquely frightening as well as macabre melodrama[2] — very much like the celluloid sensationalism found in her mother's stories. She narrates, "when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?" (13). The mother's voice has made a lasting impression on the author as she admits that, "My aunt haunts me — her ghost is drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her, though not origamied into houses and clothes... do not think she always means me well. I am telling on her, and she was a spite suicide, drowning heresy in the drinking water" (22). Yet she does not choose to remember her aunt by submitting to the transitory practice of burning “origamied” paper houses and clothes as sacrificial offerings. Her

choice to write is important since by choosing to re-imagine and rewrite the story of her aunt, the author begins her exploratory journey to find her own voice by smashing the silence surrounding the tragedy of her aunt. And this choice has paradoxically given her aunt a voice which in turn denies the non-persona imposed on her by the family.

Thus, the subversion of patriarchal norms truly begins with the author's imaginative voice that reinvents the persona of the aunt. We first see the aunt as this fearfully acquiescing woman: "She obeyed him; she always did as she was told. The other man was not, after all, much different from her husband. They both gave orders: she followed" (1 4). Nevertheless, the blame and burden of adultery imposed on the aunt by the mother's voice shifts in the author's to rape and masculine domination by man (or men) who could have been "[working] an adjoining field", who have "sold her the cloth for the dress she sewed and wore" (1 4) or threatened her with death if she revealed who he was. From an object (as imagined through the mother's voice), she becomes a subject with her own self. This is reinforced when we next see her as a woman with forbidden desires tempted by the beauty of the male physique to transgress: "For a line, a brightness, a sound, a pace, she gave up family" (15). She is also a woman who subtly rebels against the colourless subjugation of women by indulging in cosmetic vanity which is in a sense a way of asserting her individuality: "All the married women blunt-cut their hair inflaps about their ears or pulled it back in tight buns. No nonsense. Neither style blew easily into heartcatching tangles... At the mirror my aunt combed individuality into her bob. She brushed her hair back from her forehead, tucking the flaps behind her ears." (16). Nevertheless, it is a dangerous thing to do since "a woman who tended her appearance reaped a reputation for eccentricity" (16) as well as "lured her imminent lover, many other men looked at her" (17). Of course, she might have been the "precious only daughter

[whose family] welcomed the chance to take her back from the in-laws" (17) when her husband left for America.

The aunt's voice, however, becomes more and more fully realized when she "speaks" out through her agonizing groans " 'They 've hurt me too much. This is gall, and it will kill me '" (20) in the midst of convulsing labour pains. The labour and birth in the pigsty is also an interesting focal point for a contrasting comparison. In the mother's voice, the birth in the pigsty is the ultimate expression of total social ostracism and degradation whereas, according to the author, the aunt chose to go to the pigsty in order to protect the baby — "She may have gone to the pigsty as a last act of responsibility" (21). A composite picture of the aunt as a frustrated, sensual, tragic but dignified figure caught in a social fabric which suffocates the individual is thus drawn. The complex process of reinventing and resurrecting the aunt's voice has bestowed her with a character, a persona. Her successful formation has undermined the skeletal and two- dimensional depiction of her through the maternal narration. The aunt becomes a "spite suicide", an avenger when she commits suicide by jumping into the well with her child for everv drink that the family takes from the well will be a constant reminder of her.

However, the figure of the aunt has become the manipulative apparatus for both the mother's and writer's voices. Patriarchal norms funneled through the maternal narration have stripped bare the aunt's voice, confining her within the boundaries of masculine "necessity" in order to dominate her into subservient silence: "My mother has told me once and for all the useful parts. She will add nothing unless powered by Necessity, a riverbank that guides her life" (13). The aunt is transformed into this ghostly figurehead which is used as an example to solicitate numb and fearful obedience. Undeniably, the author's imaginative restoration of the aunt's voice has boldly coloured her with the subtle shades

of human nature, allowing us glimpses of a pathetic, tragic and even defiant individual. Except for the aunt's actual choices to give birth in the pigsty and to commit suicide by jumping into the family well with the baby; the voices which delineate the aunt are invented ones; we do not 'see' or 'hear' the actual and real voices of the aunt which are buried and lost in the family's history.

Nevertheless, it is through the imaginative restitution of her aunt's story that the writer searches for her own voice. Factual explorations by the author's voice combine in a layered manner with the fictional depictions of the aunt, creating equidistant narrations which are used by the writer to probe and express her fears as well as confusions. In other words, the aunt's experiences mirror the author's. A case in point is the redefinition of the aunt's adultery as rape by a kinsman since "He was not a stranger because the village housed no strangers" (l4). Maxine Hong Kingston depicts through the aunt's fear her own fear of sexual violation: "I want her fear to have lasted just as long as rape lasted so that the fear could have been contained. No drawn-out fear. But women at sex hazarded birth and hence lifetimes. The fear did not stop but permeated everywhere" (14). Such fear is further compounded by the mother's threatening admonition to protect her body and virginity for the sake of communal and familial honour[3]: "Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don 't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born" (13). The aunt desexualized the men by robbing them of their personal names and renaming them with titles: "Any man within visiting distance would have been neutralized as a lover — 'brother', 'younger brother', 'older brother'" (l8). Similarly, the writer displays her frustrated and bewildered sexuality by "hexing" the boys of her class: "As if it came from an atavism deeper than fear, I used to add 'brother' silently to boys ' names. It hexed the boys, who would or would not ask me to dance, and made them less scary and

as familiar and deserving of benevolence as girls... But, of course, I hexed myself also — not dates. I should have stood up, both arms waving, and shouted out across libraries, 'Hey, you! Love me back.' I had no idea, though, how to make attraction selective, how to control its direction and magnitude... Sisterliness, dignified and honourable, made much more sense" (18-19). Fear then becomes a successful agent of patriarchal control dispersed through the mother's narrative voice: "I have believed that sex was unspeakable and words so strong and fathers so frail... " (21).

Interestingly, the parallel layering of narrative voices of the writer and the aunt sometimes meet to fuse and overlap one another, in a sense reflecting Maxine Hong Kingston's unconscious bonding and identification with her aunt. This connection between both voices is important since both want to defy social conventions. Accordingly, when her aunt "combed individuality into her bob", the author also implicitly combs her own hair into a "bob". The word seems divorced and strange in Chinese usage but common and familiar in American usage since it denotes a particular kind of hairstyle. Another lucid indication of such overlap can be discerned from the painful description of the traditional practice of removing facial hair: as the aunt "rolled [the thread] along the hairline and the tops of her eyebrows. My mother did the same to me and my sisters and herself " (16). And when the author divulges that "I hope that the man my aunt loved appreciated a smooth brow, that he wasn't just a tits-and-ass man" (16), she is indirectly disclosing her own wish that the man she would love could appreciate a smooth brow instead of a curvaceous body. The author not only asserts her own voice through the imaginative one of her aunt but also subverts patriarchal norm by deliberately and defiantly not asking for details and names: "In the twenty years since I heard this story I have not asked for details nor said my aunt's name; I do not know

it. People who can comfort the dead can also chase after them to hurt them further — a reverse ancestor worship" (22).

To have a voice and to be voiceless. Voice versus silence. To voice, to say, to utter is to shatter silence. Maxine Hong Kingston's use of the voice in complex narrative forms interlaces the worlds of imaginative fiction and autobiographical facts. Moreover, the voice is used as an important medium of expression for patriarchal concerns as well as for asserting the individual self which is simultaneously separate yet a part of the society it resides in. This, in effect, becomes the ultimate assertion of the power of re-invention. Thus, the interesting and multiple uses of the varied ideas and concepts of voice and narration within *The Woman Warrior* deserve a further and deeper analysis.

Endnotes

1.The event which the author describes is rich in symbolic significance. The bloodletting through the slaughtering of the animals serves to ward of evil and pollution in the village caused by the aunt's sexual transgression. Her pregnancy becomes a threat to the hierarchical nature of the kinship and lineage lines in the village - "The power released at the moment when blood is spilled in slaughter, like menstrual blood, has potential for both good and evil... The double-edged power of blood is evident also from its use in exorcising evil spirits. The blood protects those who use it on the one hand and destroys those against whom it is used on the other." (Emily M. Ahern, 198)

2."On the night the baby was to be born the villagers raided our house. Some were crying. Like a great saw, teeth strung with lights, files of people walked zigzag across our land, tearing the rice. Their lanterns doubled in the disturbed black water, which drained away through the broken bunds...some of them, probably men and women we knew well, wore white masks. The people with long hair hung it over their faces. Women with short hair mate it stand up on end....One woman swung a chicken, whose throat she hat slit, splattering blood in red arcs about her". (Kingston, 12)

3. 'The control of female sexual behaviour in Chinese society is important as it reflects the manipulation of female reproductive power to ensure the continuity of the patrilineal lineages while diminishing the power of women since "The power women have is their capability to alter a family's form by adding members to it, dividing it, and disturbing male authority, the danger they pose is their capacity to break what men consider the ideal family" (Ahern, 200).

Works Cited

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior*. London: Picador, 1981. (11-22).

Wolf, Arthur P. "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors." *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*. Ed. Arthur P. Wolf. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974. 131-182.

Harrell, C. Stevan. "When a Ghost Becomes a God." In *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, 207-231.

Topley, Majorie. "Cosmic Antagonism: A Mother-Child Syndrome." In *Religious and Ritual in Chinese Society*, 233-249.

Potter, Jack M. "Cantonese Shamanism." In *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, 207-231.

Wolf, Margery. "Women and Suicide in China." *Women in Chinese Society*. Ed. Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975. 111-141.

Ahern, Emily M. "The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women." In *Women in Chinese Society*, 193-214.

Lau, Joseph S. M. "Kingston as Exorcist." *Chinese Women Writers: Critical Appraisals*. Ed. Michael S. Duke. New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1989. 44-51.

Miller, Lucier and Hui-chuan Chang. "Fiction and Autobiography: Spatial form in Tfze Golden Cangue and *The Woman Warrior." In Chinese Women Writers: Critical Appraisals*, 25-41.

Cheung, King-kok. "The Woman Warrior versus The Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic choose between Feminism and Heroism?." *Conflicts In Feminism*. Ed. Mariane Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller. New York and London: Routledge, 1990. 234-246.

Cuddon, J. A., ed. *The Penguin Dictionary Of Literary Terms And Literary Theory*, Third Edition. London: Penguin, 1991.

Yap Yoke Lin is Lecturer at the
Department of English
HELP Institute Malaysia

When the Stable is Necessary: The Architectonic Presence in K.S. Maniam's *The Return*

by Andrew Ng Hock Soon

Much attention has been given to the heteroglossic capacity in K.S. Maniam's *The Return*[1]. This essay is in a way, an addition to these myriad readings on utterances, but with an added critical extension to the multi-voices inherent in this novel[2]. Thus far, the emphasis has been upon the need to locate an individual voice in the midst of cultural ambiguity and multi-lingual bombardment. Anne Brewster's spirited essay notes that "the writer here [ie. Maniam] challenges or undermines various authoritative 'voices' acting within and upon his discourses" and of how the writer attempts to construct his world by "reading the world around him as fiction" (Brewster 175, 179). Brewster identifies several metanarratives imposing themselves on Ravi, the protagonist in *The Return* — all of which culminates in a powerful play of camivalesque heteroglossia in Ravi's identity formation, rendering him helpless to shape hiw own self. The three metanarratives identified are those of Miss Nancy, who constitutes "the voice of colonialism"; Mr Menon, who manifests socioeconomic domination; and Ravi's father, Kannan (later Naina), who represents the "Oedipal authority" (176). With these various voices constantly impairing Ravi's shaping of self-identity, it is not possible for him to find his unique voice in his already polyphonous cacophony. Brewster surmises finally that

> the heterogtossia of the novel challenges the so-called authority of any monologic or monolingual tradition. A novel like *The Return* thus works to deconstruct the dominant discourses of the milieu, in this case, that of the colonial language and its literary tradition (as

> demonstrated by the satirizmg of Miss Nancy) and nationalism. Emerging as it does from the "boundary line between cultures and languages" the novel is inevitably heteroglossic and combats what Bakhtin sees as the particular national unity of monoglossia. (Brewster 179)

What Brewster fails to realise is that Baktin's literary agenda is not fundamentally to deconstruct monoglossia and to celebrate heteroglossia per se. As Caryl Emerson has carefully asserted, Bakhtin's concern is for an ability "to remain outside" a culture,

> but outside in a particular way: one must become *an outsider equipped with some — not all, but some — insider skills*. These skills will come about only if first one lovingly accepts one's own particular personality and placement in the world (Emerson 109)

In Bakhtin's long career, he has formulated three distinct but mutually related modes of self — the dialogic self, the carnival self, and the architectonic self. The first self, according to Emerson (116), is an "open ended, give-and-take" entity which is in line with the polyphony of being and of never assuming the authoritative (and authorial) position. The second self is the "devil-may-care, immortal, fearlessly laughing self", which seeks to undermine any grand narrative. These two notions of self fit neatly into the heteroglossic and polyphonous moulds. The third self, vital but often neglected, is

> a model of personhood that [is] concerned above all to isolate and obligate the individual "I" [sic]. The task of the architectonic self is not merely to answer others but to be responsible to them and, over time, to itself; such responsibility requires, first of all, a firm starting point, a sense of genesis and sequence... (Emerson 116)

The architectonic self, in Emerson's reading of Bakhtin, is therefore important because without this self, the other two modes of being cannot exist. If an original self is not present to lend its essential voice, how then can the voices of the carnival and the dialogic emerge? Hence, Ravi's multi-linguistic shelling disables him from forming an original, architectonic starting point of reference. Irene Wong and Margaret Yong have noted that the poem "Full Circle" which concludes the novel, "may be read as the relentless pursuit of the reason for such loss", that is, the loss of a culture (and all its inherent rudiments, including language) due to "language acquisition or the learning of strange unmeaning words' (Wong & Yong 17). Indeed, the overt concern for heteroglossia and polyphony has caused Ravi to be without an essential self. Inhabiting a world of multi-voices, he finds himself without voice — a deconstruction deconstructed.

Undoubtedly, it is not a question of whether an architectonic self is present in Ravi or not. In fact, the presence of this self is forcefully evident in its absence. For Kannan, Mr Menon and Miss Nancy to be able to distance him from the "sensuous sources of life... by the cool web of language" proves that Ravi has indeed an architectonic being to begin with (Wong & Yong 18). Wong and Yong's phrase, "sensuous source of life" gives a first clue to what the source of this architectonic self might be: this idea of the "sensuous" points to an integral aspect of the Hindu culture which relies heavily on the perfect balance of ambiguity[3]. The adjective, derived from the root "sense", points to Ravi's community which is clearly an example of untainted existential innocence. Bedong was a place where the ugly heads of reason and rationality have not reared themselves, and life revolved around the senses, especially the ocular, aural and tactile senses. Ravi sees his community as

> inhabitants of an invisible landscape tenuously brought
> into prominence by the lights, mango leaves strung out

> over the doorways, the pilgrimages to Sri Subramanya temple in Sungai Petani on Thaipusam day, the painting of the bull horns the day after Ponggol and the many taboos that covered our daily lives. We weren't allowed out of the house between midday and two o'clock: the spirits of the dead would be about. Whenever we left for a long trip, we couldn't glance over our shoulders at the house and say, "I'm going". You had to utter: "I'm coming". With these gestures and words you ensured continued existence. One wrong move brought you to the gates of Neraka, hell. Neraka was evoked for us on gramophone records. Yaman's voice — the man who led us to hell — had a hoarse, frightening tone (*The Return* 13-14)[4].

Governed by what can be and cannot be seen, heard and felt, Ravi unconsciously forms a self which does not deny or distance the unknown other from its conscious self. The otherness of Ravi and his conscious subjectivity converge in a dialogic play of being, with no one self dominating at any point. The world that Ravi inhabits is a threshold of many worlds wonderfully imploding within the architectonic 'I' of Ravi. It is a world where the "tension between good and evil shimmered... like an inevitable consciousness within [the people's] heads" (*TR* 14). Conscious of the unconscious — this careful but ambiguous balance (a paradox of existence unfathomable by the Western logic of either/or) creates a wholesome unity between the three modes of being in Ravi.

The understanding of self in Ravi's small world is strongly determined by cultural taboos and a belief in the supernatural — aspects which directly contradicts Western notions of the rational and cultured self. Ravi's world before the English school was one where the numinous is as real as the perceivable world, and where spirits can speak in a hoarse and frightening voice. It is also a polyglossic world, but of a different kind. Unlike the multi-voices

that later seek to explode the "I" into the Many, collapsing everything finally into a self that is lost and unable to return to his (architectonic) self, Ravi's initial world of polyphony finds his "I" actively incorporating his "many" voices within. In other words, Ravi could, because *unconscious,* allow polyphony to be celebrated within him early in the novel. But with the arrival of the English school and its ideology of the conscious, rational self, Ravi, in trying to *consciously* mediate the many voices that seek to dominate him, fails in his attempt because of his overt denial of a voice. It is the unconscious/conscious dichotomy which collapses into Ravi's loss of his essential self.

The dialectic of selves is becoming slightly problematic here. This essay earlier suggests that the architectonic self must precede the carnival and the dialogical self for the latter two modes of self to exist. This suggestion must necessarily be further developed: it is not a precedence that is vital, but simultaneity and stability. The three modes of self must exist all at the same time, but with the architectonic self as fundamentally stable, present and "unmediatedly intentional" (Bakhtin 315). This third self must be intentional and stable for the simple reason that the former two modes of being — carnival and dialogic — are essentially temporary and unrepeatable. They are constantly subverting and being subverted, giving space to the myriad voices of the polyphonous dimension to have their individual resounding. These voices must necessarily have a fixed (stable) place for them to exist.

Hence Ravi has his architectonic existence in what Fred Botting would call a "heterotopia". According to Botting, a heterotopia is a "placeless place" where "objects and behaviors that fit only partially within dominant norms can be both contained and excluded" (Botting 254, 253). Its "otherness enables the differentiation, ordering and policing of the limits of their own

space as well as the boundaries of society" (253). In other words, Ravi's initial architectonic self could carefully negotiate the various contradictory voices that impose upon his simple notion of reality — that is a reality that does not deny the presence of the otherworldly and otherness, a self that entertains the subversive logic of both/and[5]. The three modes of self exist so harmoniously together that unity and wholeness, in the Bakhtinian sense, is achieved. After all, unity and wholeness

> need not imply homogenization, completedness, or fusion with any other thing. For wholeness is achieved not when all the parts of something are the same, but rather when each disparate part of that thing has been made indispensable to it and fits together with every other part in a unique unrepeatable way. (Emerson 117)

The novel's most important symbol — the statue of Nataraja, the cosmic dancer, is a curious symbol of equilibrium that pervades throughout the novel. Nataraja is really one of the names of Lord Shiva, the god of creation. But according to Hindu myth, Shiva's driving power "comes not from himself but from a feminine spirit called his *shakti* — his wife", who is also "a composite of ancient and contradictory deities" (Schulberg 116). Thus, within the novel's integral symbol is already a convergence of many selves, all existing in a balanced harmony. The "contradictory" but not contradicting selves again represents the possibility for Ravi's various modes of self to converge harmoniously. Like Nataraja, Ravi too is a creator of worlds — albeit fictional, and sometimes fantastical, ones. And it is to this Nataraja-symbol that Ravi hopelessly clings later in the novel when he realizes that his architectonic self begins to crumble and his dialogic and carnival modes of self run uncontrollably away from him. For no matter how multi-linguistics dampen his essential self, Ravi never fails to

persistently invent fictions in his consciousness in the attempt to understand his subjective meaning and personhood.

> Certainty during that period [that is, when Ravi attended the English school] I became aware of two: the one we could create and the one to which we made daily adjustments. (*TR* 61)

The source of Ravi's early formulation of the architectonic can be traced to his grandmother, Periathai. As Nataraja's driving power is provided by his female other, Ravi's driving power, his ability to create worlds, is first granted to him by his witch-like grandmother. Indeed, Periathai becomes all that is otherworldly for a young and susceptible Ravi. Her home, her "magical" abilities and her stories are what shape Ravi's early consciousness. Periathai's "personality and attitude" express, for Ravi, "an enchanting freshness that is reminiscent of fairy tales' (Tang 127). Periathai's world is essentially Tamil, and steeped in myth, rituals, and the supernatural. Her stories, a profound blend of real and unreal, first impress upon Ravi an ability to negotiate selves within a self — carnival and dialogic within a still, stable architectonic.

> Then, with only a tier lamp placed in the centre of the most complicated kolam in the cowdung-plastered compound, Periathai told us stories. Her voice transformed the kolams into contours of reality and fantasy, excitingly balanced. I felt I stood on the edge of a world I may have known (*TR* 6)

Ravi's early consciousness is basically a miscegenation of innocence, simplicity and faith. Everything that is uttered by Periathai is to him reality. In a sense, Ravi's initial real world is also a fictional one; no margins divide these two otherwise dichotomous worlds. Before the dawn of the English school, Ravi

enjoyed a persistently enchanted garden where the reality of poverty and hardship does not spoil the fruit of sensuality.

But this enchanted garden is quickly and systematically dispelled with Ravi's entrance into the English school. Two contending voices become the joint catalyst of the beginnings of a gradual deconstruction of Ravi's architectonic self. The condescending and discriminating voice of Menon provoked Kannan to send Ravi to an English school. Here, we see a conflict of voices that first confuses Ravi's sense of an essential self. Both Menon and Kannan are significant others to Ravi, and both their voices are within the young Ravi's early boundaries of reality (which is actually rather boundless). Menon's Englishness forms part of the adolescent Ravi's external reality. It is, however, this voice that initiated a downward spiral to mad confusion of selves that finally explodes from Ravi and overturns his sense of stability. Kannan, in his desire to rise above Menon, makes the fatal move of identifying with Menon's whiteness through Ravi. Kannan practically forces Ravi to be like Menon, that is to be white, and, indirectly, to incorporate Western notions of self, which is monolithic, monologic and monolingual. The ambiguous world of Kannan and Ravi (and Periathai) somewhat pales in splendour when compared to the economically and socially superior position of Menon. Hence, for materialistic gains, the ambiguous modes of self are to be abandoned to adopt one that is monolithic.

Indeed, the school becomes both a physical and psychological walling-off for Ravi from his known world, rendering everything that he has understood as reality suddenly uncanny[6]:

> The world I had known fell apart. My walk into town... was a nostalgic, upsetting one. The Chinese constable at the railway gates, the sweet, rotting smells from the fruit stalls, the reeking drains at shop corners, all turned

> foreign. The thought that the sky I had known also domes over other towns, frightened me. I imagined strange assaults of crowds in unfamiliar surroundings. (*TR* 20)

In school, the fabricated fairy-tales of Miss Nancy further fragment Ravi's earlier understanding of his self. Assuming Periathai's role in Ravi's life now, Miss Nancy's storytelling is unlike Periathai's in several crucial ways. Whilst Periathai's stories seek to create worlds, Miss Nancy's seek to destroy. And while Periathai stories expand Ravi's world, Miss Nancy's constrict. Miss Nancy's stories have all to do with acute suppression and repression of the self, gradually diminishing Ravi's spacious (because boundary-less) world. Dwelling on themes of self-policing — personal hygiene, moral behavior, proper conduct — Miss Nancy's stories systematically destroy Ravi's colourful world until all that is left is whiteness:

> Though she allowed me more often near her, she was withdrawn the rest of the year. I hung around her desk while she ate from a plastic box during recess. I felt her loneliness beneath all her bustle and efficiency. I had crossed the colour bar and entered the snow country of ha imagination. (*TR* 63)

It is interesting to observe that Miss Nancy's observable self is not compatible with her private self. Her ability to contain "so many characters within her" (*TR* 47) stem from "an inner desperation" (51). Perhaps this desperation is due to her failure to negotiate her many characters within her harmoniously. Perhaps she is desperate because she has no architectonic mode of being to begin with through which the various voices within her can exist dynamically. Hiding behind her "foreign glamour" (52), Miss Nancy's self-pretence is a failure to formulate an architectonic presence. Her mask which sometimes peels off reveals instead a process of

deconstruction occurring within her. Miss Nancy is a self which has been taken over by carnival subversion and maddening dialogism — deconstruction deconstructing itself perpetually. It is to this state that Ravi eventually arrives — a place of terrible and constant whiteness, where no marks can be left. Here, the imagination serves only one purpose — to continuously wipe itself clean. Whatever notion of a mark (a possible stability) is immediately subverted by another, and another, so that the slate of consciousness would always remain clean.

It is witnessed thus far the gradual breaking down of Ravi's wholeness which, in the end, renders the architectonic self void, and the dialogic and carnivalesque modes of being madly uncontrollable. A postmodern text may view this situation as positive and necessary. But as this essay has been trying to show all this while, this frenzied dialogism and carnivalesque is radically harmful to the shaping of a self. Ambiguity in self is a heterotopia in which boundaries and boundlessness have equal footing — where the architectonics of self is present to negotiate the dialogical and carnival. Postmodern texts abhor all notions of stability to the detriment, really, of the self and the text which would then be forever deferred to non-being This mode or self (or rather, non-self) is both destructive and pointless. Some form of stability must be present for dialogism and the carnival to take place, or how/where could these heteroglossic modes of consciousness take place in the first place (the repetition of "'place" is deliberate, to stress the necessity for a point of reference, which of course must have some form of stability)?

The adolescent Ravi, in being thrust into a white world, soon assimilates and even consciously entertains its standards until he loses familiarity with his early logic of both/and. He enters a new mode of ambiguity here, an ambiguity that is confusing and

frustrating because of the absence of an essential (architectonic self). Looking back at his life, Ravi asserts that his

> early experiences of life, if I say it only now, were frustratingly fragmented. There was no direction or pattern. My life has been a ride on a roller coaster: I come into a breathtaking view of the horizon and then down I plunge. I was never allowed to get comfortable. I swirled through events or expectantly waited for them. In the end I learned to enjoy the moments as they came. (*TR* 64)

But in these words are hidden utterances which deconstruct the signifier. Shortly after this reminiscence, Ravi admits that

> [p]rosperity and wealth were revealed in oblique ways. Language was inadequate. Young as I was, I recognised that words were merely a fraction of what we felt. In our community they formed only the surface. The speech, often staccato, coarse, unending and seemingly unnecessary, sounded rich. They came from an imagination that had withered because that clutter I was later to identify as culture wasn't there (*TR* 71).

Ravi's initial world of ambiguity is now exchanged for one which glorifies material prosperity and wealth above all. The inadequate language he speaks of is the language of his community (Tamil) and *not* his newly acquired language which is closely associated to concepts of wealth and prosperity. It is inadequate because it cannot express clearly his assimilated concepts of prosperity and wealth. His first language seemed withered because he has basically lost identification with his culture, *not that his culture isn't there*. In adopting another language, and indirectly another culture, he has relinquished his origins which is now seen as "frustratingly fragmented"[7]. He sees his pre-English school life as a roller coaster ride, with its varied moments, which is actually

powerfully suggestive of a dialogic and carnivalesque turn-taking within his architectonic self. The final line, however — "[i]n the end, I learned to enjoy the moments as they came" — is curiously vague. Does the protagonist mean that he has learned to accept his roller coaster fragmentation, or does he mean that he has learned to subordinate his otherwise variegated experiences under a monolithic concept of personhood. This essay seems to veer towards the latter interpretation. This is because the next paragraph immediately points to Miss Nancy's world as the continuing roller coaster experience of Ravi. It is no longer the past that matters, but the current monologism of Miss Nancy's world. Ravi's enjoyment of the moments as they come is actually Ravi enjoying his new-found whiteness. His roller coaster ride *hitherto* has been fragmenting because his roller coaster ride now is exciting because it is white. More than anything, this "new" roller coaster experience is the Western fascination with derring-do and existentialism, and not the Eastern notions of balanced ambiguity (like the yin and yang).

At the end of the novel, Ravi has successfully deconstructed his architectonic self to almost non-entity. He even relinquishes his belief in the power of fiction to sustain his sense of self:

> One's world [is], after all, private, and it [is] only through chance encounters... that one discover[s] the logic and the power that sustains the individual. (*TR* 141)

Fiction (stories) is a shared entity and exists through transmission and dissemination. If fiction becomes a private privilege, then it is no longer fiction, but nullity. Sadly, too many chance encounters with crass racism, cultural clashes, colonial discrimination and rational imposition have finally left Ravi in a tangled mesh of divided selves that cannot find wholeness again. He now conforms

to an attitude of individualism and non-sharing. What logic and power Ravi finds for himself at last are purely a monolithic idea of self. As Foucault has observed, "'[t]ruth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" — in other words, procedures of logic (Foucault 74). And what is this "truth'" but a manifestation of power?

> "Truth" is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it (74).

In the end, whilst listening to Naina's garbled language of heteroglossia, all Ravi could understand of this strange language is madness (which, interestingly, is the "logic" of the other):

> ... he began to chant in a garbled language. It embarrassed me to hear him recite a rhythm mounted on Tamil, Malay and even Chinese words. It was a secret language, like the one we invented among ourselves when we were adolescents (driven frenzy for ritual privacy), with additional consonants or dropped vowels.... [H]e was a man possessed by a special esoteric dream (*TR* 70 -71)

One sees how far removed Ravi is from his untainted community of dialogic and carnival commingling that does not subvert the architectonic self. If earlier he becomes aware of the privacy of his created world (that is, during his adolescence in the English school under Miss Nancy), he now repudiates this private world as frenzied (a synonym for madness). His father's creating of worlds in his garbled language — additional consonants and dropped vowels — is viewed by Ravi as an act of a possessed man (another reference to madness)[8]. To Ravi, his father, who has taken over Periathai's spirit and imagination, cannot "'grasp the complexity that surround[sl us" (*TR* 140). This is of course true. Naina and

Periathai now inhabit a world vastly different from Ravi's. Theirs is a boundless world, where consciousness and unconsciousness comfortably co-exist. The logic of their world is simple because there is no dividing factor. Ravi's world is complex because of an explosion of binary opposites and structuralist traps, which is further compounded by the ever present dialogic and carnivalesque that frustrate self-formulation. Ravi, in the end, stands diametrically opposite his father who, in his irrationality, has "gone round the world" but has "always... come back". This proves Naina's stable architectonic grounds, which serves as a channel to negotiate the comings and goings of the dialogic and the carnivalesque modes of self.

Bakhtin has noted that

> [e]ven in those places where the author's voice seems at first glance to be unitary and consistent, direct and unmediatedly intentional, beneath that smooth single languaged surface we can nevertheless uncover prose's three dimensionality, its profound speech diversity, which enters the project of style and is its determining factor. (Bakhtin 315)

In this sense, Maniam's *The Return* never departs from the three dimensionality of voices. Throughout the novel, we persistently hear echoes of the architectonic, the dialogic and the carnivalesque, but in vacillating degrees. If these three voices are heard to be equally present at the beginning of the novel, the architectonic voice gradually fades into near-silence, while the dialogic and the carnival voices increasingly resound. The novel then shifts from one ambiguity — a healthy and positive one — to another which is negativistic and defeatist. The final explosion of voices from the "I" renders the "I" shiftless because the essential self is lost. This is one instance when stability — the bane of postmodern discourse — is necessary[9]. For it is through a stable

presence that the non-stable entities can be negotiated. Ravi's gradual adoption of Western ways steadily destroys his magical world of the Tamil community. In the end, he is besotted with variegated voices which he can no longer control. He (like the author) finds himself a stranger in a strange land, using a tongue not his own. The telling poem in the end confirms this view; as much as the poem is for Naina, it is also a poem for Ravi (and Maniam) himself, a kind of lament for a lost world and a lost identity through the adoption of another language and another culture. For after all is it not Ravi who finally rejects his rituals ("ash of family prayers"), his roots ("the deep rootedness/ you turned aside from") and his language for another, which he at last also sees at last as artificial, poisonous ("chlorine") and rootless ("They will be vague knots/ of feelings, lustreless, cultureless/ buried in a heat that will not serve") (*TR* 173).

In the end, "we are our own foreigners, we are divided" (Kristeva 181). And it is this divided self that Ravi fails to acknowledge that fragments him into confused diaspora. In his wanderings away from his magical world to a world of whiteness, Ravi experiences what Kristeva would define as "remembrance exiled from itself" (33). For

> [if] wandering feeds even the quest for remembrance, then remembrance is exiled from itself and the polymorphous memory that is freed of it, far from being simply painful, takes on a diaphanous irony. (33)

The further away Ravi runs from his Tamil community, the more he is drawn to its memory, as evident in his persistent quest to locate a stable self when he actually has it initially. Substituting his architectonic self for a white concept of stability is really

substituting real stability (and wholeness) for fragmentation. And herein lies the "diaphanous irony".

Endnotes

1. The terms polyphony and heteroglossia are not unfamiliar to students of Mikhail Bakhtin. Although related, they are essentially different. Heteroglossia is the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the "primacy of context over text" (Emerson & Holquist 428). In this sense, heteroglossia emphasizes time and place — society, history, psychology — as crucial factors and mediators of the many voices and consciousness that occur simultaneously and dynamically, although suppressed by a systematic linguistics. Polyphony, hence, is the condition in which the "I" stands above his/her authorial other (Holquist 34); that is, a situation in which the systematic (and monolithic) linguistics (the metanarrative) are (temporarily, in the world of the carnival) overturned so that the multi-voices and the multi-linguistjcs of that particular context can rise above the official text.

2. Among critical essays on the heteroglossia in *The Return* are Tang Soo Ping's "Cultural Crossings: Renegotiating Identity & Belief in K.S. Maniam's *The Return" (Journal of Malaysian Modern Languages Association*, 1, 1996) and Margaret Yong & Irene Wong's "The Case of English in Malaysian Fiction: A Look at K.S. Maniam's *The Return* (*SARE*, June/Dec. 1983).

3. This word must be carefully defined and clarified here to avoid any misunderstanding. This essay clearly presents two forms of ambiguity, both related to an understanding and formulation of the self. Ravi's early ambiguity is defined by his comfortable assimilation of plurality, where the conscious and the unconscious worlds are happily entertained without any one superseding the other. Hence, it is a healthy and positive ambiguity; an ambiguity that celebrates a happy relationship between the architectonic, dialogic and carnival modes of self. The other ambiguity, a

negative and defeatist one, occurs when Ravi later adopts whiteness (and all its attributes, such as rationality, singularity, monolithic, monolingual and monologic). Ravi enters a different mode of ambiguity when he can no longer negotiate his various modes of self due to a gradual destruction of his architectonic self. Without this stable mode of being, the carnival and the dialogic wreak havoc in Ravi's consciousness, rendering him helpless in a world of equally contending and self-deconstructing voices. Hence, Ravi becomes confused as to which voice to adopt to find his self, and, in his confusion, becomes an ambiguous object, for he cannot be a subject because he has no essential self. All he has are contending voices that pull him from all sides (hence, the word "object" is apt as Ravi is now merely a plaything of his carnival and dialogic worlds).

4. K.S. Maniam's *The Return.* London: Skoob Books, 1993. All references are to this text, hereafter cited as *TR*..

5. In writing about the logic of both/and, Eve Tavor Bannet asserts that this logic enables "bodies to join without (disintegrating and without losing their boundaries by constituting "a third term" which preserves and traverses the interval between bodies and more important still, allow all three moments — the two bodies and that which flows between — to go on existing simultaneously" (Bannet 99). Appropriating mainly Luce Irigaray's re-reading of Freud and Lacan, Bannet's third term may necessarily be viewed as something akin to the Bakhtinian architectonic self that allows the dialogical and the carnivalesque modes of being to inhabit within it — the difference being that this architectonic self is not fluid, but a constant channel for the other selves to traverse even as it (the architectonic self) preserves this constant traversing.

6. Interestingly, and in line with my argument, the psychological walling-off of Ravi occurs as soon as Kannan announces his

decision to send Ravi "to The English School in Sungai Petani" (*TR* 20). This sudden but powerful crashing down of Ravi's world at a single utterance may be symbolic of the destructive force of language that either shapes or destroys worlds and beings, as will be shown in this essay as to how utterances first formed Ravi and ultimately fragment him.

7. Note that the Tamil language, in its coarseness, openness ("unending") and staccato-like cadence is highly reminiscent of the carnivalesque in its celebratory play of subversive language that overturns the official linguistics.

8. Indeed, the relation between demon possession and madness is not an unfamiliar phenomenon in pre-16th century. See Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, especially chapter 1.

9. Postmodern discourse repudiates stability for its monologic and monolithic tendencies. But Bakhtin's idea of stability is vastly different. It is ultimately a stability which negotiates plurality — a uni-plural situation Many postmodern critics, in appropriating Bakhtin's view of the carnival and the dialogical in their arguments, have misunderstood or disregarded the vital presence of the architectonic in the formation of self.

Works cited:

Bannet, Eve Tavor. *Postcultural Theory: Critical theory after the Marxist Paradigm*. London: Macmillan, 1993.

Bakthin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. M Holquist. Trans. C. Emerson & M. Holquist. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981.

Botting, Fred. "Power in the Darkness: Heteroptopias, Literature and Gothic Labyrinths". *Genre 26* (SummerlFall 1993). 253 – 282.

Brewster, Anne. 'Linguistic Boundaries: K. S. Maniam's *The Return*. *Sense of Exile: Essays in Literature of the Asia-Pacific Region*. Ed B. Bennett Western Australia:The Centre for Studies in Australian Literature, 1988. 173 -180.

Emerson, Caryl. "Keeping the Self Intact During the Culture Wars: A Centennial Essay for Mikhail Bakthin". *New Literary History 27* (1996). 107 - 126.

Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Trans. R Howard. London, Tavistock, 1971.

___. *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. P. Rabinow. New York, Pantheon, 1984.

Holquist, Michael. *Dialogism: Bakhtin & His World*. London/New York: Routledge, 1990.

Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez

New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991.

Maniam, K. S. *The Return*. London: Skoob Books, 1993

Schulberg, Lucille et al. *Historic India*. Amsterdam: Time-Life Books, 1968.

Tang, Soo Ping. "Cultural Crossings: Renegotiatmg Identity &; Belief m K S. Maniam's The Return". *Journal of Malaysian Modern Languages Association*. Vol. 1 (1996). 121- 30.

Wong, Irene &; Margaret Yong "The Case of English in Malaysian Fiction: A Look at K.S. Maniam's The Return". SARE 6/7 (June/Doc. 1983). 1 - 21.

Andrew Ng teaches English at the
Sepang Institute of Technology
Malaysia

Faulkner and Christian Humanism in *The Sound and the Fury*

by Agnes Liau Wei Lin

The idea that William Faulkner's African-American women characters could present interesting derivational insights is both challenging and absorbing. In particular, the idea of religion and of matters spiritual has long been associated both traditionally and ethnically with African-Americans in a very individualistic context, peculiar to them. However, an added slant to the existing readings of these African-American women may take on a fresh approach in the form of understanding their behaviour in terms of Christian Humanism.

Christian Humanism is not a religion but Christian Humanism as a philosophy has its roots in the Christian religion. The whole basis of Christian Humanism lies in the importance attached to man the individual. It is a belief that emphasizes the sharing of common human needs and difficulties and this belief seeks to overcome human shortcomings and failings through the power in man himself that comes from God.

Dilsey Gibson, whose character has been said to have been modelled after Mammy Caroline Barr, Faulkner's own family "mammy", presents interesting avenues depicting possible Christian Humanistic traits in her behaviour. She is featured in *The Sound and the Fury* as a housekeeper-servant in a white household, the Gibson household.

The Gibsons are assumed to be Christians. Can Dilsey be a Christian Humanist when she is a Christian? According to R.William Franklin and Joseph M.Shaw, "Christians who are

humanists have not added some kind of liberal twist to the Christian faith, but have listened to what the biblical message has to say about human concerns" (Franklin & Shaw 5). Hence Christian Humanism has its source in Christian religiosity, that is the Gospel. However, the question of whether Dilsey consciously practises the elements of Christian Humanism has to be delved into first. There is no direct mention of Dilsey either reading or writing. Her belief in God is rooted in deep, strong faith but it is simple faith.

The first stage in this discussion concentrates on the last part of *The Sound and the Fury* where it is mainly through what Dilsey does and says that the events of the day are chronicled. Furthermore, the last section of the novel is not conveyed in the first person narrative as are the other three. The last section bears the date "April 8th 1928". At the start of the section, the time of day is morning. The day is Easter Sunday, the day the Risen Christ rose from the dead after the crucifixion. The theme of resurrection that Easter thus carries is symbolic and significant. The morning is dismal, there is nothing joyous to mark the special occasion:

> The day dawned bleak and chill, a moving wall of grey light out of the north-east which, instead of dissolving into moisture, seemed to disintegrate into minute and venomous particles, like dust when Dilsey... emerged ... (Faulkner 229)

But note the description of Dilsey:

> She had been a big woman once but now her skeleton rose, draped loosely in unpadded skin that tightened again upon a paunch almost dropsical.... (Faulkner 230)

This description of Dilsey projects a sombre and desolate picture. Her once big frame is now reduced to a skeletal structure and the word "dropsical" connotes a sense of the diseased about her but, ironically enough, it is not Dilsey who is suffering from any disease. Significantly, this joins with the fact that in all the years of her service to the Compson household, she has experienced much. The toll taken by experience and, naturally, age is reflected on the reduction of her physical size. The phrase speaks instead of the degenerate and corrupt state of the Compson family which has spread like disease. It is Dilsey who withstands this diseased state of the Compsons, for it is her moral conscience and fortitude in the periods of tribulation that act as a counterbalance to the dilapidation of their humanity.

In the ensuing lines Faulkner develops this idea through a simile:

> muscle and tissue had been courage and fortitude which the days or the years had consumed until only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark above the somnolent and impervious guts... (Faulkner 230)

This implies that much had been drained off Dilsey; and the indeterminate phrase "days or the years" depicts a certain quality about Dilsey. It's as if Dilsey has been looking after the Compsons for an immeasurable period of time. However implausible this may sound, the result of Dilsey's having this quality could allude to the description of Dilsey being "different" from the other characters in *The Sound and the Fury*.

What is left figuratively is skeletal evidence; yet Dilsey remains indomitable, she will not be put down, thus Dilsey as a figure looms forth like a "ruin and a landmark...." Again there exists a certain degree of contradictoriness here, for Dilsey is

likened to both a ruin and a landmark which could suggest that she is above her surroundings (in the Compson household there is degeneracy and corrosion of values). She may on the one hand represent a ruin because of what she has suffered and she may on the other hand represent a landmark because of what she positively stands for in the midst of negation.

The symbolically indomitable skeleton of Dilsey is significant, for she seems skeletal only externally; internally, however, her spirit is indomitable and unconquered. Her body has been subjected to age and travail but her soul remains untouched. Also, having risen above the "somnolent and impervious guts" suggests a resurrective sense about Dilsey and it is after all, Easter Sunday. Suffering and endurance have placed her above human weakness and decadence.

> Indeed she is used by Faulkner to exemplify, in however ironic a fashion, the aristocratic virtues of Antebellum society which the members of the family itself distort, betray, or deride. She does this in the novel in addition to upholding in her own humble, dignified way the Christian virtues of love and sacrifice and forgiveness. (Jenkins 162)

As Jenkins argues, we can admire much in Dilsey's nature but there remains a question: does Dilsey knowingly and consciously motivate herself in pursuit of these high moral standards or is she just led on by faith? Jenkins says that

> Dilsey propounds no ethical system concerning human behaviour. She merely acts in a humane way to all the people with whom she has contact. (169)

Dilsey practises spontaneity of action and feeling and not so much of thought. She is not aware of the principles and tenets of

Christian Humanism under that name. However, Dilsey is not simple minded.

> If there is any informing ethical framework governing her behaviour at all, it is the Southern black's version of Christianity with its emphasis on suffering, endurance, the wages of sin and the promised afterlife.
> (Jenkins 169)

In expressing this opinion, Lee Jenkins in *Faulkner and Black-White Relations: A Psychoanalytic Approach* explains Dilsey's behaviour. From the following statement I conclude that Dilsey acts from the heart and not from the head:

> The humanism born of faith concentrates on quite ordinary matters: faith in God related to the day-to-day concerns of living. (Franklin and Shaw xi)

Dilsey attests to this for she trusts in God to see her through the daily experiences of existence in a household whose values are corroded and destroyed by the deterioration of values. Faith in God is the foundation of the Christian religion she upholds.

> 'I does de bes I kin... Lord know that....' (Faulkner 275)

Also, Dilsey feels that her actions are justifiable in the eyes of the Lord because whatever it is she will do the best she can and the most she can to overcome shortcomings and obstacles that crop up. This also suggests that Dilsey does think about what she does and has done. She measures her own actions against the wrong and right of religion. In her relationship with the Compsons, Dilsey's actions are testimony to the fact that she is concerned with the welfare of others.

> "Hush," Dilsey said, "he ain't gwine do nothin to her. I ain't gwine let him."

> "But on Sunday morning, in my own house," Mrs. Compson said.
> "When I've tried so hard to raise them Christians. Let me find the right key, Jason," she said. She put her hand on his arm. Then she began to struggle with him.... "Hush," Dilsey said, "You, Jason!"
>
> "Something terrible has happened," Mrs. Compson said, wailing again,
> "I know it has. You, Jason," she said, grasping at him again. "He won't even let me find the key to a room in my own house! "
> "Now, now," Dilsey said, "what kin happen? I right here. I ain't gwine let him hurt her. Quentin," she said raising her voice, "don't you be skeered, honey, I'se right here." (Faulkner 243-244)

In the above scene, Dilsey comfortingly assures Mrs. Compson and Quentin that she will prevent Jason from hurting Quentin if Jason does decide to take matters into his own hands. Here, Dilsey determines to stand up to Jason, the master of the household, in her decision to protect Quentin. Jason, Dilsey feels, metes out too harsh a treatment in his dealings with his niece, a treatment cold and almost inhuman. In an earlier period, he had refused to grant Quentin's mother (Caddy, his sister) visitation rights and for this Dilsey admonishes him. And when Dilsey arranges for Caddy to see her daughter Quentin, Jason takes Dilsey to task for arranging it:

> "I like to know whut's de hurt in lettin dat po chile see her own baby," Dilsey says. "If Mr. Jason was still here hit ud be different."
> "Only Mr. Jason's not here," I says.
> "I know you won't pay me any mind, but I reckon you'll do what Mother says...."

> "You's a cold man, Jason, if man you 'is," she says. "I thank de Lawd I got mo heart dan dat, even ef hit is black."
> "At least I'm man enough to keep that flour barrel full," I says. "And if you do that again, you won't be eating out of it either." (Faulkner 179)

Dilsey judges Jason by what he lacks: humaneness; and Jenkins adds that because

> Dilsey has moral strength, she refuses to compromise her beliefs to satisfy Jason. Her presence in the Compson house deflates Jason's verbal assessment of his stature." (89)

Thus, Dilsey questions the values of Jason ("if man you 'is") and is not afraid to reproach Jason for his lack of humaneness. She does this because Jason is committing an offence in her eyes by denying a mother her right to visit her own child.

Dilsey empathizes with Caddy's predicament. She has brought up both Caddy and Quentin. She censures Jason for what he lacks, in an effort to make him aware of his shortcomings. Her action shows her concern in wanting to right a wrong. Quentin had arrived at the Compson household amidst the surcharged emotional state of Mrs. Compson who is more concerned about the smearing of the family honour, now that her daughter Caddy is no longer married to Herbert,

> "To have my own daughter cast off by her husband" (171)

than with the question of who is to care for a helpless infant, who is in fact her own grandchild. Dilsey provides a sort of hold on the situation when she declares pointedly,

> "And whar else do she belong?" Dilsey says, "who else gwine raise her cep me? Ain't I raised ev'y one of y'all?" (171)

Seventeen years later, when Jason threatens to beat up an adolescent Quentin for playing truant at school and for forging her grandmother's name on her school report cards, it is Dilsey who acts as a buffer. She intervenes on Quentin's behalf against the ruthless Jason. In that scene, an older Dilsey challenges Jason to hit her instead of Quentin. She offers Quentin reassurance and comfort in the face of Jason's pitiless and sadistic threats. Ironically what Dilsey receives in return is a rude and unfeeling rebuff from Quentin, ("You damn old nigger") and on the following day, in trying to administer some comfort to Mrs. Compson when Quentin appears to have left the house, Dilsey again receives a rude dismissal.

As women, perhaps Dilsey, Quentin, Mrs. Compson could measure each other's actions on a common ground: the ability to care genuinely and to feel concerned for others regardless of creed or colour. Depicted in their respective physical and verbal responses to Dilsey's proffer of assistance, Quentin and Mrs. Compson are unwilling to come into direct physical contact with a black woman; their reaction is one of recoil. Dilsey in her action of proffering comfort and reassurance does so because she sees a need for it in situations where both Quentin and Mrs. Compson are distressed. And Dilsey sees both Mrs. Compson and Quentin simply as people, who need assistance in trying times. Hers is not a complex view that has to consider racial differences.

The word "humanism" connotes a sense of possessing the quality of being human, or the character of being human. Being human entails not only the ability to feel for others but knowing why one should be concerned over the welfare of others when the

need arises. Surely Dilsey in her connection with the Compsons has proved that she is a fair and just possessor of this quality of being human. In her daily meetings with the respective Compsons through the years, her help is always readily rendered, but not always readily acknowledged. Is Dilsey aware of this? Faulkner does not empower her to be so. One reader's impression is:

> However forcefully Dilsey may stand as a symbolic embodiment of humanity, one still notes her acquiescence to her subservient position. She accepts being a "nigger". Social decorum remains intact: she is treated with traditional condescension, and she accepts the role of the self-sacrificing Mammy as her natural function. (Davis 70)

Davis's comment on Dilsey's "acquiescence to her subservient position" and her acceptance of "being a nigger" offers matter for debate. First, Dilsey does not act out the "self-sacrificing Mammy as her natural function" but she is required and assumed to do just that in her place as the black housekeeper of a white household. She does not ask to be more than the housekeeper and does not once conceive the idea of being her own mistress. This could be viewed as evidence of her "acquiescence to her subservient position". But Dilsey does intervene in matters of white folks, as seen in the case of Quentin.

However, Dilsey is not depicted as being consciously indignant of the mistreatment of blacks by whites. For Dilsey, like many of her race, accepts the traditional belief that suffering and endurance are synonymous with being black. These are also religious prerequisites to a glorious life after death. Hence it was their lot in life; and for them the acceptance of this — be it resignedly or stoically — was an acceptance of being black. Dilsey may be self-sacrificing in her relations to the whites, but only when she deems them in need of consolation and comfort and even

protection. She becomes self-sacrificing in her effort to help and she is self-sacrificing because of the quality of humaneness in her and not because she is passively subservient in her role as the black housekeeper in the household, a role that makes her anything but a meek nigger. If help is needed, she will offer it to those who need it. It's simply a case of caring and being concerned for the well being of others. Dilsey affirms these qualities naturally, by practice and belief; for they are an innate part of herself.

An important section of the novel sees Dilsey attending the Easter Sunday sermon with Frony her daughter, Luster her grandson, and Benjy the retarded child of the Compson family. It is morning, they are on their way to church and Frony wears a new garment. Dilsey chides her for wearing something new, for if it rains it will be spoilt.

> "You got six weeks' work right dar on yo back," Dilsey said. "Whut you gwine do ef hit rain?"
> "Git wet, I reckon," Frony said. "I ain't never stopped no rain yit." (251)

If it rains then she'll be wet but that will not deter her from wearing a new dress. Frony knows what will be will be, but she will not renounce her own will.

Dilsey, although she does not share her daughter's matter-of-fact refusal to change, accepts the natural course of things and like her daughter she does not relinquish her individual will. She may not be able to curb Jason's growing deterioration but she will stand up to him if Jason necessitates challenge. Dilsey does exhibit a reverence for human life which is the essence of all humanism. This is poignantly shown in her defence of Benjy. Bringing Ben, the white retarded son of Mr. and Mrs. Compson, to a black church distresses Frony:

> "I wish you wouldn't keep on bringing him to church mammy," Frony said. "Folks talking."
> "What folks?" Dilsey said. "I hears em," Frony said.
> "And I know what kind of folks," Dilsey said, "Trash white folks. Dat's who it is. Thinks he ain't good enough fer white church, but nigger church ain't good enough fer him."
> "Dey talks, jes de same," Frony said.
> "Den you send um to me," Dilsey said. "Tell um de good Lawd don't keer whether he smart or not. Don't nobody but white trash keer dat." (251)

Benjy's retardation does not make him any less human in Dilsey's eyes and Dilsey knows that God views Benjy similarly — "de good Lawd don't keer whether he smart or not." Here Dilsey shows that she knows the impartiality of God and she has made a link between Benjy and God.

Mrs. Compson's claim that she has tried so hard to raise her children as Christians is a mockery and a travesty of what Christianity actually means. For her son Jason especially mocks the Christian image of love and forgiveness. Dilsey Gibson on the other hand stands in contrast to the decadent Compsons and perhaps through her actions and words Dilsey defines Christianity; coupled with this religious belief is her humanistic trait that makes her compassionate and humane.

In church, she requires her undivided attention when following Reverend Shegog's sermon. She feels the need to "whut got de blood en de ricklickshun of de Lamb." With this, there is hope for salvation — de resurrection en de light — in an otherwise bleak and desolate life, from the viewpoint of the blacks. Franklin and Shaw add that

> The entire range of human experience, they find, is illumined by the cross and the resurrection of Christ. (32)

Dilsey continues crying silently after the service is over and this makes Frony uncomfortable.

> "Whyn't you quit dat, mammy?" Frony said. "Wid all dese people lookin. We be passin white folks soon."
> "I've seed de first en de last," Dilsey said, "never you mind me."
> "First en last whut?" Frony said.
> "Never you mind," Dilsey said. "I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin." (258)

Dilsey's apocalyptic-sounding statement comes as a consequential effect of the powerfully charged sermon. What she sees remains intensely private, for she shares it with no one, not even with her daughter. Despite Dilsey's privacy of thought, there is an ominous note to her words. She does not comment on the sermon but she reacts to it physically and emotionally: the sermon has touched her. And Dilsey's apocalyptic statement brings to mind John's revelation of the Christ in Revelation 1:8: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End". This link makes Dilsey's words revelatory. She could also have meant that her religious convictions based on her faith have helped her to understand her problems, and to live life purposefully in the midst of trials. Hence, she has seen the beginning and the end.

Even without any signs of verbal acknowledgement as to how the sermon has moved her, Dilsey does project a sense of religious comprehension about her, during and after the sermon. Her crying depicts an understanding of what "de Lawd" has suffered to save man — "the annealment of de Lawd" is truly a thing of honour and magnitude. For Dilsey, the need to have "de

blood en de ricklickshun of de Lamb" is certain and perennial. Without verbalizing her views, she seems to take note of the essence of Christian Humanism:

> At the heart of Christian Humanism... the fullest realization of what it means to be human can be known through personal communion with Jesus Christ, the Word of God who entered the arena of human life to bring wholeness and freedom to every human being. (Franklin and Shaw 44)

With "de blood en de ricklickshun of de Lamb" Dilsey has entered into a "personal communion with Jesus Christ". She provides nothing definite as to whether she has come to the "realization of what it means to be human" but when she utters those strangely prophetic words amidst her crying (which is described as silent and rigid) we feel they spring from a silent conviction that she has witnessed the growth of human decadence and is now witnessing the eventual end of human dignity and worth in the emotional, moral and spiritual dilapidation that engulfs the Compson family.

> To be fully human, according to Christian teaching, involves coming to terms with oneself in relation to God and at the same time expressing one's humanity in relation to other human beings. (Franklin and Shaw 39)

Dilsey bears full testimony to this. The actions and values of the Compsons are measured against her actions and values. Dilsey is the foil to the Compsons and she expresses her 'humanity in relation to other human beings".

She is kind when kindness is needed, strong where strength is asked of her, caring when care is required and above all she is all of these not only because she feels that it is her duty to be so but because she is simply, naturally and unaffectedly all of these.

These descriptions become a definition for Dilsey, of the person Dilsey is. However, it may be argued that it would be difficult to view Dilsey as a sufficiently realistic character.

Did Faulkner consciously create the character of Dilsey as that of a Christian Humanist? I think not. Dilsey, Faulkner himself owned, was modelled after his own "mammy" Caroline Barr, who was with the Faulkner family for a long period. It was in a way a recapturing of the past, the preserving of Mammy Caroline Barr in the character of Dilsey Gibson. Even if Faulkner did not set out purposely to make Dilsey a Christian Humanist, Dilsey has it in herself and she shows with clarity elements of Christian Humanistic traits.

The claim that Dilsey exhibits Christian Humanistic traits in her behaviour is not made less valid by this silence of Faulkner. She is not portrayed as being aware of Christian Humanism but the reader may judge from her actions and her words and derive the kind of motivation from which these actions and words are impelled forward. The notable fact remains that Dilsey does after all demonstrate that these behavioural aspects of Christian Humanism are present in her character.

Works Cited

Davis,T. (1983). *Faulkner's 'Negro', Art and the Southern Context* (Rev.ed.). Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Faulkner, W. (1989). *The Sound and the Fury*. London: Picador Classics. All references from this edition.

Franklin,W. and Shaw, R. (1991). *The Case for Christian Humanism*. Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Jenkins, L. (1981). *Faulkner and Black-White Relations, A Psychoanalytic Approach*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Agnes Liau teaches at
Pusat Bahasa
Universiti Sains Malaysia
Penang

The "Gay" Spinster of Glorious Hill: A Queer Reading of Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke*

by Neil Khor Jin Keong

Summer and Smoke (*Summer*) can be considered a twin-play to Williams' more famous *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Both were written at about the same time. The unfinished version of *Summer* was staged in Houston about a few months before *Streetcar*'s Broadway success in 1947. Based on the short story "Yellow Bird", *Summer* is about the 'coming-out' of the spinsterish Alma Winemiller. Alma of the short story is a preacher's daughter haunted by a "disembodied someone" of liberal tendencies. She finally breaks out of her conformist role, begins to smoke and defies her parents. She eventually leaves Glorious Hill for New Orleans. The short story is a pause in a progressively self-condemnatory path that the playwright adopts when addressing the subject of homosexuality in his works. This article is interested not only in *Summer's* transposition from short story to play but also in revealing queer moments of identification that surrounds this spinster from Glorious Hill.

Modifications took place before the story was transposed onto the stage. Williams developed the "disembodied someone" into a Promethean figure to represent the liberal tendencies of Alma's cavalier ancestors. John Buchanon in *Summer* is the attractive 'bad boy', a rebel without a cause who is self-destructive yet irresistible. His drinking, gambling and fighting habits are almost pathological. Meanwhile, Alma Winemiller of the play is almost all spirit except for a part of her that constantly demands

expression. Like Alma of the short story, she suffers from incompletion. She represses her sexuality because she believes it is unnatural. She is, in her own words, a "weak, divided individual". Though she inherits Alma Tutweiler's religious facade, she does not have the latter's strength. That seems to have been transferred to John. The plot of the play also differs slightly from the short story. Alma Winemiller's rebellion does not begin until she realises that her life has been a camouflage. She realises this when John confronts her violently about her denial of having sexual desires. While Alma Tutweiler successfully re-establishes herself in New Orleans, Alma Winemiller never leaves Glorious Hill. Neither is her rebellion as fierce as the latter's, who without a "blink of an eye... drew back her right arm and returned [her father's] slap with good measure" (235). While the story is more interested in "slapping" the obstructers of desire, at times almost resembling a lashing out against conservatism, the play is more balanced.

However the reviews of the New York production of *Summer* were dismal. The play, staged just after *Streetcar*, was mercilessly compared to Williams' masterpiece. Critics found *Summer* very disappointing, among them is one of the playwright's earliest biographers, Benjamin Nelson. *Summer*, Nelson wrote, was simply "a bad play" (Nelson 117). In that short sentence he succinctly expressed what so many had felt about the New York production. Most of the critics found *Summer*'s characters too flat, lifeless and too allegorical. Nelson complained about how Williams' "obsession with the sexual" had abstracted the play (116). Richard Watts of *the New York Post*, like Nelson, could not bond with the characters, complaining that "while the hero and the heroine think and talk a lot about sex and passion, there is an almost academic quality about their preoccupations (117). Harold Clurman of the *New Republic* agrees with this assessment, complaining that in *Summer* "so much time is given to a conscious

exposition of theme that Williams loses the specific sense of his people (117). The play's weaknesses seem to be ingrained in its theme. Williams' preoccupation with sexuality while seemingly plausible in the medium of the short story fails once it goes onto stage. Alma and John come across in the New York production as stilted, one-sided characters who are so preoccupied with debating about sex, that they seem to forget how to live. This dehumanises them and converts them, to use Nelson's description, into "abstractions" on stage.

The Houston production however proved to be different. Held before the New York production and directed by Margo Jones, this production proves that the play's central weakness lies not with the theme but with its staging. *Summer* demands the expressionism that a small theatre provides. Margo Jones' small Houston theatre provided the intimacy required for the play to appeal to the audience. This theory was proven correct once again under the direction of Jose Quintero and his circle-in-the-square production in Greenwich Village, New York. Benjamin Nelson describes the Quintero production:

> The rectangular stage, surrounded by the audience on three sides, was admirably suited to the setting, and the size of the playhouse itself - it had only a little more than two hundred seats — was a prime factor in achieving the tone and atmosphere Mr. Quintero sought.... [B]y compressing the action in a kind of dark and shifting limbo, Quintero gave the play the expressionism it required and enabled the actors to heighten every word and gesture (119).

Upon closer examination of the text, it becomes clear that the play sets out to express, on stage, the mood, emotion and frustration of its characters. Nelson is right in suggesting that expressionism lies behind the success of Quintero's production. This, I believe, is also

true about Jones' Houston production. In *Summer* Williams hoped to express the feelings inside an individual on stage. Evidence supporting this interpretation can be found in the production notes accompanying the play. The sky, for example, is the focal point of the play's expressionistic quality. Williams wants the sky to be blue and wants it to appear overhanging slightly above the heads of the characters:

> There must be a great expense of sky so that the entire action of the play takes place against it. This is true of interior as well as exterior scenes... During the day scenes the sky should be a pure and intense blue (like the sky of Italy as it is so faithfully represented in the religious paintings of the Renaissance) and costumes should be selected to form a dramatic colour contrast to this intense blue which the figures stand against. (Colour harmonies and other visual effects are tremendously important) (99).

The basic aim of this instruction is, I believe, to give external expression to inner feelings and ideas. The queer subtext of the play depends on this technique to work. In the New York production, though Joe Mielzner's set design was innovative, it could not sustain the play's need for expressionism. Williams' notes on set design again reinforces the idea that the play is centred on the expression of a self in conflict. The framework of the set resembles the private and public spaces carefully crafted to personify a divided personality:

> Now we descend to the so-called interior sets of the play. There are two of these 'interior' sets, one being the parlour of an episcopal rectory and the other the home of a doctor next door to the rectory. The architecture of these houses is barely suggested but is of an American Gothic design of the Victorian

> era. There are no actual doors or windows or walls. Doors and windows are represented by a delicate framework of Gothic design... sections of the wall are used only where they are functionally required... In the doctor's house should be a section of a wall to support the chart of anatomy. Chirico has used fragmentary walls and interiors in a very evocative way in his painting called *Conversation among the Ruins*. (100)

If the sky represents the moods of the self, the set seems to be created to accommodate the violent tussle between Alma and her *doppelganger*. If the "interior" set symbolises the secret world of the individual, the "exterior" set is the public space where disguise becomes necessary. A stone angel dominates this public space. In the prologue of the play, where Alma and John are children, they discover the angel's name. As they discover the meaning of the word Eternity, they represent the two components that are constantly at battle in the life of a homosexual: the soul and the body. The "sky", the "interior set" and the "exterior" set, will be their battleground as the play progresses.

Part One of the play is entitled "Summer". It is divided into six scenes and trails the flux in Alma's life since her reunion with the boy of the prologue. Lighting in the first scene, according to the production notes, should grow dim indicating the faded sunlight of dusk. Alma is singing the patriotic song "La Golondrina" and her father is visibly uncomfortable with her daughter's stage performance, complaining that "this is going to provoke a lot of criticism" (105). This one line defines Alma's life as the preacher's daughter. John, as he moves onto the stage, is a "promethean figure, brilliant and restlessly alive in a stagnant society" (105). This is a sharp contrast to Alma, whose presence is only heard through "a voice not particularly strong, but [which] has great purity and emotion" (105). When she comes into the

audience's gaze, there is "something prematurely spinsterish about her" (107). Due to "excessive propriety and self-consciousness", Alma appears queer on stage. She, according to the playwright, resembles an eighteenth-century lady displaced in the modern era. It is a queerness that "is apparent in her nervous laughter" but it is a "nature [that] is still hidden from her"(107). When they meet, as though to push the point home, there is fireworks exploding in the sky. While Alma has grown up shouldering the responsibilities of her mother who has lost her mind, John evades his responsibility as a doctor because of his deep-seated fear of death experienced as a child when his mother passed away. While things spiritual easily impress Alma, John's training in the science of medicine makes him cynical about religion and spirituality. This is made clear in their differing attitudes towards John's career as a doctor:

> Alma: I have looked through a telescope, but never a microscope. What... what do you... see?
> John: A — universe, Miss Alma.
> Alma: What kind of a universe?
> John: Pretty much the same kind that you saw through the lens of telescope — a mysterious one...
> Alma: Oh, yes...
> John: Part anarchy — and part order!
> Alma: The footprints of God!
> John: But not God.
> Alma [ecstatically]: To be a doctor! And deal with these mysteries under the Microscope lens... I think it is more religious than being a priest... (111)

But John has not forgotten their encounter at the fountain as children. He knows that Alma is a hypochondriac because she is denying a part of her self that demands expression. He casually tells her that she is suffering from a doppelganger "and the

doppelganger is badly irritated" (113). Later, after Alma accuses him of deliberately hurting her feelings, he reveals to her that he likes her and, more importantly, that he knows she likes him:

> John: You're attracting attention! Don't you know that I really like you, Miss Alma.
> Alma: No, you don't.
> John: Sure I do. A lot. Sometimes when I come home late at night I look over at the rectory. I see something white at the window. Could that be you, Miss Alma? Or, is it your doppelganger, looking out of the window that faces my way? (118)

In scene two, which is in the rectory, Alma is scolding her mother for stealing a plumed hat from the grocery store. Alma in this scene is clearly a different person. The encounter with John has somehow intensified the demands of her "irritated doppelganger" and she calls John over the telephone. Sheepishly, she castigates him for not fulfilling his promise to take her out and takes the opportunity to invite him to a social meeting where "we talk about the new books and read things aloud to each other" (122). She is however constantly interrupted by her mother who, later in the scene, will play an integral role in bringing about a queer moment of identification. When Nellie, Alma's music-class student, draws Alma's attention to the attractiveness of John's body, the audience, like Alma, begins to see the male body as an erotic object:

> Alma: What are you doing at the window Nellie?
> Nellie: Watching someone I have a terrible crush on!
> Alma: Someone — next door?
> Nellie: You know who — Dr. Johnny Junior. You know, I thought I'd always hate men. Loathe and despise them. But now, oh, I think he's the wonderfullest person in all the world. Don't you think so?

Alma: In appearance perhaps, but his character is weak. Where do you see him? [she catches Mrs. Winemiller's eye]

Nellie: He isn't dressed, so I think it must be his bedroom.

Alma: Please come away from the window.

Nellie: He's brushing his hair.

Alma: Nellie, come away from the window...

Nellie: They're calling him again. He is getting into his shirt.

Alma: Nellie, don't look out the window and have us caught spying.

Mrs. Winemiller [suddenly]: Show Nellie how you spy on him! Oh, she's a good one at spying. She stands behind the curtain and peeks around it, and...

Alma [frantically]: Mother! (124)

By problematising Alma's sexual attraction towards the naked body of John, Williams was able to create a queer moment of identification for his gay audience. Although Alma is a woman, she is not able to make her sexual desires legitimate. Alma, like the homosexual, is a voyeur, who is constantly aware that, like her, their desire for men is "deviant".

It is in scene three — the social meeting scene — that the queer subtext of the play becomes prominent. Williams does not rely solely on the reversal of gender roles in this play to create queer moments of identification. Through a play of words, action and innuendo, Williams creates a queer gathering of "queens". The men are clearly effeminate; Mr. Doremus is a mama's boy while Vernon is a "willowy young man with an open collar and Byronic locks" (125). The widow Bassett is a town-gossip who has a vicious tongue. Rosemary is "a wistful older girl with a long neck and thick-lensed glasses" (125) and Alma, needs no explanation. To further embolden the effect he wanted, Williams not only relied

on stereotypes, but also made references to homosexual poets and the exclusivity of literary aspirations that many homosexuals gravitate towards. Mrs. Basset for example confuses William Blake with the French poets Verlaine and Rimbaud. She objects to Rosemary's reading of Blake thinking that the latter "travelled around with a Frenchman who took a shot at him and landed them both in jail! Brussels, Brussels!" (128). John Clum agrees with this reading and adds that Alma's reading of Blake's poem is a "conflation of two poems, one of which has been shortened, revised and gender-bent" (1996: 34). "By changing the gender of the pronouns and reworking the poem to give it a more personal meaning", Clum says that Alma has given "the kind of revision that many gay men have privately given to heterosexual literature" (1996: 34). But the most effective tool to bring home the queer atmosphere of the bookish meeting is undoubtedly the appearance of John. "He is a startling contrast to the other male company, who seem to be outcasts of a state in which he is a prominent citizen" (*Summer* 126). Williams, measuring with a merciless physical yardstick, elevates John to the status of a demigod. Mrs. Besset congratulates Alma who "laughs breathlessly" (127). Vernon's verse play, "eight inches thick", is sidelined. After Mrs. Basset's outburst and Alma's revisionist reading of Blake, John leaves the meeting abruptly. When Mrs. Basset suggests the obvious, that John left to go to Moon Lake Casino for a more "physical" time, Alma castigates her; and a cat-fight ensues:

> Alma: Why Mrs. Basset, what gave you that idea? I don't think that John even knows that Gonzales girl (referring to Rosa Gonzales).
>
> Mrs. Basset: He knows her all right. In the biblical sense of the word, if you'll excuse me.
>
> Alma: No, I will not excuse you! A thing like that is inexcusable!
>
> Mrs. Basset: Have you fallen for him, Miss Alma? Miss Alma has fallen for the young doctor!

> They tell me he has lots of new lady patients!
>
> Alma: Stop it! [She stamps her foot furiously and crushes the palm leaf fan between her clenched hands]. I won't have malicious talk here! You drove him away from the meeting after I'd bragged so much about how bright and interesting you all were! You put your worst foot forward and simpered and chattered and carried on like idiots, idiots! (130)

Alma's outburst breaks up the meeting but it indicates that she has "fallen for the doctor". These meetings, that gay audiences will appreciate, are more than mere gossip sessions where people bitch and chatter about each other, it provides a space for the marginalised to come together. In *Summer*, the misfits of Glorious Hill find themselves in the rectory of the queer Alma Winemiller.

In scenes four to six, Alma's desire for John, personified in scenes two and three, begins to take control of her. Late at night after the incident, Alma begins to suffer from heart palpitations and visits the clinic. There she discovers an injured John being attended to by the buxomy Rosa Gonzales. She confesses that she "seems to be all to pieces" (132) and finds great difficulty breathing. With a stethoscope, John discovers the problem that has been haunting Alma and when asked, he tells her the reason: "Miss Alma is lonesome" (134). John explains to Alma that she is a person who is worth a lot of consideration "because you have a lot of feeling in your heart and that is a rare thing. It makes you too easily hurt" (135). The divided personality in Alma, will, from this moment onwards, begin to emerge through Alma's actions. The first being Alma's rebellion against her father's prohibition of her meeting John in scene five and the second being her confrontation with the fact that John is not a "gentleman" in scene six. Alma

realises that John does not share the religious values that she abides by. She is hurt when she realises that the gossip surrounding John is true. This erases her argument with her father that "I don't judge people by the tongues of gossip" (137). More importantly, her discovery of John's sexual promiscuity mirrors her own discovery of her doppelganger. She cannot accept the fact that John is attracted to the physical attractions of Moon Lake Casino where "anything goes" (139), just as she cannot accept her sexual desires for John. Desires that Alma, like the homosexual, has been conditioned to believe is "deviant":

> Alma: Those Latins all dream in the sun — and indulge their senses.
> John: Well, its yet to be proven that anyone on this earth is crowned with so much glory as the one that uses his sense to get all he can in the way of — satisfaction.
> Alma: Self-satisfaction.
> John: What other kind is there?
> Alma: I will answer that question by asking you one. Have you ever seen, or looked at a picture of, a Gothic cathedral?
> John: Gothic cathedrals? What about them?
> Alma: How everything reaches up, how everything seems to be straining for something out of reach of stone — or human — fingers?... The immense stained windows, the great arched doors... all reaching to something beyond attainment! To me — well, that is the secret principle back of existence — the everlasting struggle and aspiration for more than our human limits have placed in our reach — who was that who said... 'All of us are in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars!
> John: Mr. Oscar Wilde (139)

Like the homosexual, Alma Winemiller is a secret sexual deviant because the only person who knows about her attraction for John (men) and who censors her for it is herself. Williams, by invoking the name of Oscar Wilde in this "ostensibly heterosexual exchange", John Clum argues, "signals the gay interpretive community that there is a gay code operative in the play" (33), but more importantly it reinforces the gulf between the body and the soul that Wilde, the celebrated homosexual, was intensely aware of. Like Alma, most homosexuals feel that they "are in the gutter looking at the stars!" When John kisses her and suggests to her that "there's other things between a man and a woman besides respect" (143), Alma furiously ignores the sexual innuendo:

> John: The cock-fight has started!
> Alma: Since you have spoken so plainly, I'll speak plainly, too. There are some wo***men*** who turn a possibly beautiful thing into something no better than the coupling of beasts! — but love is what you bring to it... Some people just bring their bodies. But there are some people, there are some wo***men***, John — who can bring their hearts to it, also — who can bring their souls to it! (emphases mine; 144)

But as Part One of the play dissolves and re-emerges into part two, entitled "Winter", Alma like the novice in the gay world will realise that relationships have to be fleeting and purely physical because the "love that you bring to it" is never allowed expression. At the beginning of scene seven (the first scene of part two), Alma is surrounded by her "queer" friends. Meanwhile John is having an "orgy" in the clinic. Alma, probably feeling jealous, calls Dr. Buchanon and tells him about the party at the clinic. A fight ensues between Dr. Buchanon and Rosa's father, the former is fatally shot. At this point in the play, both Alma and John are forced to

face the consequences of their actions. The debate between the body and the soul reaches a climax in scene eight:

> John: Hold still! Now listen to the anatomy lecture. You see this chart? It's a picture of a —... a tree with three birds on it. This top bird is the brain. The bird is hungry. He's hungry for something called truth. He doesn't get much, he's never satisfied with it, he keeps on shaking his cold and weak wings... And down there is the lowest bird — or maybe the highest, who knows? — yes take a look at him, too, he's hungry as both the others and twice as lonesome — what's he hungry for? love!...
>
> Alma: So that is your high conception of human desires. What you have here is not the anatomy of a beast, but a man. And I — I reject your opinion of where love is, and the kind of truth you believe the brain to be seeking! — There is something not shown in the chart.
>
> John: You mean the part that Alma is Spanish for, do you?
>
> Alma: Yes, that's not shown on the anatomy chart! But its there... And its that, that I loved you with — that! Not what you mentioned!.. Yes, did love you with, John, did nearly die of when you hurt me. (155)

Both Alma and John are fugitives from the qualities they represent. Alma from the fact that the physical expression of love is as legitimate as the spiritual aspect of that union, while John hungers for the love that has been denied him since his mother's death. His brutal, self-destructive behaviour is a manifestation of his inability to establish an intimate relationship with another individual. After

this confrontation, John does not turn to Alma as he realises that his attraction to Alma is based on his love for what she represents and not for who she is:

> John: I wouldn't have made love to you.
> Alma [uncomprehendingly]: What?
> John: That night at the casino — I wouldn't have made love to you. Even if you had consented to go upstairs. I couldn't have made love to you. [Alma stares at John as if anticipating some unbearable hurt] Yes, yes! Isn't it funny? I'm more afraid of your soul than you're of my body. You'd have been as safe as the angel of the fountain — because I wouldn't feel decent enough to touch you. (155)

As summer progresses into autumn, Alma is so badly burned by the heat of passion that only smoke remains of her 'soul'. The spiritual has escaped the body. In scene nine, Mr. Winemiller confronts Alma about her neglecting of responsibilities but she simply ignores him. Throughout the autumnal months, Alma hibernates, ignoring the gossip of Mrs. Basset and avoiding her queer community. She emerges in scene ten, in the dead of winter, near the stone angel. Nellie announces that she and John are to be married, this propels Alma to confront the latter in scene eleven. John, unlike Alma, has turned himself into a successful doctor. He discovered the cure his father was looking for and managed to save the town of Lyons. He is a responsible young hero, having stayed away from Moon Lake Casino where "everything goes". In fact he is about to commit himself to heterosexuality by marrying the gregarious Nellie. Confronted by a clearly different Alma, he confesses:

> John: ...I've come around to your way of thinking, that something else is in there, an

> immaterial something — as thin as smoke...
> It can't be seen, so it can't be shown on the chart. But it's there all the same. (168)

The queer subtext culminates into a single moment of queer identification when a devastated Alma tells John that the "tables have turned with a vengeance" (170). Now that she has come to accept the fact that there can be a physical relationship between them, he is insisting that *she* must remain a "lady":

> Alma: You talk as if my body had ceased to exist for you, John, inspite of the fact that you've just counted my pulse. Yes, that's it!... I came here to tell you that [***we being men***] doesn't seem so important to me anymore, but you're telling me I've got to remain a ***lady***. [she laughs rather violently.] The tables have turned with a vengeance! (emphasis mine; 170)

The play ends with a wintery landscape. Alma comes full circle to where she began, near the fountain, in the "exterior" part of the set. She has become what circumstances have driven her to be — a social deviant. There are no traces of her former self, only the stone angel hauntingly reminds us of the soulful Alma of summer. Having her sexual desires awakened and having her love rejected by John, Alma like the homosexuals is a shadow of her former self. She seeks intimacy with strangers, hoping to feel the love that was never reciprocated:

> Alma: There's not much to do in this town after dark, but there are resorts on the lake that offer all kind of after-dark entertainment. There's one called Moon Lake Casino. It's under new management now, but I don't suppose its character has changed.

The Young Man: What was its character?
Alma: Gay, very gay... (174)

Like Alma Winemiller at the end of the play, the homosexual is a fugitive from himself. He leads a double life that involves a careful balancing act between the "interior" and "exterior" worlds. In this play, Williams does not rely solely on gender-transvestism, he enlarges the "gay code" to include gestures, interests and revisionist readings of heterosexual literature to create a probable queer subtext. This is also partly why the play fails. Benjamin Nelson is partly right that Williams was so preoccupied with developing the queer subtext through the mastering of queer codes that his characters became as stereotypical as their speeches. One thing is however clear: through the effective moments of queer identification, gay audiences sees themselves as Alma Winemiller, an individual so divided that she is "all to pieces". She is a mirror that every gay man tries to avoid, for if gazed upon, the image of Alma Winemiller reminds the homosexual about the incomprehensible gulf between the body and the soul. Like Alma the gay person has come to realise that perhaps "spirit itself is counterfeit". In the world of *Summer and Smoke*, the spinster of Glorious Hill is indeed "gay, very gay".

This paper is part of an on-going research project on Tennessee Williams' plays.

Works Cited:

Clum, John M. "From *Summer and Smoke* to *Eccentricities of a Nightingale*: The Evolution of the Queer Alma". *Journal of Modern Drama*, 39 (1996): 31-50.

Clurman, Harold. [Review of Williams' *Summer & Smoke*]. *The New Republic*: CXIX, 25 October 1948.

Nelson, Benjamin. *Tennessee Williams*. New York: Astor-Havor, 1961.

Vannatta, Dennis. *A Study of Tennessee Williams' Short Fiction*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988.

Vidal, Gore. *The Collected Short Stories of Tennessee Williams*. New York: New Directions, 1985.

Watts, Richard Jr. [Review of Williams' *Summer & Smoke*]. *New York Post*: 7 Oct. 1948

Williams, Tennessee. *Period of Adjustment; Summer and Smoke; Small Craft Warnings*. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982.

Neil Khor Jin Keong
is Tutor at the
Department of English
University of Malaya
Kuala Lumpur.

"These women are shrewd tempters with their tongues": Women, Speech, and Power in Shakespeare's First Tetralogy

by Veronica Lowe

Feminity and power. These, in the Renaissance, were incompatible concepts, for woman was the weaker vessel. Feminity meant inferiority, physical, moral, and intellectual. Yet, the women in Shakespeare's first tetralogy do exercise power, power that is closely associated with their use of their tongues.

The human race's principal instrument of communication, the voice, is used to instruct and teach, to order and command, to reprimand and condemn. Moreover, as Catherine Belsey observes, "to speak is to possess meaning, to have access to the language which defines, delimits and locates power" (191). Hence, as a corollary of its denial of power to women, the Renaissance patriarchy demanded silence of them, maintaining that feminine silence was necessary since female speech caused the expulsion of man from the Garden of Eden and was, therefore, evil. They took their cue from St. Paul, who declared that:

> the woman [must] learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. (1 Tim. 2:11-14)

Indeed, silence was one of the three traditional feminine virtues, the others being chastity and obedience. In 1591, Henry Smith wrote in *A Preparative to Marriage* that "the ornament of a woman is silence" (Novy 5). This view was not uncommon in the

Renaissance. And since good women were always silent, voluble women were, by definition, bad women: shrews who attempted to overturn the natural order ordained by God through their incessant scolding and complaining. The shrew was defined by her lack of the feminine virtue of silence, by her extensive use of her tongue.

The subversive power of the female tongue is referred to early in the tetralogy —indeed in the first scene involving a female character. The French general, Alenson, noting the length of Joan's discussion with Charles, the Dauphin, observes that "These women are shrewd tempters with their tongues" (*1H6* 1.2.123). Alenson's words recall the part played by Eve's tongue in the Fall. And Eve's daughter, Joan, certainly seems to have inherited her verbal facility. Astonishing the initially sceptical French nobles with her "high terms" (1.2.93), she persuades them to renew their abandoned attempt at raising the siege of Orleans. Her success with her tongue is, however, the result of not only feminine guile but witchcraft as well. The fair persuasions she uses to "entice the Duke of Burgundy/ To leave the Talbot and to follow us" are mixed with more than just "sugar'd words" (3.3.18-20). Charles urges her to "enchant him with thy words" (3.3.403) and Burgundy himself seems vaguely aware that he has been enchanted: "Either she hath bewitch'd me with her words,/ Or nature makes me suddenly relent" (3.3.58-59). The suggestions that it is witchcraft which ensures the success of her fair pleadings are too strong to be ignored, especially in view of the appearance of the spirits in 5.3. As a witch and a peasant, Joan stands apart from the other women in the plays, but her use of her tongue looks ahead to their use of theirs.

Lawrence Stone asserts that the ability to scold was an important lever of power for women in Renaissance England, where women had few legal rights (199). But the efficacy of scolding varied, depending on the nature of a woman's relationship

with her husband — on his love for her. Raised by their marriages and possessed of neither economic nor political levers to use against their husbands, both Margaret of Anjou and Eleanor Cobham resort to verbal aggressiveness; Eleanor, to encourage her husband to take the crown for himself, and Margaret, to urge the dismissal of the Protector, Gloucester — in short, to realize their own ambitions. These attempts to overwhelm their husbands with words achieve varying success. Eleanor's brief show of choler has Gloucester anxious to be reconciled to her, but he continues to bear a "base and humble mind" (*2H6* 1.2 62) despite her best efforts.

Similarly, Margaret's use of her tongue is not an unqualified success. Although her eloquence — stunning examples of which we are treated to in 3.1 and 3.2 — may well have contributed to Gloucester's dismissal from the office of Protector and his subsequent indictment for treason, she cannot take all the credit for engineering his fall. The jealousy, ambition, and malice of Winchester, York, Suffolk, and Buckingham are powerful forces that cannot be discounted. It is they, who lime the bush in which Gloucester's wife, Eleanor — and, thus, Gloucester himself — are caught. Even the normally myopic Henry is aware that their animosity towards his uncle plays a large role in the latter's downfall. When bewailing good Gloucester's case, he mentions "these great lords" before his queen:

> What low'ring star now envies thy estate,
> That these great lords, and Margaret our Queen,
> Do seek subversion of thy harmless life?
>
> (3.1.206-208)

And, significantly, it is to the lords, not Margaret, that Henry resigns his authority: "My lords, what to your wisdoms seemeth best,/ Do, or undo, as if ourself were here" (3.1.195-196). Hence, although Margaret gets what she wants, it is not without considerable aid, and if this attempt at using her tongue as a

weapon is a qualified success, the next, in 3.2, is a failure. Anticipating allegations of her involvement in Gloucester's death and noting, to her chagrin, her husband's preoccupation with his uncle's death, she tries without success to focus Henry's attention on herself by adopting the role of the spurned wife. But Henry only continues to mourn Gloucester and when Warwick arrives bearing the demands of the commons, Margaret is completely ignored.

Margaret uses her ability to scold to much greater effect in *3 Henry VI*. That she is considered a "shameless callet" (2.2.145), a "wrangling woman" (2.2.176), a "scold" (5.5.29), and a "railer" (5.5.38) is established well before she says anything:

> *Exeter*. Here comes the Queen, whose looks bewray her anger:
> I'll steal away.
> *Henry*. Exeter, so will I.
>
> (1. 1.218-219)

Indeed, Margaret has Henry completely cowed by the force of her subsequent speech berating him for disinheriting their son Edward. Her verbal dominance — Henry hardly gets a word in anywhere in *3 Henry VI* and is actually told to be quiet on several occasions! — is the basis of her dominance in their relationship as Edward IV points out:

> ... the bloody minded Queen,
> That led calm Henry, though he were a king,
> As doth a sail fill'd with a fretting gust,
> Command an argosy to stem the waves.
>
> (2.6.33-36)

The argosy in question is, of course, not only Henry but also the ship of state, England, for in commanding the king, Margaret commands the kingdom as well.

Denied the use of real arms by social conventions, the women in the tetralogy often have no weapon but railing. Confronted by the man responsible for the deaths she mourns, Anne's only defence is to abuse him. She is unable to use Richard's sword when he offers it to her not only because she is well on the way to being "captive to his honey words" (*R3* 4.1.79), but also because, unlike Margaret, she finds it impossible to defy social conventions, which dictate that violence is, to quote Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, "a man's office" (4. 1.265).

In a later scene in *Richard III*, Elizabeth and the Duchess of York find themselves in a similar situation. The railing in these scenes — as indeed in most of the play — is directed at Richard of Gloucester, but the women's attempts at overwhelming him with the force of their words fail. Anne is herself overwhelmed by Richard's words, as she recalls bitterly later:

> Lo, ere I can repeat this curse again,
> Within so small a time, my woman's heart
> Grossly grew captive to his honey words
>
> (4. 1.77-79)

Seduced by Richard, Anne ceases railing and accepts his ring and his proposal. The Duchess and Elizabeth do not fire any better, for Richard refuses to listen to them, ordering the trumpets and drums in his train to drown their exclamations. The Duchess, his mother, does manage to obtain his permission to speak but is unable to make him heed her words, and Richard actually forces Elizabeth to listen to him. Although she appears to hold her own against him, first swiftly raising objections to all he says and then interrupting his sentences before he can finish them, Richard believes that she, like Anne before her, grows captive to his honey words. Whether she has really been won over or only pretends to be so is an issue that can be settled only in performance. But while alternative interpretations of Elizabeth's attitude towards Richard's proposal

are possible, there can be little doubt that her words simply do not dismay him at all.

The only woman whose railing has any effect on Richard is Margaret. Although he does not admit that she makes him uneasy, her words to him before beginning her railing "Ah, gentle villain! do not turn away" (*R3* 1.3.163) suggest that, like Exeter and Henry in *3 Henry VI*, he would steal away from her if he could. Richard tries to avoid her, but Margaret stops him from leaving, declaring that she will make repetition of what he has marr'd before she lets him go (1.3.165-166). And she does just that while Richard listens. He may call her names and try to twist her words, but he is unable to stop her from speaking. Indeed, if he is the centre of attention in his confrontations with the other women, in his clash with Margaret, it is she, who commands attention.

Although she appears in just two scenes, Margaret dominates *Richard III* with her curses. And like her, the other women — Anne, Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York — also curse those responsible for the deaths of their husbands, sons, or father-in-law. Their curses stem from a combination of anger, frustration, and impotence, for there is no alternative — and practical — means by which these women may be revenged upon those who have wronged them. They are widows in a patriarchal society, women bereft of the power and eminence they once enjoyed as wives of kings or would-be kings of England.

In Shakespeare's first tetralogy, as many men curse as women: the Shepherd, Joan's father in *I Henry VI*, Suffolk in *2 Henry VI*, Nolthumberland, Clifford, Rutland, and York in *3 Henry VI*. While their gender is obviously not something these men have in common with the wailing queens of *Richard III*, they do share their feeling of impotence. Joan's father, for instance, curses her after her denial of their relationship (*1H6* 5.4.26-31) while Suffolk

Margaret's observation is not inaccurate, as Anne, who finds herself "the subject of mine own soul's curse" (*R3* 4.1.80), discovers.

But if words are no more than "windy attorneys to their clients' woes", "airy succeeders of intestate joys", and "poor breathing orators of miseries" (4.4.127-129), why, as the Duchess of York asks, "should calamity be full of words" (4.4.126)? Elizabeth's answer is that "though what they will impart/ Help nothing else, yet do they ease the heart" (4.4.130-131). Her view is shared by Suffolk, who, following his banishment, cries in anguish that "my burden'd heart would break/ Should I not curse them" (*2H6* 3.2.319-320). Jane Donawerth cautions against interpreting such comments in Renaissance writing in the light of the modem idea of speech as an emotional release (58). In the Renaissance, speech was believed to be part of the physiological process. Most physicians of the age accepted the view of their classical predecessors, such as Hippocrates, that speech relieves the heart of excess heat and wasted humours caused by disease and overwrought emotions. Thomas Elyot writes in *The Castel of Helth* (1541) that

> Vociferation, whiche is syngynge, redynge, or crienge [has] the propertie, that it purgeth naturall heate, and maketh it also subtyll and stable.... By high crieng and loude redinge, are expelled superfluous humors. (Donawerth 58)

while in his Positions [on] the Training up of Children of 1581, Richard Mulcaster maintains that the mad, the melancholy, and the phlegmatic "receiue comfort from speeche, which makes roome for health, where reume kept residence" (ibid.,59). In view of this, ther railing and cursing of the women in Shakespeare's first tetralogy function as more than weapons.

save the lives of those facing execution, as Clifford sneeringly reminds the captive York:

> So cowards fight when they can fly no further;
> So doves do peck the falcon's piercing talons;
> So desperate thieves, all hopeless of their lives,
> Breathe out invectives 'gainst the officers.
>
> (3H6 1.4.40-43)

Nor do all curses take effect. Despite being "well-skill'd in curses" (*R3* 4.4.116) Margaret does not have things all her way: Dorset survives and Elizabeth, although she will die neither wife nor England's queen, remains a mother.

The curses of the women may, arguably, have the power to call down divine vengeance on those who have wronged them, but they cannot prevent or undo the evil that has been done. Indeed those who curse often recognize the limitations of their weapon. Margaret and Suffolk acknowledge, even as they curse, that they do so in vain. Suffolk admits that curses cannot kill:

> ... Wherefore should I curse them?
> Would curses kill, as doth the mandrake's groan,
> I would invent... bitter searching terms,
>
> (2H6 3.2.308-310)

and Margaret, that curses affect only the one who curses:

> ... dread curses, like the sun 'gainst glass,
> Or like an overcharged gun, recoil
> And turn the force of them upon thyself.
>
> (3.2.329-331)

the Bastard of Orleans and subsequently that of the Dauphin himself, for she has as yet performed none of these "wondrous feats" (1.2.64). It is her prophetic voice that gives her a voice in the masculine world of military endeavour.

A third woman is associated with prophecy although she does not make any prophecies herself. Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, secures the services of a witch and a conjurer to discover the course of future events. For Eleanor, prophecy is a substitute for action:

> Follow I must; I cannot go before,
> While Gloucester bears this base and humble mind.
> Were I a man, a duke, and next of blood,
> I would remove these tedious stumbling blocks
> And smooth my way upon their headless necks;
> And, being a woman, I will not be slack
> To play my part in Fortune's pageant.
>
> (*2H6* 1.2.61-67)

Eleanor's part in Fortune's pageant begins with an attempt to descry the future because, being neither a man, a duke, nor next of blood, she cannot remove those who stand between her and her ambitions. She resorts to prophecy as it gives her the illusion of playing an active part in Fortune's pageant. Her desire to know the fates of Henry and his peers underlines her inability to smooth her way upon their headless necks, her impotence to effect her wishes. Indeed, most of the prophets in the plays are persons in states of disadvantage or distress: Margaret, who has outlived her glory as mother, wife, and England's queen, Joan the shepherdess, and the doomed Henry (cf. *3H6* 5.6.37-43) and Hastings (cf. *R3* 3.4.104-105).

Prophecy, like scolding and cursing, is largely a resort of the impotent in the plays, but the dramatist is careful to limit its use

Whatever its efficacy, the feminine weapon of cursing was illicit in the Renaissance, for the patriarchy expected women to be silent, obedient, and submissive. Moreover, as Thomas points out, cursing was considered a blasphemy, for it implied "a magical manipulation of the Almighty's powers which no human being should attempt" (503). In prophecy, however, the female voice achieved a measure of legitimacy and authenticity. While the female voice was, to the patriarchy, at best, irrational, and at worst, evil, when a woman prophesied, her words were no longer her own but ostensibly those of God. Her voice was, thus, divine and masculine and, therefore, legitimate and safe.

In the Renaissance, women were prominent among the "steady procession of would be prophets" (Thomas 133). Thomas attributes this phenomenon tp the fact that as "women at this time were denied access to any of the normal means of expression afforded by Church, State, or University", "the best hope of gaining a ear for female utterances was to represent them as the result of divine revelation" (138). But, with the exception of Margaret and perhaps Joan, the principal women of the tetralogy do not prophesy or even claim to do so. And even Margaret, who calls herself "a prophetess" (*R3* 1.3.301), largely confines herself to the articulation of her own desire for revenge, her only prophecies being arguably, her predictions that Elizabeth will wish for her aid in cursing Richard (1.3.245-246) and that Richard will split Buckingham's very heart with sorrow (1.3.300). As for Joan, Margaret's predecessor as "the English scourge", although the Bastard of Orleans says that she has "the spirit of deep prophecy... / Exceeding the nine sibyls of old Rome" (*1H6* 1.2.55-56), she does not prophesy on stage at all. Even so, that she is introduced as a prophetess, as the person "*Ordained*... to raise this tedious siege/ And drive the English forth the bounds of France" (1.2.53-54, my emphasis), is significant. It is her reputation for descrying "what's past and what's to come" (1.2.57) that brings her to the notice of

by women. For, by its very nature, prophecy sanctions the voice of the prophet. And while the Renaissance patriarchy would have had no trouble accepting authoritative pronouncements about the future from Henry V, "the mirror of all Christian kings" (cf. *1H6* 5.1.30-33), and his saintly son, Henry VI (cf. *3H6* 4.6.69-76), such pronouncements from women would have been less palatable.

In the tetralogy, the freedom to speak is closely associated with power, particularly in the last two plays, in which the struggle for the throne of England is at its fiercest. Prisoners such as Henry, Oxford, Somerset, and Buckingham are routinely denied the freedom to speak (cf. *3H6* 4.8.57, 5.5.4, *R3* 5.1.1-2). The only prisoner who is actually urged to give voice is York, for Margaret, in her exultation over his defeat, would hear him "grieve" (*3H6* 1.4.86). But York is the exception. Nor are prisoners the only ones who wish to be heard. *3 Henry VI* is full of appeals of this kind. Indeed the phrase, "Hear me speak", runs like a refrain through the play. Using variations of it, Warwick and Northumberland, supporters of the two rival kings, urge the gathered nobles to listen to their respective choices for the crown:

> *Northumberland.* Peace thou, and give King Henry leave to speak.
> *Warwick.* Plantagenet shall speak first: hear him, lords;
> And be you silent and attentive too,
> (1.1.120-122)

In this instance, the struggle for the crown has become a competition for the attention of those present. Henry, the anointed king, is forced not only to compete for the attention of his subjects but also to beg permission to speak first from one of his peers, "My lord of Warwick, hear me but one word" (1.1.174), and then from his wife, "Stay, gentle Margaret, and hear me speak" (1.1.264). The phrase, "hear me speak" recurs in the following scene when Richard appeals for his father's attention, asserting that he will

prove that York may claim the crown by open war and not be forsworn "if you'll hear me speak" (1.2.20), and again in the next when Rutland begs "Sweet Clifford" to "hear me speak before I die" (1.3.18). And in 2.2, the hapless Henry begs once more:

> *Henry.* Have done with words, my lords, and hear me speak.
> *Margaret.* Defy them then, or else hold close thy lips.
> *Henry.* I prithee give no limits to my tongue:
> I am a king, and privileg'd to speak.
> *Clifford.* My liege, the wound that bred this meeting here
> Cannot be cur'd by words, therefore be still.
> (2.2. 117-122)

But Margaret, on this occasion, the person who denies another permission to speak, soon finds herself in the role of the suppliant on her visit to Lewis of France: "King Lewis and Lady Bona, hear me speak/ Before you answer Warwick" (3.3.65-66).

More appeals for attention are found in *Richard III,* most of them made by the Duchess of York. In 4.4, she asks Richard to "patiently hear my impatience", then begs him to "let me speak" and again to "hear me speak" (4.4.157, 160, 180). But it is only when she says that she "shall never speak to thee again", that he consents to "Hear... a word" (4.4.181-2). Margaret, now the sole surviving member of the house of Lancaster, also asks or rather, demands — to be heard. She interrupts the Yorkists' quarrel with "Hear me, you wrangling pirates" (1.3.158) and curses them all. When she curses Richard, she does not ask him to hear ha but states peremptorily that "thou shalt hear me" (1.3.216).

Despite the association between the freedom to speak and power, words are often seen in opposition to deeds and specifically to war. The peace-loving Henry, for instance, sees words as an alternative to arms: "frowns, words, and threats,/ Shall be the war that Henry means to use" to make "the factious Duke of York

descend my throne" (*3H6* 1.1.72,73,74). To Henry's uncles, however, blows speak louder than words. Humphrey of Gloucester warns Winchester that "I will not answer thee with words, but blows" (*1H6* 1.3.69), while Bedford, taunted by the victorious French at Orleans, urges his fellow English generals to "let no words, but deeds, revenge this treason!" (3.2.49). Other knights, too, consider blows more effective than words. Stafford's brother urges him to assail Cade's rebels with the army of the King "seeing gentle words will not prevail" (*2H6* 4.2.167-168). Alexander Iden tells Cade that his sword will "report what speech forbears" (4.10.53). And Richard asserts that if words will not serve as York's surety, then their weapons shall (5.1.140). Their view is shared by Young Clifford, who warns Warwick to

> Urge it no more; lest that, instead of words,
> I send thee, Warwick, such a messenger
> As shall revenge this death before I stir.
> (*3H6* 1.1.98-100)

and later declares to York that "I will not bandy with thee word for word,/ But buckle with thee blows twice two for one" (1.4.49-50). Words are considered a poor substitute for blows. Indeed, accusations of cowardice often refer to the substitution of words for blows, such as when Margaret sneers at 'long-tongu'd Warwick" (2.2.102) and Richard alleges that "Clifford's manhood lies upon his tongue" (2.2.125).

There are two contradictory views of the power of words in Shakespeare's first tetralogy: for if words are ineffectual compared to blows, yet the cities Warwick "got with wounds" are "Deliver'd up again with peaceful words" (*2H6* 1.1.120, 121). Feminist critics assert that verbal facility is a mark of impotence. To Margaret Loftus Ranald, for instance, "the only men... who reach similar heights of loquacity, even eloquence [as the women], are those who either lack or have lost power" (173). However, others, such

as Michael Hattaway, maintain that "eloquence, like prowess in battle, is always seen as a means to power" (9).

Which of these views is correct — or are they both? The answer is to be found in Margaret's embassy to Lewis of France and Henry's observations on it (*3H6* 3.3). Speaking, presumably from experience, he predicts that

> Her sighs will make a battery in his breast;
> Her tears will pierce into a marble heart;
> The tiger will be mild whiles she doth mourn;
> And Nero will be tainted with remorse,
> To hear and see her plaints, her brinish tears.
> (3.1.37-41)

Yet, despite Margaret's best efforts, Lewis first stalls, refusing to act immediately. Then, after Warwick arrives with Edward's offer of alliance, he decides not to help her at all, magnanimously offering her refugee status in France instead of the military aid she has come for. The position is clear: while Margaret is undoubtedly as subtle an orator as Warwick, what ensures the success of his oratory and the failure of hers is the difference in their situations, as Henry points out in a series of antitheses:

> Ay, but she's come to beg, Warwick to give;
> She on his left side craving aid for Henry:
> He on his right, asking a wife for Edward.
> She weeps, and says her Henry is depos'd:
> He smiles, and says his Edward is install'd;
> (3. 1 .4246)

While Lewis does ultimately give Margaret what she wants, it is not because her sighs have made a battery into his breast:

> *Bona*. My quarrel and this English queen's are one.
> *Warwick*. And mine, fair Lady Bona, joins with yours.

Lewis. And mine with hers, and thine, and Margaret's.
Therefore at last I firmly am resolv'd
You shall have aid.

(3.3.216-220)

Margaret gets the aid she seeks only because aiding her is the most convenient way in which Lewis may avenge himself upon Edward "for mocking marriage with a dame of France" (3.3.255). His decision has not been influenced in any way by her "fair persuasions".

Words have no inherent power of their own. And that is the difference between having "a voice" and having the power of what Jonathan Goldberg calls "voicing", the ability to impose one's interpretation of events on others, to force them to accept what one tells them as the truth (119). Richard III, for instance, has that power, for as the Scrivener says of Richard's indictment of Hastings, "Who is so gross/ That cannot see this palpable device?/ Yet who's so bold but says he sees it not?" (*R3* 3.6.10-12).

The women of Shakespeare's first tetralogy do have voices; we certainly hear them — even Anne, the most docile of them all — lamenting, scolding, and cursing. But their voices, though heard, are generally disregarded by the patriarchy. For as York puts it so succinctly, "I cannot give due action to my words,/ Except a sword or sceptre balance it" (*2H6* 5.1.8-9).

The women, notably the widowed Margaret, often "fill the world with words" (*3H6* 5.5.43) because that is all they can do, yet their tongues are, on occasion, effective weapons when backed by sword, sceptre, or the love of a man.

Works Cited

Belsey, Catherine. *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama.* London: Methuen, 1985.

Donawerth, Jane. *Shakespeare and the Sixteenth Century Study of Language*. Urbana:University of Illinois Press, 1984.

Goldberg, Jonathan. *'Shakespearean Inscriptions: the Voicing of Power' in Shakespeare and the Question of Theory.* Eds. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman. New York: Methuen, 1985. 116-137.

Hattaway, Michael. *Introduction to 3 Henry VI. New Cambridge Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Novy, Marianne. *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Ranald, Margaret Loftus. *Shakespeare and his Social Context: Essays in Osmotic Knowledge and Literary Interpretation.* New York: AMS Press, 1987.

Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

Thomas, Keith. *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971.

All references to Shakespearean plays are to the Arden editions. Biblical quotations are from the 1611 Authorized Version.

Veronica Lowe is Lecturer at the
Department of English Language
Faculty of Languages
University of Malaya

"And beyond it, the deep blue air": Philip Larkin's Momentary Contact with Transcendence

by Leonard Jeyam

In this essay I wish to bring into clearer focus the rare moments of transcendence that the English poet Philip Larkin affords us, and, in doing so, I also hope to prove a possible *symbology* that governs these moments, especially in terms of theme and imagery. The symbols that I speak of are not just words of pure Image (that is being detached from the Word) but are more like silent markings existing also for the reader to discover an opening into the world of the ineffable. By the ineffable I mean a less obvious dimension of the poet's mind, less obvious in so far as his words literally signify. I shall be seeking some answers so as to demonstrate that a kind of thematic imagery does indeed exist in the poetry of Philip Larkin, especially as in his use of the images of light, air, water, and earth.

The water and light imagery found in the poem "Water" is worth looking at in some detail. In this poem two obvious strains of imagery are at work:

> If I were called in
> To construct a religion
> I should make use of water.
>
> Going to church
> Would entail a fording
> To dry, different clothes;

My liturgy would employ
Images of sousing,
A furious devout drench,

And I should raise in the east
A glass of water
Where any-angled light
Would congregate endlessly.

(*Collected Poems* 93)

On one hand, there are the numerous poetic referents of the new "religion" the persona could construct — should he be called to do so — such as the religious terminology of "Going to church", "liturgy", "devout", "the east" and "congregate". Yet, on the other, another set of referents is at work interacting with both its own poetic antecedent "Water" as well as that of "religion" in line two: all these referents of the former have to do with the phrase "use of water" in line three such as "fording", "Images of sousing", "drench" and even the raising of the "glass of water". Both sets of referents, therefore, could be quite accurately termed as metaphors. As regards the antecedents of the "religion" and "Water" being labelled as symbols, it is in my opinion that neither could be deemed as such. Yet if we were to recall other images of the poet that succeed in evoking the kind of "transcendent infinity", to borrow Latré's phrase (155), that is so immediately memorable at the close of "Water", we then begin to realise that perhaps the antecedent of water could indeed possess "symbolic" properties of its own.

Could, perhaps, the "transcendent infinity" at the close of "Water" also be present in other works of Larkin but in a different way? Similar images and poetic techniques do indeed bear a striking resemblance in other poems, especially at the close of them. For example, let us take a look at the poem "High Windows", especially

at its conclusion which exerts a mysterious though irresistible power of a vision:

> When I see a couple of kids
> And guess he's fucking her and she's
> Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm,
> I know this is paradise
>
> Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives —
> Bonds and gestures pushed to one side
> Like an outdated combine harvester,
> And everyone young going down the long slide
>
> To happiness, endlessly. I wonder if
> Anyone looked at me, forty years back,
> And thought, *That'll be the life;*
> *No God anymore, or sweating in the dark*
>
> *About hell and that, or having to hide*
> *What you think of the priest. He*
> *And his lot will all go down the long slide*
> *Like free bloody birds.* And immediately
>
> Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:
> The sun-comprehending glass,
> And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
> Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.
>
> (*CP* 165)

As an anthology piece, or as a poem read independently of the poet's other works, it would be easy enough to say that here is a concluding stanza that suggests a welcome escape for the persona from the dialectic clash of the sexual freedom of his youth and that of youth today (or more accurately, of the liberal Sixties), a relief beyond articulation that outdistances and assuages even the sexual

tension of the preceding stanzas. For some, the escape could be said to be that of a self-conscious abandonment of the encumbering world of reality, the so-called "Real" world of Lollette Kuby (81). Yet for others it could also be a rare, though timeless moment celebrating the liberating happiness of the times, the "paradise" of the first stanza that the persona himself acknowledges as what "Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives". Here, then, is obviously a thematic struggle that could point to the poet's imagination that is either caged in by apprehension and defeat or a hopeful existence and, in the words of another poem "Sad Steps", "undiminished somewhere" (*CP* 169).

In fact the struggle here could be broadened to subsume a kind of thematic imagery that evokes other poems so as to unravel the ambiguities of the poem. If we were to look at the final line of the quoted stanza above, we could easily make the dour association that the word "Nothing" and the series of negating affixes after it are indicative of a state of nothingness and even oblivion that readily brings to mind such lines as in "Nothing To Be Said":

> ... And saying so to some
> Means nothing; others it leaves
> Nothing to be said.
>
> (*CP* 138)

or as in the conclusion of "I Remember, I Remember":

> "Nothing, like something, happens anywhere."
>
> (*CP* 82)

Many first-line critics too have seen this dramatic Larkinesque shift of the imagination as a negative attitude. Richard Murphy calls it a "celebration of the void" (32), or according to Calvin Bedient it is an instance of the poet's "domestication of the void" (71). C. B.

Cox even goes so far as to say that the "Nothing" in the final line "suggests that escape from the world of historical contingency is inevitably a movement towards annihilation" (qtd. in Latré: 270).

But this is, I feel to miss the point of the wonderfully energising images of the conclusion of "High Windows" such as "The sun-comprehending glass" and "the deep blue air" that help characterise the world of the "Elsewhere" of the poet, or simply the "there" as Latré chooses to term it (273). Andrew Motion, generally praised for his most welcome assessment of Larkin's pessimistic tendencies, thinks that this conclusion contains only "some hope of reprieve":

> The most obvious reward of this "thought" is that it removes him from the context of actual human fallibility. It is an exalted imaginative alternative — in secular terms — to the false "paradise" of sexual freedom and godless independence promised on earth. But clearly there are drawbacks… he cannot entirely suppress the effect of the two negatives "Nothing" and "Nowhere". For all their freedom from specific circumstances, they imply extinction. (81)

Yet, just as Larkin is ironic, Motion does in the end agree that the "symbolist intensity" of the final lines of the poem does "convey an inexpressible element in the thought they contain" (81). Perhaps it is because of this symbolist intensity that most critics are bewilderingly inconclusive as regards the close of "High Windows". Barbara Everett, in her thoroughly compelling account of Larkin's Symbolist techniques in her essay entitled "Philip Larkin: After Symbolism", seems to echo Motion by terming it the "extreme contradictory intensity of the end" (239). Without explicitly calling Larkin a Symbolist poet, she sees "the deep blue air" and the sense of void so convincingly conveyed by the poet as

> ... too Mallarmean to be only coincidentally similar. "L'azur" [the blue] is Mallarme's most consistent and philosophical symbol, delineating both the necessity and the absence of the ideal, an ideal which we imprint on the void sky by the intensity of our longing; his poetry is full of "De l'éternel azur la sereine ironie" [the calm irony of the endless blue]. (239)

Could this be the "symbolistic" side to Larkin that both Andrew Motion and Barbara Everett have persuasively uncovered, the very same poet who when asked by Ian Hamilton as to whether he read French poetry answered: "Foreign poetry? No!" (qtd. in Everett: 238). Yet if the idea of the Mallarmean "blue" is to be accepted, then much of Motion's "symbolist intensity" and "inexpressible element" (81) as well as Everett's "extreme contradictory intensity" (239) seem to be unravelled, demystified even. But is that to say that the exaltation of the persona's final lines is undermined by a sense of futility since the persona's "symbolistic" longing cannot be fulfilled but only assuaged? Is it indeed that "Beneath it all, desire of oblivion runs"? (*CP* 42). Unlike Motion, Everett also delves deeper into the Symbolist issue by going so far as to point out a possible affinity Larkin could have had with Baudelaire as well (239-242), an intertextual study which "finally embodies and resolves all" the impossibilities of "High Windows". I have found the significance of the second French poet to be less satisfying.

Terry Whalen feels that Everett's acscribing of the blue--embodying window and the transcendent space imagery to the Symbolist poets is only part of a fuller picture. In his analysis of the concluding stanza of the poem "Here" to prove a possible relationship with D. H. Lawrence, which is "a flight to pure contemplation" (he also referred to the conclusion of "High Windows" as being "a moment of contemplative song"; 20) and also "Larkin's most overlooked kind of poetic effect", Whalen

thinks that Barbara Everett's Symbolist ideas deserve "some credibility" (63). But we, according to him,

> do not have to go past the example of D. H. Lawrence to see that the "bluish neutral distance" [of "Here"] is both English and carefully elemental as much as it is Symbolist. (63)

Symbolist and Lawrentian similarities aside, I personally feel that the wonder of the moment, the inspirited tone, the heightened rhythm of the lines of the concluding stanza of "High Windows", should not be denied the poet. After all, is not the poet (and the persona) stressing the fact that it is in the life of the imagination that one is able to transcend the repressive ordinary world, so much so that the freedom afforded to both the younger generation as well as the more youthful persona is only a limited one at best? I see the metaphor of the "slide" as being somewhat restrictive (a literal slide is after all not "endless"). It could suggest that another clue to understanding the conclusion of the poem is the theme of freedom that both the parallel "slides" in the poem epitomise. One slide is of course connotative of the sexual freedom the youth of today enjoy, the "paradise /Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives",

> And everyone young going down the long slide
>
> To happiness, endlessly.
>
> (*CP* 165)

The other slide is the religion-free, unrepressive, undogmatic, liberating sexuality that perhaps one might have thought the persona practising "forty years back" so much so that others could have said of him then that

He
And his lot will all go down the long slide
Like free bloody birds.

(*CP* 165)

The qualifying adverbial "endlessly" of the first slide in the first line of stanza three is important: it, according to my reading of the poem, suggests also the exhilaration of the moment, of the action of the sliding itself, but is a moment that must end. If we were, however, to compare this image to the vertical "slide" of the imagination, of "the deep blue air" beyond the "sun-comprehending" windows, I then feel that the qualifying phrase "and is endless" of the final line suggests for the persona a vision of another dimension of existence, another reality, that is truly inspiring, enduring, and, more importantly, free. Perhaps then the expansiveness of this world of the "Elsewhere" finally overwhelms the irony-laden "Here", the ordinary and tense world.

I feel that the parameter for interpretation has already been set by the poet when, in an interview with John Haffenden, he said:

> One longs for infinity and absence, the beauty of somewhere you're not. "High Windows" shows humanity as a series of oppressions, and one wants to be somewhere where there's neither oppressed nor oppressor, just freedom. (qtd. in Latre: 274)

This must surely be proof enough of the existence of the dualistic strain of the Real and the Ideal in the poetry of Philip Larkin that Lollette Kuby has pointed out (81). But I wish to refine her view of the poet's world of the Ideal — if possible. Both Kuby's worlds of the Real and the Ideal are firmly rooted in the ordinary, physical world not independent of space and time, with the latter ultimately being an abstracted extension of the former:

> the Ideal is a glorified abstraction from the real — an Illusion, but one which must be called a Real Illusion since to conceive it is the nature of man. It is that which makes disillusionment inescapable and every choice inevitably wrong. (81)

She goes on to elucidate these worlds that are essentially motivated by *real* people:

> The speakers in Larkin's poems, the "outsiders", the "refusers", the disenchanted and disappointed, the self-mocking self-defenders, those whom critics have accused (as though they were real people) of weak-willed bitterness and ill-tempered passivity are... neither necessarily choiceless nor lacking in willed effort. In each poem the speakers have chosen either to work or to sit in the park, to be married or single, to write a poem or join the dance, to have a love affair or leave one.... If they have found their choices unfulfilling, it is not only for the reason that they would have desired contradictory things — to join the dance *and* write the poem, to be involved and remain autonomous — but also for the more basic reason that they are dualistic creatures for whom "right" is identical with "ideal". Choice cannot possibly be right; satisfaction cannot possibly be attained because the thing after it is chosen and the experience when it is lived is, in nature, different from its ideal counterpart. Yet the ideal counterpart always and only motivated choice and precipitated action in the first place. For the human being, happiness is always leaving on "the outward bound" because the thing not chosen, and only that, retains qualities of imagined perfection. (81-82)

The "Elsewhere" that I have mentioned in the poetry of Philip Larkin, or the "glorious", or the "there" (as opposed to the "here" of Kuby's worlds), is a more mystical though highly evident

feature of the poet. But it, though still motivated by the opposing "ordinary" world, is not unlike the highly imaginative leap into the ineffable of "High Windows", or the hypothetical state of transcendence achieved with the raising "in the east / A glass of water" at the close of the poem "Water", or even the sense of wholeness, love that the female consciousness of "Wedding-Wind" experiences as she feels the joy within of the "bodying-forth by wind", kneeling by the gleaming "all-generous waters". Even as random examples these three intimations of the "Elsewhere" show and prove a distinct elemental relationship: the images of light (or of the sun), water, and air (that includes the wind) effect conjunctively or individually a transcendent state that is welcome, positive, though momentary.

The world of the "Elsewhere" in the poetry of Philip Larkin does indeed seem to possess curious "symbolic" properties. Yet proposing to term the light, water, and air (and earth, as we shall see later) imagery of Larkin as his poetic symbols would, at this stage, seem inadequate, even catachrestic, simply because Larkin's world of the "Elsewhere" is still impenetrable. I would hazard guess that Larkin himself would not have agreed to these elemental images being labelled as "symbolic", much less being called "symbols". Could perhaps this world of the "Elsewhere" be deemed as intimations of an unconscious dimension of the poet — a world that even Larkin himself could not express in a more lucid way? Are then perhaps the elemental images that I have spoken about really "signs" or words and phrases that represent this more tropological Elsewhere? Carl Jung, in his lecture "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry" first delivered in May, 1922, said that

> The unconscious background does not remain inactive, but betrays itself by its characteristic effects on the contents of consciousness. (69)

That is to say that if the aforementioned elemental imagery is indeed clues that represent "the unconscious background" of the poet, i.e. the "Elsewhere", then perhaps Jung's definition of a symbol could be adhered to. Jung goes on to say in the same lecture that Sigmund Freud found "a very important source for knowledge of the unconscious contents" in dreams, they being explicit clues to the unconscious. But, he adds, of Freud's analysis of these clues found in the "conscious contents" of dreams:

> Those conscious contents which give us a clue to the unconscious background are incorrectly called symbols by Freud. They are not true symbols, however, since according to his theory they have merely the role of *signs* or *symptoms* of the subliminal processes. (70)

The "true symbol" according to Jung "is the intimation of a meaning beyond the level of our present powers of comprehension" (76):

> The true symbol... should be understood as an expression of an intuitive idea that cannot yet be formulated in any other or better way. When Plato, for instance, puts the whole problem of the theory of knowledge in his parable of the cave, or when Christ expresses the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven in parables, these are genuine and true symbols, that is, attempts to express something for which no verbal concept yet exists. (70)

If Jung's method of defining a symbol is to be used in the analysis of the poetry of Philip Larkin, then I should think that there are no true symbols in his mature phase of writing. What the elemental images of, say, the refracted light of "High Windows", the "perpetual morning" of "Wedding Wind", or even the "unfenced existence" at the close of the poem "Here", all point to is perhaps

more of Jung's "signs" or "symptoms". A more-than-casual reader would notice that these are less the exception than the rule. Thus, the metaphorical connections would more appropriately refer to the types of transcendental imagery "symptomatic" of Larkin's poetry, that would in the end prove to be clues which can determine the poet's desire for a kind of transcendent peace, his quest for a kind of permanence, or existential stability. These are *not* true symbols as Jung would define them at best they are *symbolic* of perhaps a truth not directly apparent.

Finally, there is still the unique spiritual dimension in the poem “Here”. The strange spiritual force is, I feel, due to the luminous presence of a very powerful “Elsewhere” portrayed at its close. Much of the first three stanzas is so like the Larkin we know and the Larkin that will surely endure: the accumulating detail of both industrialised and pastoral England, modern urban society, and of course, the poet as the locomotive *voyeur*:

> Swerving east, from rich industrial shadows
> And traffic all night north; swerving through fields
> Too thin and thistled to be called meadows,
> And now and then a harsh-named halt, that shields
> Workmen at dawn; swerving to solitude
> Of skies and scarecrows, haystacks, hares and pheasants,
> And the widening river's slow presence,
> That piled gold clouds, the shining gull-marked mud,
>
> Gathers to the surprise of a large town:
> Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster
> Beside grain-scattered streets, barge-crowded water,
> And residents from raw estates, brought down
> The dead straight miles by stealing flat-faced trolleys,
> Push through plate-glass swing doors to their desires —
> Cheap suits, red kitchen-ware, sharp shoes, iced lollies,
> Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers —

A cut-price crowd, urban yet simple, dwelling
Where only salesmen and relations come
Within a terminate and fishy-smelling
Pastoral of ships up streets, the slave museum,
Tattoo-shops, consulates, grim head-scarfed wives;
And out beyond its mortgaged half-built edges
Fast-shadowed wheat-fields, running high as hedges,
Isolate villages, where removed lives

Loneliness clarifies.

(*CP* 136)

While this outer world of empirical detail is undoubtedly a part of the recognisable poetic world of Larkin, another also seems to be existing simultaneously. An "otherworldliness" of elemental imagery that often precedes Larkin's intimation of the world of the "Elsewhere" appears in the end of stanza one. Again, as in the union of these elemental signs in the first stanza of "The Whitsun Weddings" anticipate the epiphanic close of the poem, the meeting of the water, sky and earth here inspires an almost surreal, numinous "presence" to the persona's view of the landscape outside the train. I feel that this metaphorical union of elemental images helps foreshadow for both the persona and the reader the transcendent, supersensory mood of the final stanza. If the world of the "Here" is cluttered with people and objects, the "Elsewhere" is remote, with an existential space of its own:

Here silence stands
Like heat. Here leaves unnoticed thicken,
Hidden weeds flower, neglected waters quicken,
Luminously-peopled air ascends;
And past the poppies bluish neutral distance
Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach
Of shapes and shingle. Here is unfenced existence:

Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.

(*CP* 136-137)

Here, like an impressionistic painting, the conclusion makes a direct appeal to a world beyond the senses. Here is a perspective that draws us deeply into the background. Larkin's artistic means do not represent things as they are so much as to evoke a particular mood. I think Larkin was trying to show a vision, but at the same time his stanza aims quite simply to *be* a vision.

The choice of perspective in this stanza (employing images of light and shadow, water and land) reinforces the mystical serenity and stillness of the sun, a fixed image of transcendence. This technique also has a calculated effect. It prevents a total view of the scene, preventing us from receiving a unified visual impression; thus, in terms of feeling too we unemotionally sense not a wholeness but a kind of disintegration of self as the "out of reach" signifies. As the physical self diminishes, we too "luminously ascend" and feel a wholeness of the coming together of the empirical and transempirical natures of Man, as the harmonising opposites of the light and dark and vertical, spatial imagery illustrate.

In this vital contact with transcendence, the seascape reveals an aspect of the poet's art that is rare: it lies before us isolated, naked but for some "shapes and shingle", and yet the signs of a "solving oblivion" here resurrect a kind of purifying elemental hope, running counter to the existential despair that underwrites some of his bleakest poetry. Beyond the "bluish neutral distance" of this poem and even "the deep blue air" of "High Windows", Larkin, I feel, tries to see something beyond himself, something which some secret desire had long yearned to transform into an inner image. This inner-reality that is deeper than perceptions, thoughts, and

feelings; this glimpse into the unseen; this momentary contact with transcendence is a necessary spiritual palliative to his often-sullied, physical world.

Works Cited

Bedient, Calvin. *Eight Contemporary Poets*. London: Oxford UP, 1974.

Everett, Barbara. *Poets in Their Time*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

Jung, Carl. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. Trans. W.S. Dell & Cary F. Barnes. London: Ark Paperbacks, 1984 (original 1933).

Kuby, Lolette. *An Uncommon Poet for the Common Man: A Study of Philip Larkin's Poetry*. The Hague: Mouton, 1974.

Larkin, Philip. *Collected Poems*. Ed. Anthony Thwaite. London: Faber & Faber, 1988.

Latré, Guido. *Locking Earth to the Sky: A Structuralist Approach to Philip Larkin's Poetry*. European University Studies Series 14. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1985.

Motion, Andrew. *Philip Larkin*. London & New York: Methuen, 1982.

Murphy, Richard. "The Art of Debunkery." *The New York Review of Books* 15 May (1975): 30-33.

Whalen, Terry. *Philip Larkin and English Poetry. London:* Macmillan, 1986.

Leonard Jeyam is Lecturer at the
Department of English
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Malaya

SARE **Subscription Information**

(Rates apply from January 1997)

Individual:			
Malaysia	RM30.00	Other Countries	US$20.00
Institution:			
Malaysia	RM38.00	Other Countries	US$25.00
Single Copies:			
Malaysia	RM15.00	Other Countries	US$10.00
Back Issues:			
Malaysia	RM15.00	Other Countries	US$10.00

I would like to subscribe to SARE. My bank draft for
______________________ is enclosed.
(Please do not send cash)

Name ______________________________

Address ______________________________
____
____

Southeast Asian Review of English is published twice a year in June and December. Contributions on any aspect of literature and language studies in the new Literatures in English or in British and American literature are welcome. SARE also publishes articles, reviews, review essays, checklists relating to the new Literatures in English, poems, stories and other creative work, English translations of poems and stories written in any of the Southeast Asian languages (submitted together with the originals), English language studies, and commentary on the cultural and intellectual aspects of the Southeast Asian world. Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced on quarto paper. These should follow the MLA Style Manual. The Editorial Board cannot undertake to return any manuscript unless it is accompanied by a self-addressed envelope and return postage.

Contributions submitted to **SARE** must be original, previously unpublished work.