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PARTINGS

by

Siew-Yue Killingley

It is hard to feel who hurts more
By looking on with outsiders' eyes
Or looking inwards with the mother's
As the whimper then cry explodes
Into yet another being all ensouled.

At this parting should we avert our gaze?
So private, yet public, could there be resentment
In those new-born tears, a conventional show
Of grief at parting, perhaps masking relief
That the painful point has passed to living?

They closed their eyes to shut out blackness,
The flatness of refusal to feel more after peaks
Of foreseen joy, which is a kind of parting grief.
Each hides the absence of further feeling from eyes
That cannot overflow with love become relief.

And once as the train was about to start,
Her eyes started to tear and to tear my heart,
Which hiding from my eyes, made me briefly remark
That she'd be on time, no need to fear delays,
And thus sped that parting in conventional ways.

Yet in time there subtly arose other pretence
Veiled in oblique looks and smiles to cover absence
Of grief at parting, and to hide that pain
From all eyes and our own by embracing again
And averting our gaze from the breach in-between.

On Good Friday I saw again the small bright east
Window at Strasbourg Cathedral, glowing with mystery
And light, depicting so strangely the Mother and Child
Of God, like a blinding brilliant eye parting
The gloom of the church with insight into parting.

She could be parting her garments to reveal her breast
(It's only a small window and set high up in the gloom).
Our eyes wouldn't be able to see if lips were on nipple,
Or if parting from it, those gaping childish lips
Darkly revealed, 'And last they parted my garments.'

Then the strange unease of the eleven ill-prepared
Even for a simple parting from their Lord, as they faced
What seemed like a perpetual parting, and looking up,

They had to witness with their eyes if not hearts
A yet cloudier separation of familiar ways.

And last, as the pure soul leaves the body
It looks back with mild regret, as at a birth.
My eyes look on and recognize with averted gaze
The relief of a parting of the ways, and I dry
Them lest they overflow into conventional grief.

THE PERFECTIVE IN ENGLISH

by

Irene F. H. Wong

Among the persistent and prominent problems in the description of the English finite verb has been that of accurately characterizing the difference in meaning between forms like "He went" (usually termed the 'simple past' or 'preterit') and forms like "He has gone" (the 'present perfect') and "He had gone" (the 'past perfect'). Of theories about the perfective/preterit opposition and related phenomena, there is no dearth; in fact, there is a long legacy of grammatical treatises stemming from well before the modern era in linguistics. However, in spite of the plethora of information on the use and meaning of the perfective, many problems remain. This paper re-examines the issue of the perfective, in an attempt at a better understanding of its use and function in English.

Firstly, is the perfective a tense form in English? Before we can answer this question, we have to ask what tense is. It can be defined as an expression of time in the form of the finite verb, relative to the time of the utterance. Now tense is only a grammatical term, while time is a universal, non-linguistic concept in the real world, and no strict correspondence can be expected between the two. Real time, though in actuality a continuum, is usually conveniently divided into past, present, and future, and confusion between real time and tense has led to

the belief that the latter must also be similarly divided into past, present and future.

However, if we consider that tense means the correspondence between the form of the verb and our concept of time, then in actual fact there are only two divisions of tense -- one marked formally with the '-ed' suffix and the other without. Grammarians differ as to what to call these two divisions of tense, alternating between 'past', and 'present', 'past' and 'non-past', and 'remote' and 'actual'. Semantically too, the difference between the two is clear--with past time being the marked member of the pair in that it specifically excludes the present moment, while non-past time is understood to mean any period of time, short, long or eternal, that includes the present moment.

But the finite verb in English also has a number of other suffixes, which do not seem to relate to time. For example, there is the '-ing' suffix (as in 'swimming', 'eating', 'taking', etc.) and the '-en' suffix (as in 'swum', 'eaten', 'taken', etc.). For these verb forms, the relation to time is expressed rather by the auxiliary verbs they occur with, as in "is/was swimming", "have/had eaten". The first suffix, the '-ing', is usually known as the progressive (all other verbs without the '-ing' being non-progressive) and the second suffix, the '-en', is usually known as the perfective.

This has given rise to what is called the progressive or continuous tenses and the perfect tenses. So although the perfective is not included within the main two-way division of tense into past and non-past, it is nevertheless

seen to interact closely with forms serving to indicate temporal relationships. More specifically, it is felt to indicate that the events spoken of have been 'completed'; there is consequently a natural relationship between the perfective and past time, since presumably only events which have occurred in the past will be completed at the time of speaking. The sentences "He went", "He has gone", and "He had gone" all refer to actions that have taken place in the past. If this is so, then what is it, if anything at all, which distinguishes between them?

Grammarians differ in their answer to this. Many would like to call the difference one of 'Aspect', which has to do more with "the manner in which the verbal action is experienced or regarded" (Quirk and Greenbaum 1973:40) than with tense or time. For English, the two aspects usually referred to are the progressive (expressed by the '-ing' suffix) and the perfective (expressed by the '-en' suffix). Hence actions which are regarded as being in progress will take the form "He is going" or "He was going", and actions which are regarded as having been completed will take the form "He has gone" or "He had gone", the first of each pair being in the present tense and the second in the past tense.

While the distinction between progressive and non-progressive forms is relatively clear, that between perfective and non-perfective is not. While the progressive aspect is marked by the '-ing' suffix in main verbs, this is not the case with the perfective aspect, for in the latter case the main verbs generally keep the same form as in the past tense (e.g. 'told',

'walked', 'bought', 'had', 'folded', etc.), with the exception of about only sixty verbs in the language which have their own separate perfective forms (e.g. 'gone', 'rung', 'drunk', 'swum', 'eaten', 'taken', 'ridden', 'arisen', 'written', etc.). The difference between the perfective form and the past tense form resides formally not in the main verb but in the presence or absence of the auxiliary verb 'have/had' (e.g. 'told', 'had told'; 'walked', 'has walked'; 'tried', 'have tried').

Semantically too the meaning of the progressive is much clearer than that of the perfective. It is to the latter, therefore, that this paper devotes its attention. The problem of 'aspect' in English is that it is not systematically marked in the grammar or in the lexicon; moreover, the language does not have as complete or systematic a system of aspect as, say, Russian. Thus, with only two aspectual forms, the progressive and the perfective, English has to express a whole list of relatively concrete meanings. Moreover, it is the perfective aspect which has to bear most of this semantic load since the meaning of the progressive is quite restricted and specialized.

Hence some of the meanings which have been associated with the perfective aspect focus around such concepts as completion, repetition, habituality, result, anteriority, short duration, temporal limitation, punctuality, inception, etc. Of all these meanings, it is that of anteriority, or 'past-in-the-past', which is usually expressed by the past perfect. More accurately, it is said to express "a time further in the past, seen from the viewpoint of a definite point of time already in the past"

(Leech 1971:42). The crucial point about the use of the past perfect is that it demands an already established past point of reference. Examples such as the following make this clear:

1a When he got home, the ambulance had left.

b The robbers had left by the time the police arrived.

However, there are also other means in the language to express the idea of past-in-the-past than through the use of the past perfect. If the narrative is such that the sequence of two events is already well established, the past perfect is interchangeable with the simple past tense, as the following example shows:

2a I went out after my wife had got back from work.

b I went out after my wife got back from work.

Since the subordinating conjunction 'after' places the second event (i.e. the wife getting back from work) before the first (the speaker's going out), the sequence of events is very clear and the past perfect is, in a way, redundant. If there is a difference between the two sentences, it may be said to reside in the fact that the first statement measures the 'beforeness' of the wife getting back from work from the event of the speaker's going out, while the second statement measures it directly from the present moment, treating it as another 'then', or past, event.

Of the two verb forms for expressing the past, the preterit and the past perfect, the latter may be said to be the marked member of the pair in that it is ordinarily used only against the backdrop of the former. In other words, it is not common to the preterit. This is well illustrated in the following extract from Henry James's The Portrait of a Lady (1947:3):

> The old gentleman at the tea-table, who had come from America thirty years before, had brought with him, at the top of his baggage, his American physiognomy; and he had not only brought it with him, but he had kept it in the best order, so that, if necessary, he might have taken it back to his own country with perfect confidence. At present, obviously, nevertheless, he was not likely to displace himself; his journeys were over and he was taking the rest that precedes the great rest. He had a narrow, clean-shaven face, with features evenly distributed and an expression of placid acuteness. It was evidently a face in which the range of representation was not large, so that the air of contented shrewdness was all the more of a merit. It seemed to tell that he had been successful in life, yet it seemed to tell also that his success had not been exclusive and invidious, but had had much of the inoffensiveness of failure. He had certainly had a great experience of men, but there was an almost rustic simplicity in the faint smile that

played upon his lean, spacious cheek and lighted up his humorous eye as he at last slowly and carefully deposited his big tea-cup upon the table.

The scene of the old gentleman at the tea-table is narrated in the simple past tense (see lines 10 to 21, 28 to 33, which establishes the past point of reference for the passage. When the author wishes to go further back to a point prior to that established point of reference, he uses the past perfect, as in lines 1 to 8, and 22 to 27.

This leaves the present perfect to express the rest of the whole list of meanings and functions which have been attributed to the perfective forms, such as 'past with present relevance', 'past involving the present', 'state up to the present', 'indefinite past', 'at least once in a period leading up to the present', 'habit in a period leading up to the present', and 'resultative past' (Leech 1971:30-35). As is noticeable, there is no parallel in the present tense to the past-in-the-past idea expressed by the past perfect, and so the idea of anteriority is not relevant when it comes to the present perfect.

The main problem with the present perfect is that there is no one 'meaning' which has been found to satisfy the linguists working in this area. Each work makes claims which refute others. For example, the property of implying an end-point (under the meaning of 'completion') had long been a favourite among grammarians, but recent work now sees that it cannot be taken as necessary to perfectivity. As Comrie declares (1976:19), "indicating the end of a situation is

at best only one of the possible meanings of a perfective form, certainly not its defining feature".

There is a great deal of truth in each description of meaning and function attributed to the present perfect forms, such as 'past with present relevance', 'past involving the present', 'state up to the present', 'indefinite past', 'at least once in a period leading up the present', 'habit in a period leading up to the present', and 'resultative past' (Leech 1971:30-35). However, the trouble is that none of these conceptions applies to more than a subset of cases, and grammarians have to come up with lists of examples to illustrate each 'meaning' of the present perfect, but in the end we are no clearer as to the meaning of the present perfect in general.

This has led to some linguists not being in general agreement with the classification of the perfective under the category of aspect, even though there are correspondences between its meanings and functions with some of the meanings usually expressed by aspectual forms in other European languages, such as that of 'completion' and 'result'. It would seem that the main reason for classifying the perfective as an aspect has been simply that there is no other well-defined category into which it fits comfortably.

Some linguists have even been led to argue for the exclusion of the category of aspect from the categories of English grammar, because of the host of problems which its definition entails (Zandvoort 1962). However, other linguists feel that they should keep the

concept, albeit with some modification; for example, Comrie (1976:52) includes the perfect in his discussion of aspect only while "bearing in mind continually that it is an aspect in a rather different sense ..." Lyons (1968:316) discusses the English perfect as an aspect category, but then considers the use of the perfect to "give support to the traditional view that, in certain circumstances at least, it is a secondary, or relative tense, rather than an aspect". Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on his idea.

It is clear that there is something that distinguishes the perfective form of the verb from the preterit, and that this is in terms of something other than tense. Whether this difference is called aspect, in whatever sense of the word, or a secondary tense, is perhaps not the most important issue at hand. What is more pertinent is a grasp of the differences in meaning expressed by the use of the perfective form of the verb in English.

Sifting through the maze of suggested 'meanings' of the present perfect, it seems that the only general definition which is possible is an abstract and not very helpful one:

> perfectivity indicates the view of a situation as a single whole, without distinction of the various separate phases that make up that situation; while the imperfective pays essential attention to the internal structure of the situation.
>
> (Comrie 1976:16)

All that can be said to be the 'meaning' of the present perfect is an identification of prior events with the 'extended' now which is continuous with the moment of coding, while the preterit contrasts in identifying prior events with 'then'-time which is conceived as separate from the present, the 'now' of speaking. Instead of further attempts at defining the 'meaning' or 'meanings' of the present perfect, it would be far more fruitful to study how this basically simple contrast serves diverse expressive functions and how these functions are addressed by linguistic theory.

To do this we need to distinguish the basic meaning of the preterit/present perfect opposition from the welter of interpretations which that opposition may receive in particular communicative contexts. In other words, the so-called 'meanings' of the present perfect "are not actually intrinsic to it; rather they come from an interaction with other elements of the linguistic and general pragmatic context" (McCoard 1978:11). Quoting again from McCoard (1978:9), "... it is not surprising to discover that aspectual choices cannot, in the end, be pinned solely to objective features of events in the real world; the speaker makes a choice to represent phenomena perfectively or imperfectively, though many times the choice responds to physical reality in some degree".

These interpretations are unconsciously inferred by the listener, who reacts to various linguistic and nonlinguistic clues. When we attempt to describe the inferential meanings as if they were part of the grammatical system itself, we run into problems for the grammar cannot handle the subtlety and variability of

the use of the present perfect from one example to the next. In other words, an opposition like preterit/perfect may be put to very many different uses, supporting many different interpretive extrapolations of meanings; but it is wrong to equate these extrapolations with the meaning proper of the forms themselves.

We are led to undertake an essentially pragmatic analysis in the study of the present perfect, an analysis which focuses on the use of linguistic tools in interactive settings. Fillmore (1974:1) provides the following concise characterization of the realms of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics:

> Syntax ... characterizes the grammatical forms that occur in a language, while semantics pairs these forms with their potential communicative functions. Pragmatics is concerned with the three-termed relation which unites (i) linguistic form and (ii) the communicative functions which these forms are capable of serving, with (iii) the contexts or settings in which those linguistic forms can have those communicative functions.

Stalnake (1972:383) divides the pie in similar manner:

> Syntax studies sentences, semantics studies propositions. Pragmatics is the study of linguistic acts and the contexts

> in which they are performed. There are two major types of problems to be solved within pragmatics: first, to define interesting types of speech acts and speech products; second, to characterize the features of the speech context which help determine which proposition is expressed by a given sentence. The analysis of illocutionary acts (such as promising, warning, etc.) is an example of a problem of the first kind; the study of indexical expressions (whose reference is determined by the context of utterance) is an example of the second.

The role of pragmatic inference-making, based on the individual's understanding of the way the world around him normally works, looms very large in the ordinary rounds of communication, but this does not make it part of grammatical structure. In fact, the inferential meanings are actually rooted in the world-knowledge and belief of the speaker/hearer. If we alter the structure of that world-model, the implicational links will dissolve.

In fact, this use of pragmatic analysis should be extended to cover not only the use and 'meaning' of the perfective aspect in English, but all choices of tense too. McCoard's approach to this is captured by the following quote (1978:15):

> ... we do not hold tense-choice to be a simple function of an event's temporal location; no simple temporal determinism can account for shifts of temporal perspective like those just discussed. Later on, we will discover that the "temporal facts" of a case are insufficient by themselves to explain the choice of the perfect against the preterit or other alternatives. The speaker's conceptualization of events and their relationships intervenes constantly, injecting a degree of apparent indeterminacy into the choice of a particular tense at a particular discourse site. It is up to us to try to identify the relevant conceptualizations and the manner of their intervention between real-world phenomena and linguistic expression.

This appears to be the sort of approach that is most suitable to the linguistic study of literary texts, for it is in such texts that we find carefully delineated all the facets that enter into the real-life use of language, not only for communication, but also for many other functions. Quoting from Winograd (1974:75):

> A sentence does not "convey" meaning the way a truck conveys cargo, complete and packaged. It is more like a blueprint that

> allows the hearer to reconstruct the meaning from his own knowledge.

Wright (1977:211) shows the application of such an approach to the study of literature:

> time is not the only breeze that ripples our language. We live in other dimensions as well, notably that of fiction: the possible, the imaginable, the remembered, the anticipated, each of which has its innumerable shades and shadows to be spoken of as we can. Without quite knowing it, we have chosen to institutionalize our awareness of the varieties of our experience not by multiplying the forms of every verb but by developing new forms of fiction; and it turns out to be one source of our fiction's energy that we narrate these forms, untroubled by time, in tenses that can never quite forget it.

There are many areas where the study of contextual variables has provided valuable illumination into otherwise refractory problems in linguistic analysis. Staying within the realm of verb-tense phenomena, we may mention the case of identifying sentences which can have generic (i.e. timeless or habitual) sense; the analysis in such an instance "must take into account pragmatic matters -- the beliefs and knowledge about the world on the part of the

speaker, the cultural and customary assumptions that the speech community holds in common ... presuppositions and entailments, as well as other logical and quasi-logical relationships are inextricably mixed up with the phenomenon of English generic use" (Lawler 1973:8-9).

In fact, it seems that, especially in the study of tense-choice, we must consider not only the superficially-present elements of the sentence, and the time of the utterance, but the point of view of the speaker of the sentence as well ... the choice of tense is based in part on the subjective factor of how the speaker feels himself related to the event. Kirsner and Thompson (1976:201) show how pragmatic inferences determine the interpretation of sentences with different verb forms, and make a differentiation between the 'message' of an utterance and its 'meaning': "The *message* is the totality of what is *inferred* from the use of the *meaning* in a given utterance in a particular context. Typically, the *message* communicated is richer than the *meaning* signalled." There are many other studies which discuss the role of contextual factors in linguistic analysis, albeit most of them rather sporadically.

We have seen some of the range of variability and subtlety that the present perfect in English can be used to express. The richness is there for speakers who want it, but then there are others too who may find this very richness a source of confusion, especially in a very communication-oriented world. It is perhaps interesting to note that at least two writers, Vanneck (1958) and Defromont (1973) have commented on the apparently increasing use of the preterit in place of the perfect by

American speakers. Vanneck (1958:237) says: "There are signs that in modern spoken American English, the distinction between preterit and perfect is beginning to be lost ... Very many speakers no longer feel any instinctive need for the perfect tense in a number of contexts which traditionally require it." He gives the following examples where he identifies the encroachment of what he calls the "colloquial preterit":

> He isn't there now. I don't know what happened to him.
>
> Spain's a nice country. I know some people who were there.
>
> Hurray! He did it again!
>
> Darn it! I did it again!
>
> Yes, he's here. I just saw him.
>
> You missed him. He just went out.
>
> Did you have lunch (yet, already)?
>
> I didn't pay for this book yet.
>
> That show's still on. I saw it twice.
>
> I live in New York, but I never saw the St Patrick's Day parade.

We could argue that the presence of the adverbs 'yet' and 'already', which so clearly

refer to the characteristic time-span of the perfect, remove the burden of temporal contrast from the verb and allow a neutralization of the forms in favour of the preterit *without* loss of the temporal nuance. Vanneck theorizes that the Continental predominance of the perfect may have fostered the overcompensating use of the preterit in the New World (and in turn a counter-acting 'hypercorrect perfect'). Moreover, "the great majority of non-British immigrants ... have this in common, that they are not used to differentiating between the perfect and the preterit in their own spoken mother tongue" (Vanneck 241).

Defromont (1973) cites examples from Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman where the verb phrase has 'clearly resultative' bearing on the context of utterance, yet we find the preterit:

> (There's such an undercurrent in him.) He became a moody man.
> Here, we brought you some flowers.

And what is the root of the confusion of the perfect and preterit, or rather the tendency toward loss of the perfect? Defromont (1973:110) sees it mainly in the light of phonology:

> a phonological change -- the loss of the auxiliary *have* -- is the starting point for a grammatical change: the substitution of the (preterit) for the (perfect).

He argues that since all but about sixty (a 'small minority') of English verbs do not have

distinct forms of the preterit and the past participle, whenever the forms of the auxiliary *have* are weakened in pronunciation to the point of disappearance, all that is left is a "de facto" preterit: "I have told him" becomes "I've told him" and then "I told him". The weakening process is particularly noticeable where consonant clusters of complexity occur with a full perfect: "I've just bought a hat" contains the spoken cluster /v-dz/, which the "law of least effort" works to simplify into /dz/. If speakers regularly eliminate the auxiliary with verbs which then are ambiguous between preterit and perfect, they are hardly going to have recourse to its services when the forms remain distinct. Thus we find "I seen" (in perfect meaning only, or ambiguous semantically?) appearing naturally in the mouths of the non-upwardly-mobile.

Actually it would be interesting to know if some/all speakers who do say "I seen" ever say "I saw" or "I have seen", and especially if they distinguish the forms in a way analogous to the standard perfect/preterit contrast. Only in this way could we establish a genuine neutralization of the opposition, or find out if the preterit has become the unmarked form, while the perfect retains its status as a marked form. This development could place English in striking opposition to the other major Western languages which have almost universally tended to downgrade and discard the forms of the preterit, heading toward a future with only the non-ambiguous perfect. In some cases, it appears that the preterit/perfect opposition is not simply collapsed, but takes on non-temporal significance or is otherwise specialized. Meantime, however, only time will tell the

actual direction that the present perfect is taking in English, in the different varieties of use around the world.

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TRAGIC HEROES SUFFER TO BE WISE

by

Kee Thuan Chye

could I call you a sufferer of love
o jester to the King of Jews
o high priest to a spitfire bitch?
would that not be
awarding laurels to easter clowns
or making a tragic hero out of leander
the commuter
whose neurotic mistrust
must have sown the suicidal seed in him?
Zeus ordains: man suffers to be wise
but He alas is not your god
and so you take your beatings
without a snarl
why with your faithfulness
you should instead have been
a woman's best friend
but you do whimper
awhen your godly heroine wills
that you make your
daily land-crossing
to do her bidding
or leave your temple of love unguarded
against wolves
and when you prostrate at her feet
she sinks her luvociferous fangs
uncaringly
in your virgoan virtues
like nails to break your heart

my friend
you are no tragic hero
but this I know at least:
you'll bear the pain without a bark
when you're nailed to your cross
of roses

PAKISTANI LITERATURE IN ENGLISH 1990: A CRITICAL SURVEY

by

Alamgir Hashmi

Different to many a previous year, writers' meetings and seminars have been popular again. The National Book Council of Pakistan together with the University of Karachi held in May the National Symposium on Pakistani Literature in English, with many writers, academics, journalists, students, and the general reading public attending the three-day event. The Symposium combined academic papers and sessions with a fair share of readings of authors. The Shakir Ali Museum and the Quaid-e-Azam Library in Lahore as well held readings and lectures, which were attended by sizable audiences. As Zulfikar Ghose returned to the country of his birth after twenty-eight years, the occasion was not missed by the literati -- to take another look yet at the man and his work. (See "Sialkot's Prodigal Son", The Pakistan Times, 30 May, p. 9).

Generally, discussion of language, literature, and culture has been quite specific and ever more vigorous. Language, particularly, is drawing increasing academic attention. Along with the articles by Robert Baumgardner (e.g., "The Indigenization of English in Pakistan", English Today, No. 21, pp. 59-65) and others, Tariq Rahman's longer study, Pakistani English: The Linguistic Description of a Non-Native Variety of English (National Institute of

Pakistan Studies, Islamabad), will do much to further Pakistani English as a linguistic subject area.

Criticism and fiction were the year's particular gains. As they competed for the top place during this year, and even some fine short stories appeared in ones or twos in the magazines and anthologies, three new novels, a short story collection, and a first-time reprint of a 1950s novel were the major events, which perhaps should almost make 1990 the 'fiction year'.

Hanif Kureishi published his first novel, The Buddha of Suburbia (London: Faber and Faber), which follows on from his several plays and short stories, showing to advantage the stagecraft and spoken language as well as the themes used there. Adolescent Karim Amir growing into manhood learns about himself and the world around him and discovers the operative rules of family, work, institutions, society, and culture. As it is not an usual bildungsroman, Haroon, his father, is also rediscovering himself in his love for Eva and in the effort on his own and others' behalf "to reach [your] full potential as human beings" (p. 13). He is the latter-day lecturing (contrary) Buddha, a traditional image recast in the suburbs of South London, who walks out of his marriage for another woman, believing himself and declaring to his son "we're growing up together, we are" (p. 22). Karim Amir's own schooling and affairs with Eleanor, Jamila, etc., lead him out to much excitement and learning away from the gloomy family home and boring suburban living as he finds himself a place in the theatre world as well as

interesting people to base his characters on. The experience also leads to a mature self, the artist's conscience:

> If I defied Changez, if I started work on a character based on him, if I used the bastard, it meant that I was untrustworthy, a liar. But if I don't use him it meant I had f -all to take to the group after the 'me-as-Anwar' fiasco. As I sat there I began to recognize that this was one of the first times in my life I'd been aware of having a moral dilemma. Before, I'd done exactly what I wanted; desire was my guide and I was inhibited by nothing but fear. But now, at the beginning of my twenties, something was growing in me. Just as my body had changed at puberty, now I was developing a sense of guilt, a sense not only of how I appeared to others, but of how I appeared to myself, especially in violating self-imposed restrictions. Perhaps no one would know I'd based my character in the play on Changez; perhaps, later, Changez himself wouldn't mind, would be flattered. But I would always know what I had done, that I had chosen to be a liar, to deceive a friend, to use someone. What should I do? I had no idea. I ran over it again and again and

> could find no way out. (pp. 186-7)

As the theatrical itself assumes a dimension of life, playing moves the plot, and searching for a character becomes both a structural and a symbolic device, the first-person narrative develops from the point of view of "a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories" (p. 3), adding to its already colourful, lower-middle-class plinth and parlance which is the best cure for the latter-day Raj and Daj fiction of the Minerva Press variety. How the past and present are defined, Karim Amir places himself at a distance from his father and takes a decision to construct time in the only personal and valid terms possible:

> I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd been colluding with my enemies ... [Dad] was always honest about this: he preferred England in every way. Things worked; it wasn't hot; you didn't see terrible things on the street that you could do nothing about. He wasn't proud of his past, but he wasn't unproud of it either; it just existed, and there wasn't any point in fetishizing it, as some liberals and Asians radicals liked to do. So if I wanted an additional personality bonus [of an Asian past], I would have to create it. (pp. 212-213)

While England is spoken of as a "Kingdom of Prejudice" -- with it routine racist and fascist marches and Asian and West Indian lives imperilled beyond help, in his personal life Karim Amir finds something to sustain him: "I'd grown up with kids who taught me that sex was disgusting. It was smells, smut, embarrassment and horse laughs. But love was too powerful for me. Love swam right into the body, into the valves, muscles and bloodstream ..." (p. 188). His father remarries; Mum and Jimmy become friends; Anwar dies, helpfully; Jamila and Changez try to sort out their marriage; he himself leaves America after a visit and knows that there is hardly an Asia to turn back to but the entire experience has been worth the emotional and intellectual effort:

> I could think about the past and what I'd been through as I'd struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is. (pp. 283-4)

"To locate myself and learn what the heart is" -- this suburban wisdom, however, is evidently shared by more than one Buddha by the end of the book, even if, except for Karim Amir and his father, the other characters remain shadowy figures portrayed in half tones. Margaret, the mother, is a very sympathetic if 'unfinished' character and Eva, Eleanor, Charlie, and Pyke, etc., are interesting but remain one-dimensional; the younger brother, Amar, "who called himself Allie to avoid racial trouble" (p. 19), remains a name only. The black-and-white aspect of the social reality literally reduces them to certain roles which, howsoever they may modify them, they cannot

reject or transcend; nor is there any motivation, it appears, to conceive of such a society without its brown gurus, breaking-down white spouses, profligate sons, radical Asian daughters, self-indulgent Buddhas, third-worlding white social-workers to help or comfort the blacks, and perverse though brilliant theatre directors. Karim Amir meets them squarely, sometimes treats them roundly, and takes all life's possibilities in a stride, maintaining his sense of humour and detachment.

The Buddha of Suburbia has a gripping story, a contemporary socio-cultural reference which often works better than paste-on, and a concern with human relationships and happiness that predominates all else. Kureishi's energetic style is catchy; the quality of humour, particularly the sarcasm, is distinctly Pakistani; and the plebeian manner is worn with a panache that only a literary culture with a working-class tradition -- such as Britain's-- can make possible.

Tariq Ali's first novel also follows some recent playwriting. In Redemption (London: Chatto and Windus), the gloom caused by the collapse of the Alternative System is beaten out with wit and banter as the Trotskyites contemplate the new challenge. As the socialist and labour classes have failed to be responsive, the brigade considers moving into the Catholic Church and Rome itself. The world congress proposed by Ezra Einstein (alias Ernest Mandel), 70 years old, collects enough elderly revolutionaries for the congress to attract attention, though it falls short of evolving any workable theme or strategy. But there is a plenitude of jokes born of an earthy realism,

and life's decencies are not overlooked in religious fervour. Canadian comrade Cathy Fox does not attend the conference because she does not want to join in excavating Trotsky's grave in Mexico to find some love letters. As she writes of her non-attendance to Einstein, "the whole world has to be remade"; but the novel's wisdom is in having it discussed from more than one angle and withholding the formula to accomplish the Project.

Adam Zameenzad's Cyrus, Cyrus (London: Fourth Estate) follows his previous three novels to match the hectic speedwriting with a resembling theme, which is sure to indicate to some 'a style'. Of lowly, 'untouchable' origins, the disenfranchised protagonist cannot tell his last (family) name and resorts to uttering only his given name to identify himself. In Britain, not enfranchised but convicted of murder of three children, he tells his autobiographical tale of extravagant emotion, sex, and carnage sitting in prison. Religion, society, and justice are held responsible for all wrong, even though his three life sentences have been commuted somehow by some divine intervention. Earlier, going from country to country only lands him in hell finally; there he has only the officialdom to exercise his wild brains with. The little humour there is is based in grotesquery, which comes as a relief against the socio-spiritual mayhem of Zameenzad's one-dimensional world.

In Athar Tahir's Other Seasons: Twenty-five Short Stories (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel), however, a serious purpose, if not a definite formula, is at work; middle-class values are enforced with a vengeance and there is no escape from needing

social approval. A dismal world is portrayed in which people are inadequate and aggressive; their motives are mean; the natural world is indifferent if not an accomplice in man's machinations; and the body and soul are like the sexes portrayed here -- ill at ease with each other. In dialogue, the stories mix the local (usually Punjabi) idiom with usual English; the lower-class characters are recognizable from the nativized speech while the story's point of view or the moral standard is enunciated in the correct language. Still, "A Colonial Octogenarian" and "Diamond Market" have quite successfully and sympathetically drawn characters because they speak in a non-standard language. "Broken Bangle" is perhaps the most psychologically ambitious story in the collection, but has no use for speech. While there is a feel in some of these stories for the countryside as well as the sterile and phoney middle-class culture of the cities, it is a thing apart. Most of them rely on clever, freighted endings; the narratorial comment is heavy-handed; and the characters are rarely allowed to evolve. With all this, Tahir has made a bold effort for Pakistani (pr Punjabi?) rural and urban fiction to have a credible setting and speech. However, there must be many ways to the successful short story. The approach, for instance, is different in Rukhsana Ahmad's stories (in Right of Way. London: Women's Press, 1988), which do not encounter similar problems but remain of interest for other reasons and qualities.

Mumtaz Shah-Nawaz's The Heart Divided (Lahore: ASR Publication) is primarily a Partition Novel which received much attention when it was first published following the

author's death. The text then was in an imperfect state and printed without advice. The present reprint, first in over thirty years, simply copies the first edition and surely has been a lost opportunity. Other notable reprints or paperback editions are Bapsi Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride (New Delhi: Penguin), which was earlier only The Bride, and The Crow Eaters (New Delhi: Penguin); Saadat Hasan Manto's Kingdom's End and Other Stories translated from Urdu by Khalid Hasan (New Delhi: Penguin); and Sara Suleri's non-fictional Meatless Days (London: Collins).

Not only in fiction but in criticism also the language and idiom issues were the main themes. Language and style (-istics) remains the key to reading in the discussions of fiction and poetry by Tariq Rahman ("Linguistic Deviation as a Stylistic Device in Pakistani English Fiction", JCL, 25:1, pp. 1-22) and Shaista Sonnu Sirajuddin ("Three Contemporary Poets: A Study of Their Use of Language", The Muslim Magazine, 16 November, p. 5; 23 November, p. 5), who use the linguistic and literary approaches, respectively, and offer pragmatic analyses of the literary practice. Studies dealing with these and other topics published by Alamgir Hashmi were: "Poetry, Pakistani Idiom in English, and the Groupies" (World Literature Today, 64:2, pp. 268-271); "Other Seasons Truly" (The Muslim Magazine, 2 Nov., p. 5); and "Lord Buddha, T.S. Eliot, and What's too Right with Our Poetry" (The Pakistan Times: Midweek Edition, 30 Jan., 6 Feb., 13 Feb., 27 Feb.). Eric Cyprian published an important review article, "A New Vision for Commonwealth Literature" (The Nation, 23 Nov., p. 5), which is also a landmark statement

concerning culture. As critical writing about Pakistani literature has dealt with broad philosophical and technical issues, it has been equally concerned specifically with the work of such writers as Ahmed Ali, Iftkhar Arif, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, Alamgir Hashmi, Mohammad Iqbal, Hanif Kureishi, Saadat Hasan Manto, Taufiq Rafat, Nazneen Sadiq, Sara Suleri, and Athar Tahir.

In non-fiction, M. Attiq ur Rahman, a retired army general, published Back to the Pavilion (Karachi: Ardeshir Cowasjee), a combination of autobiography and memoir, which skilfully recounts a distinguished military and public career and is relatively less stereotypical in its social commentary and personal revelation. Miangul Jahanzeb was the last Wali (ruler of the former State of Swat in Pakistan and his oral narrative (The Last Wali of Swat: An Autobiography as Told to Fredrik Barth. Oslo: Norwegian Universities Press) has its own special charm. The narratives by Hamidul Haq Chowdhury (Memoirs. Dhaka: Associated Printers) and Tamizuddin-Khan (The Test of Time: My Life and Days. Dhaka: University Press Ltd.), both of whom became citizens of Bangladesh in the 1970s, should also be mentioned here because they were both citizens of Pakistan before 1972 and a substantial part of their life, career, and work attached to that period. S.M. Moin Quresh (Crocodile Tears. Karachi: Pak Shield Publications) writes in the jocular vein and can pinch home the point with a laugh. The only place where the reader is called upon to cry over our common failings -- and spilt milk -- is the book's "Introduction".

If this year's work is any indication of the art of the possible, we have come a long way from 1965 (when First Voices was published) and it has all been worthwhile; so that now we can look forward to the 1990s with a strong sense of a contemporary tradition.

MOON OVER MANILA

(for Marjorie Evasco)

by

Kee Thuan Chye

Moon over Manila
drips a dreamdrop in my eye
and the stars become your dimples
as you smile a song for me,
and the stars are the silverpoints of your eyes.
And soon you're here with me
beneath the emerald palmettes
and hanging bay-opals
reflecting the golden dome, cupped in our hands,
floating on Manila Bay.
Then we ride in the Love Bus
and we peer through the misted glass window
at Ch'ang-O's flirtatious beam for Yi,
and as I catch the glass reflection
of your rabbit-cute wink,
it becomes the fleeting farewell
of a silver shooting star.
Now the eaves absorb the moon,
skirting shadows across my page.
Reflecting silky splendour out of the fiery orb
though great distance comes between the two,
the vanishing dome becomes an eclipse of the sun,
and all of a sudden
I feel the morning cold.

THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE IN ENGLISH IN MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS*

By

Malachi Edwin

This paper will briefly describe the development of the teaching of literature in English in secondary schools in Malaysia and how the changes in language and education policies in Malaysia affected its teaching. This paper will discuss the teaching of literature in the ESL classroom and also the teaching of literature in English as an elective subject for upper secondary school students. This paper will finally highlight the role played by Universiti Pertanian Malaysia in the training of literature teachers through its Bachelor of Education (TESL) programme.

Introduction

The teaching of the English language has been very much part of the Malaysian education system from the time of British colonial days. The English language and Literature in English

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were taught as two separate subjects in National Type English schools in the Malaysian secondary schools. Until 1970, English was the medium of instruction in the National Type English schools. However, this was changed when the Malaysian government passed the Education Enactment Bill in 1971 which effected the abolition of the English medium of instruction. As indicated by Gaudart (1985), the Bill was aimed at working towards a common education system with Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction.

Bahasa Malaysia was thus made the sole medium of instruction at the Primary level, beginning with Standard One for all National Type English schools. This change in the medium of instruction was completed in 1980 at Form Five level, the final year for upper secondary education. Since then, the English language has been taught as one of the subjects in the Malaysian curriculum (Asiah Abu Samah, 1983).

English language and Literature in English continued to be taught as separate subjects even after the medium of instruction was changed from English to Bahasa Malaysia. The English language subject did not have any literature component before 1990. In 1990, Literature in English was incorporated as part of the English language programme beginning at the lower secondary level.

Before the change in 1990, Literature in English was a non-examination subject and was taught to all lower secondary students. However, at the upper secondary level, Literature in English was an examination subject. The students who studied Literature in

English were only those who had registered for the Literature in English paper for the Senior Cambridge examination or the Malaysian Certificate of Education examination (presently called Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia).

The Teaching of Literature in English: Upper Secondary Level

The teaching of Literature in English at the upper secondary level has not changed very much over the decades. It is still an optional subject and is studied for examination purposes. Two or three forty minute periods per week are allocated for this subject.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Literature in English used to be a relatively popular subject among English medium students. These English medium students who registered for Literature in English, generally had a level of English proficiency that enabled them to understand the original literary texts used. However, after the change of medium in the instruction from English to Bahasa Malaysia in 1970, there was a drastic drop in the number of students who registered for Literature in English.

This is probably because the standard of English is declining steadily in Malaysia and more teachers and students tend to shy away from Literature in English. In fact, in 1988, only 57 schools in Malaysia offered Literature in English to Form Five students, and there wre only 355 students throughout Malaysia who sat for Literature in English in (Examination

Syndicate, Malaysia, 1988). These figures were comparatively lower than the previous years. Moreover, the majority of the candidates for the Literature in English paper paper are now from urban or Christian missionary-run secondary schools.

The Ministry of Education has taken steps to check the declining standard in the English language as well as the decreasing number of students taking Literature in English. According to some officers in the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), the CDC is planning a new syllabus for the Literature in English subject. However, to date, nothing has been officially finalised.

It is believed that among the aims of the new syllabus for Literature in English are: to develop in the students an awareness of the value and pleasure of reading selected literary works; an appreciation and understanding of human genres and literary devices used. This newly planned syllabus is to be in line with the National Education Philosophy and the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (ISSC) which was implemented in 1987.

To date, a number of changes have been made with the implementation of the ISSC. The English language programme in this curriculum paved the way for the incorporation of a literature component in the English language subject through the Class Reader programme which will be further discussed later.

The Teaching of Literature in English: Lower Secondary Level

Before 1970, Literature in English, was allocated a forty minute period in National Type English schools at the lower secondary level for all students. Unlike the upper secondary level where original texts were used, the texts used for the lower secondary level were bridged versions of literary texts or simplified anthologies.

However, with the change of the medium of instruction from English to Bahasa Malaysia in 1970, Literature in English was no longer taught at the lower secondary level. The single forty minute period was converted into another English language period as the Ministry of Education realised that students did not have the proficiency in English to manage even simplified literary texts. It was also felt that students needed more time for developing their language skills so the conversion of the forty minute period from Literature in English to English language was considered an appropriate move. At the time, this move seemed to signal the end of the teachinbg of Literature in English in lower secondary schools; but this proved however, not to be the case later.

The teaching of literature in English was indirectly affected by the concern for the declining standard in the English language, particularly the students' poor reading skills in English. In its attempts to improve the deteriorating standard of the English, the Schools Division of the Ministry of Education introduced two programmes: English Language Reading Programme (ELRP) and Class Reader

Programme (CRP). The ELRP had little or no relation to the teaching of Literature in English. However, the CRP which was implemented in 1990, signaled the return of Literature in English at the lower secondary level in Malaysia.

The ELRP was initially introduced to residential schools but the programme was later extended to day schools. The ELRP incorporated more than 200 graded literary texts to cater for both lower and upper secondary school students. The aims of the ELRP make no mention of teaching literature in English as this programme was in no way an attempt to bring back Literature in English into the Malaysian curriculum. The ELRP aimed mainly at achieving the standard of reading stipulated in the Lower and Upper Secondary English language syllabuses. The ELRP also hoped to instill the habit of reading for pleasure as well as widen the students' general knowledge.

The implementation of the ELRP at the school level was carried out in a variety of ways. It varied from teachers carrying boxes of books to the classrooms; to the books being placed according to the different grades in the library; or in some instances, the books being merely stacked on the library shelves. The implementation of the ELRP depended very much on the English language teachers. It was later found that the programme was generally ineffective.

The Class Reader Programme (CRP) implemented in the secondary schools through the ISSC, has brought about some significant changes in the English language programme. These

changes have directly affected the teaching of Literature in English. The ISSC specifications require that one forty minute period per week be allotted for the literature component. The aim of incuding a literature component is to enable students to "read and enjoy prose, poetry and plays" (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 1987).

The CRP for Form I students is presently being implemented. It is also expected to be implemented for Form II students by mid-1991. It is targeted that by 1994, the CRP will be implemented for all the students from the five Forms in the Malaysian secondary schools. In the CRP, a total of 24 titles of literary texts were selected for the Form I students. Another set of titles has been finalised for Form II and will soon be used. As in the case of the books in the ELRP, the texts for the CRP are also graded.

The implementation of the ISSC in Malysia saw the return of the teaching of Literature in English in the Malaysian lower secondary schools through the CRP. Although the CRP is concerned with developing reading skills, the CRP also aims "to introduce elements of literature into language teaching" (Devinder Raj and Hunt, 1991).

The inclusion of Literature in English in the English language programme in the Malaysian curriculum is indeed a welcomed change. This is especially so since there has also been growing dissent among TESL educationists with regards to the divorce of literature from the language classroom and growing popularity for the concept of literature in the ESL classroom (Brumfit, 1985; Widdowson, 1985; Stern, 1987).

As such, the implementation of the CRP also indicated a change in policy with regards to teaching Literature in English as it was no longer taught as a separate subject but as a component of the English language subject. Thus, Literature in English which was once taught as a separate subject, then dropped from the curriculum, has now been brought back into the Malaysian secondary school curriculum but as a component of the English language subject.

Teacher Training for Literature in English Teachers

In its attempts to ensure the successful implementation of the Class Reader Programme, the Schools Division of the Ministry of Education has produced teaching files (Teachers' Guides) as resource materials to help the English language teacher. This is largely because of the concern of the Division that a large number of the English language teachers at lower secondary school have no formal qualification in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) or teaching literature (Devinder Raj and Hunt, 1990).

The situation described by Devinder Raj and Hunt (1990) is a serious problem despite the fact that there are 28 teacher training colleges and four universities in Malaysia involved in the training of English language teachers. The teacher training colleges and most of the universities with the teacher training programes, tend to emphasise on the training of teacher trainees for teaching the language

skills and little emphasis was given to the teaching of literature in English.

Presently, only Universiti Pertanian Malaysia is involved in training teachers of Literature in English. This is through the Bachelor of Education (TESL) programme offered by the TESL Unit in the Department of Languages, Faculty of Educational Studies. It is offered as a minor option for TESL major students. Presently, this is the only program in Malaysia that specifically trains teachers for teaching Literature in English.

This programme takes a two-prong approach:

(i) providing teacher trainees with knowledge about literature in English

(ii) providing teacher trainees with pedagogical knowledge in relation to teaching literature in English.

The teacher trainees, most of whom have some or little knowledge of literature in English, are provided enrichment courses which aim to provide them a relatively sound base to become teachers for the Literature in English subject and for teaching the literature component in the English language subject. These teacher trainees register for the following courses: Introduction to Literary Criticism, Novels in English, Short Stories in English, Drama in English, Poetry in English and Malaysian Literature in English.

Besides the enrichment courses mentioned above, the students also have to register for two pedagogy courses. The courses are: The

Teaching of Literature in the ESL Classroom and Approaches and Methods to the Teaching of Literature. These courses are geared towards providing students with the theoretical framework and practical experience for teaching literature.

Seminars and workshops are also held with the cooperation of the Schools Division of the Ministry of Education for the teaching of literature in English. These sessions provide teacher trainees with information on the current developments in the field of teaching literature and also to provide hands-on experience in producing materials for teaching Liteature in English and literature in the ESL classroom.

In accordance to the requirements of the Bachelor of Education (TESL) programme, the teacher trainees also have to undergo 12 weeks of Teaching Practice at local secondary schools. During their Teaching Practice, the teacher trainees are required to teach the English language, which includes teaching literature in the ESL classroom situation. They also have to teach Literature in English if the subject is offered in the school where they are attached to. Since most schools do not offer Literature in English, the teacher trainees are mostly involved in teaching literature in the English language subject (literature in the ESL classroom situation).

The general feedback from the TESL lecturers who had observed Literature in English as a minor option is encouraging. It is hoped that more TESL teacher trainees will register for the Literature in English minor option as this will help them to be trained as both

English language teachers as well as Literature in English teachers.

The TESL Unit which offers the Literature in English programme is in the process of making a number of changes to further improve it. The changes are made in view of the challenges that these future teachers will have to meet when they become English language teachers and Literature in English teachers in the Malaysian secondary schools.

Conclusion

The development of the teaching of Literature in English in Malaysian secondary schools has been affected to a certain extent by the changes in language and education policies in Malaysia. Over the last few decades, the teaching of Literature in English in Malaysia has remained very much the same at the upper secondary level, in terms of syllabus and examination format. Literature in English is still taught as a separate subject from English language.

However, there have been some changes in the teaching of Literature in English at the lower secondary level in Malaysia. Literature in English was once taught as a separate subject but was later dropped from the curriculum when the medium of instruction changed from English to Bahasa Malaysia in 1970. But with the implementation of the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (ISSC) in 1987, Literature in English is now taught as a component of the

English language subject, and not as a separate subject.

The changes in the teaching of Literature in English have created a need to train teachers to teach this subject. In order to meet this need, the Faculty of Educational Studies at Universiti Pertanian Malaysia, offers a Bachelor in Education (TESL) programme, in which Literature in Englishy is offered as a minor option.

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THE FIRST ASP

by

Leonard Jeyam

Was the voice of existence heard
as she screamed for her Anthony,
or did those lines

merely sustain themselves so eloquently
the way the poet meant them to be?
Not only in this tragedy

but I can still feel the first asp
not wanting to kill a disgraced
Queen of Egypt, not ever to bite

and release her from a fertile land
that also sometimes shrivels
the snarling crocodiles of the Nile.

TIENANMEN, JUNE 1989

by

Siew-Yue Killingley

Old men should not beget
More children lest they forget
Their mortality and invest
Their last throw for wisdom
In a last show of virility.

But these old men have begotten
Death on children, their youth forgotten:
Such immortality's like incest;
Their last throe of folly
Is their last word to manhood.

Old men have pressed to earth
Youth's bloom and sap at birth,
And choked its trusting cries
And crushed young minds with lies
Of love in a crunch of tanks.

When the blinding folly of old men
Makes them frantic for the death of heirs,
Tien has no eyes, an is dead in Tienanmen,
And hope blinks at its last grey hairs.

The Chinese have a saying, 'Heaven (tien) has eyes' when an evil deed is being done, especially whent he evil-doer seems to be getting away with it. An means 'peace'.

RING OF COSMIC FIRE:
Temporal Strategies and Narrative Consciousness in *The Return*

by

Margaret Yong

The Return is a novel about a Tamil family living in Kedah in the years after the second world war. The background includes the small towns of Bedong and Sungei Petani, and the less accessible rubber plantations of Kedah. The plot covers three generations, Ravi the narrator and central figure of the novel, his father, and his grandmother -- together with the extended family of a typical Tamil family of the postwar period.

From these basic beginnings (a typical family in a small town of semi-rural Malaysia, in the middle decades of this century), it is possible to infer the central thematic preoccupations of the novel. *The Return* fills our expectation of the New Literatures dealing with the culture of an immigrant post-colonial society. It is a work of cultural definition: it answers to the implied question asked by all such fiction dealing with a similar period of colonial and post-colonial history -- the question of the transition of a group of people moving from one world into another world. This process of cultural adaptation constitutes the thematic background to *The Return*.

The novel employs the time lapse of three generations in order to examine this theme of

cross-cultural encounter between the immigrant culture and the culture of the 'reception' country (in this case Malaya/Malaysia). The three-generation saga is an important motif as it enhances the sense of continuing struggle and change within the story of the cross-cultural encounter. It is precisely the passage of time which gives prominence to the processes of cultural adaptation, and which reveal the historical process as something inherently unstable and dynamic. Time in the novel brings about evolving processes of cross-cultural fertilisation.

The novel's treatment of time is ingenious. *The Return* is not merely a chronology of historical change; it views the idea of change through a series of carefully constructed devices, most significantly the use of a first person narrator. Time and change are filtered through the narrating consciousness of Ravi, the man who looks back and remembers how he was shaped by the experience of the cross-cultural encounter. Moreover he does not merely 'remember' passively, he recreates the sense of his family through the trauma of the experience of conflict within change. I am here suggesting a thematic rationalisation of the first person narrator: the story is told as the autobiography of the central figure, which shifts the personal memories of the past, so that we are conscious of the presence of time in his story. Time in his narrative becomes a framework for understanding his life.

In this way, history becomes a personal encounter with the forces of the colonial process, or (to put it another way) the past is understood as a process of change. From the

perspective of the central narrator, all time is transitional, since it moves with the family history of the three generations adapting to their ever-new environment and circumstances.

We see then the thematic implication of using Ravi as the fist person narrator for the story of his family. The story becomes a personal sifting of the past, with the emotional stresses being reflections of Ravi's own sense of identity.

Seen in this way, the framework chapter of *The Return* formulates the first distinct memory of the narrator, and not just the convenient starting point of the family saga. The narrator has an impeccable reason for the opening sentence of his account of the past which shaped him: 'My grandmother's life and her death in 1958 made a vivid impression on me' (p. 1). However, I must add that this is obviously also the starting point of the central thematic preoccupation with the idea of the colonial cross-cultural encounter. After all, the cultural encounter can only take place with the act of migration.

Let us return to the narrator's point of outset. It makes sense for him to begin his story with the grandmother, Periathai, because she is the first vivid presence from his earliest childhood. In this way, the grandmother also becomes the foundation for the protagonist's sense of self. This doubles the theme of the cultural encounter, since the overall 'impersonal' theme of evolving adaptation also occurs on the private and personal level of the main character.

This part of the novel is concerned with the definition of the world of the immigrant (the grandmother) from the time she reaches foreign fields. Again the narrative technique implies a distinctive way of understanding time as a process of change. The grandmother has already taken on mythic proportions in Ravi's recollection -- she has become part of a collective and folkloric past. Her arrival is 'explained' by the common store of stories about her sudden appearance on the horizon. Ravi's description of her arrival is unconnected with any discernable reason for her coming; and this is emphasised by the odd, incongruous image of the camel with which she is compared: the refugee humping her worldly goods.

The textual detail enhances the isolation and strangeness of her coming -- thus foreshadowing the theme of her struggle in the 'new' land:

> She came, as the stories and anecdotes about her say, suddenly out of the horizon, like a camel, with nothing except some baggage and three boys in tow. And like that animal which survives the most barren of lands, she brooded, humped over her tin trunks, mats, silver lamps and pots, at the junction of the main road and the laterite trail. (p. 1)

It is clear from the description that the grandmother has an air of impermanence, of one who is in transit -- or as the novel figuratively points out, someone at the crossroads.

At the crossroads, the grandmother moves off to a destination that may be described as remote, a deadend, and yet in its own way a whole way of life. In Ravi's words (p. 1), his grandmother sets off through trees and bushes, along a dusty track and ends up next to an old Hindu cemetery; the imagery of loss scarcely needs explication. But here she builds a house or at least a dwelling place. Her actions symbolize her isolation from the mainstream of life in the new land, and thus perhaps her incomprehension of its meaning; but they also reveal the fortitude and courage which are the strength of her convictions. Later, she will give the same advice to the puzzled child, Ravi, 'Never let anything break your spirit' (p. 7), when the Emergency regulations fail to break her spirit.

The grandmother is portrayed as a strong woman, with much fierce courage and determined to succeed in building a new life for her family. This aspect of her character influences our understanding of the protagonist, as he is obviously drawn to her because he shares that tenacity.

In contrast to Ravi's early picture of his grandmother, the three young sons seem pale creatures, whom Ravi describes as frightened, cowering in the house built by the grandmother while she trudges with her camel's burden of saris through the estates for miles.

The narrator's mediating presence here is significant in showing the difference in his attitude towards these people. His description of his grandmother is warm and sympathetic, but his description of the three sons evokes

laughter:

> 'They were like chickens afraid of slaughter,' a man who had known my grandmother when she first got to Malaysia, said, laughing. (p. 1)

His laughter distances us from the three sons. But there is a further point to the narrative technique. The man continues, 'And her boys had become the wild fowl, dust of all Bedong on their feet' (p. 1).

The imagery used here already suggests that the process of adaptation has begun with the sons. And yet this too is distanced; made into distant recall by the man who has retreated to the past in bringing up this memory (with 'his eyes glazed with searching the past for my grandmother's image'; p. 2).

The narrative then turns back to the definition of the grandmother's world in Bedong. And it is soon evident that the grandmother's moral resolve alone cannot overcome her problems; and that part of her problem is her limited repertoire of strategies for the new land. Ravi is quite clear about this reason, for he tells us that 'All her Indian skills and heritage had been depleted' (p. 3). The grandmother has been an itinerant peddlar flogging saris, she has been a tinker, a spirit healer, and a vadai seller.

The grown up Ravi in looking back to the past understands that the Indian heritage has become part of the burden of the past. This insight is complexly modified at this point of

his narrative. It is at this stage that Ravi provides the central imagery of that Indian heritage, the light within the house. This image cluster first appears at the beginning of the grandmother's life in Malaysia; and again it is put into the words of the man who used to know her: 'your grandmother wanted to light her own lamp!' (p. 1).

This thematic image, which I have termed the light within the house, is composed of two equal elements: house and light; 'form and spirit' (private communication with the author on 18th February 1987.) The house is a small habitation, with hall, another room and cooking place. However this is her first 'real' house, because of its emotional significance. Its meaning is to be discerned in its elaborately carved entrance. The pillars of the entrance have stories of Indian mythology executed by another impoverished recent migrant from India, who has transferred his vision of the distant world of his cultural consciousness into his work; the work of art represents his version of the past, now speaking to Ravi who is forming his own version. His is a work of love, into which he 'must have put all his disappointments, nostalgia and dreams' (p. 4).

Again the narrative voice suggests that Ravi shared in those sublimated yearnings of the artist, for a vision of life that contained more promise than the dusty tracks of a rubber estate ending at a cemetery. The imagery surrounding the grandmother's existence in Bedong creates a richly layered world; and it is this which forms the emotional background of the young Ravi's memories of her.

The symbolic house whose entrance pillars lead into another world, now seeming far away, conducts the votive mind searching for meaning from the past to another thematic image: the light which burns within.

The image of light comes from the Friday prayer ritual, for which the grandmother prepares herself carefully. The grandmother herself is changed by the experience. The simple image of her is stark in its bareness yet evocative. Dressed in white purity, her face masked by saffron, her manner preoccupied, 'absorbed, impenetrable' (p. 4), she seems no longer on the mundane level of life. The time of twilight ('mysterious dusk') adds to the potent atmosphere, as does the hushed expectancy of the circle of waiting children.

The act of setting up the sacred space for prayer with its ring of cosmic fire (p. 4) is itself a deliberate rite, which leads to the culminating image of the light of the ritualistic lamps:

> Then she drew forth bronze tier lamps and pouring oil from a clay container, she set them, three in number, alight. The sari, the jewellery and the idol glowed now, creating a kind of eternity around them. (pp. 4-5)

The symbolic light of eternity evoked through the religious imagery of the novel illumines the grandmother's existence, transforming the harsh drabness of an itinerant way of life (the transient life of the uprooted) into a world that is meaningful and intense. Through such

ritualistic transformation, the grandmother is able to participate in the profound way of life left behind, which otherwise seems remote from her new mode of existence.

However the whole episode is recalled as a powerful memory, and the act of remembering is also a reminder of time and distance. In Ravi's imaginative recreation of the scene, his grandmother's total absorption into that world of mystery and magical force seems like 'a re-immersion, a recreating of the thick spiritual and domestic air she must have breathed <u>there, back in some remote district in India</u>' (p. 6; my emphasis).

The remote source of the memory indicated here implies a juxtaposition of worlds. The ritual takes the grandmother far away from the world of actuality, the world of selling vadai in the streets of Bedong, which is also a world that is insistent and not to be escaped from permanently. This other world, no less real, claims the attention of the narrator's 'other memories' (p. 12) of his early life. Yet for the intense moment when he watches his grandmother enact the ritual of worship, Ravi glimpses the potency of a different way of being:

> Her voice transformed the kolams into contours of reality and fantasy, excitingly balanced. I felt I stood on the edge of a world I [might] have known. (p. 6)

In the actual world of Bedong, the meaner vision prevails over the grandmother's longing for the greater intensities of metaphysical fantasy.

Ironically, from this point onwards, the narrator records the closing in of an already narrow world: the 'black area' curfews which regulate daily life; the image of the grandmother sleeping 'on a cramped wooden platform at the back of a provision shop' (p. 7); the story of the futile chase after legality at the Town Council Office; the tumour which finally kills her body, though it cannot entirely defeat her spirit.

The emotional withdrawal of the grandmother ('some inner preoccupation robbed her walk of its customary jauntiness'; p. 8) marks a kind of realisation by the reflective Ravi that her hopes of being considered the 'rightful heir' (p. 8) to the land she has come to were illusions: 'she had no papers, only a vague belief and a dubious loyalty' (p. 9). The irony of legality mirrors a wry evaluation of the inefficacy of incipient 'belief' and 'loyalty'. Yet the haunting last image of the grandmother suggests that her inarticulate struggle with the colonial encounter could not defeat her 'belief' and 'loyalty', which continue to light up her 'eyes [that] never lost their vitality' and that 'never spoke a farewell' (p. 110) to those left behind to continue the struggle.

'Belief' and 'loyalty' are nebulous values given an intense life in the finely balanced metaphysics of the grandmother, as she is remembered by Ravi. The act of remembrance is also a balancing act for Ravi ('I felt I stood on the edge of a world ...'), but the balance is tipped by the communist Emergency, which draws him back into the actual world of Bedong.

It is this world which he will explore: 'My other memories were of a lush green countryside, cloud-striated sky ...'; p. 12) arching over the family home, and, thus, another house -- this one apparently only functional compared to the fantasy carved on the portals of the grandmother's house. But the pattern of discovery is to be repeated by Ravi, who plays under a 'graying cloth draped ... like a shroud' over his grandmother's all but forgotten tin trunks. The symbolism of the image encapsulates the grandmother's experience. And out of it, the special aura of the mystic light glows for Ravi.

This time the grandmother's lamps are lit at Deepavali, Thaipusam, and Ponggal, the festivals of the community when everyone comes together. But for Ravi, the secret meaning is to be seen only when the lamps are lit, creating 'large, blue-tinged auras on the air, the flames burning steadily' (p. 14), for then they shine on 'a special country' of the mind, revealing 'an invisible landscape' (p. 14) which transforms the ordinariness of the family house.

There is a darker aspect to this landscape of fantasy, for it is a country inhabited by unseen spirits, ruled by superstitions which find a sign in everyday occurrences (p. 15). But its emotional intensity renders it 'more tangible than the concrete one' (p. 15) of Bedong and Sungei Petani. It is a voice from this world, speaking from the dimension of dream-significance, which snatches Ravi out of the familiar dual orbits of the Bedong/Ramayana worlds of his family, and into a clash between the Indian past (so richly recalled in the framing structures of his mind) and the colonial

present. The story of this conflict is a theme which has been touched upon in an earlier paper[2], so I will restrict my remarks to the framework devices of time in the novel.

The voice from the world of dream speaks through Ravi's 'stepmother' and this voice announces a course of action which introduces Ravi to his third internal landscape. This is the landscape of learning which eventually releases him from the bonds of his other backgrounds, but not without an inner cultural wrench, which leaves him with permanent psychic scars.

The story of Ravi from this stage of his metamorphosis delineates his development away from the traditional spheres of his family and the Tamil community of Bedong and Sungei Petani. The autobiography records the process by which Ravi makes the transition from the fantastic dimension lit by his grandmother's cosmic 'circle of flame', which had made whole the imaginative life of his childhood, to the plane of a fractured self awareness, which sees him moving uneasily from one cultural ambience to another.

The self awareness being nurtured in Ravi reflects the loss of community which is the inevitable corollary of individuality. This is an area of the cross-cultural encounter often crippling to the emerging sense of a personal being, so that the biography of such a transition is often that of disillusionment and alienation: such is the area of psychological darkness associated with V. S. Naipaul's investigation of this phenomenon. *The Return* records a similar loss of meaning in the death

of Naina, in which the brilliance of the grandmother's ritual lights is made 'lustreless, cultureless' (p. 183).

But K. S. Maniam's record of this transition in *The Return* struggles to discover a way out of the darkness of the divided self. Ravi may mourn the distancing of the community spirits in 'our invisible world' (p. 15), but his battle to sustain a sense of wholeness is not a fatal one. In the end he emerges with a sense that the rituals of that communal world, now rendered 'useless' (p. 180), may not be the base for transmutation into a brave new world, but the loss has not utterly destroyed him. Again this may be an effect of the autobiographical voice. Naina's death is felt, its intensity being signified by the fire-twisted articles of the shrine room:

> Nataraja, only darker, had fallen on his side. Periathai's tier lamps had survived the flames, one or two twisted by the heat. (p. 181)

The record of loss implies a distancing ambiguity (the darker, fallen god, the twisted lamps), but its objectivity (so different from the immersion in anguish felt by the mother) can still note wryly the survival of the lamps.

Ravi's sense of loss, then, is not simple. His complex 'knot' of feelings finds itself in the textually perfect expression of the poem composed by the narrator, which ends the 'tormenting recognition' (p. 182) of loss. For the fact remains that Ravi can transmute loss

into an ordered and ordering experience of his world.

Before he dies, Naina chants in a 'garbled language' (p. 180), as though desperately trying to make sense of the destruction to come. The grandmother's symbolic house has been turned into a 'mass of burnt rubble' (p. 181) and with Naina's death, it is replaced by another symbolic house, the funerary house of death fashioned by the priest. With the crumbling of the funerary house, the old ways disintegrate, liberated by the stream behind the house and 'setting the spirit free at last,' (private communication with the author on 18th February 1987). The priest's actions are merely the formal religious double for the act of liberation on the secular plane carried out by Naina before his death, when he burns down the family home.

The Return thus comes full circle with its central image cluster. There is another transformation of the image before the novel closes. Ravi marks the anguish of Naina's attempt to fashion a new kind of shrine of worship from the soil of the land, but he builds quite a different structure. Out of the stony rubbish of the burnt-over waste land, Ravi fashions his house of words. It is a measure of the integrity of this novel that in making the journey out and subsequent return ('Full Circle'; p. 182), its protagonist wears the lineaments of pain, yet can still hear the 'secret language' (p. 180) to be spoken to the new world. (The theme of the 'secret language' was the subject of the paper already referred to.)

This essay will conclude with the suggestion that an exploration of temporal strategies in *The Return* can reveal an intricate play of narrative consciousness. Indeed the idea of time passing frames our perception of the worlds in conflict which are reconstituted by the emergent mind of the central figure of the novel. Ravi is caught inescapably in the flux of time, even as he defines himself against its flow.

Notes

[1] K. S. Maniam, *The Return*, Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann, 1981.

[2] in a joint paper by the present writer and Dr. Irene Wong, which was presented at the ACLALS conference, University of Guelph, August 1983; and published in SARE (1983).

"The Heart of Darkness Revisited: Marianne Wiggins's John Dollar"

Review of

Marianne Wiggins. *John Dollar*. London: Penguin Books, 1989. vi + 234pp.

by

Wong Ming Yook

In *John Dollar*, one feels that the British Empire is once again on trail: the terribly English colonials out in Burma that Wiggins cuttingly portrays are made to look ridiculous in their strutting postures and superiority. If arrogance and chauvinism made the British Empire, Wiggins in this novel has decided that these same attitudes brought about its downfall.

John Dollar is reminiscent of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. In fact, it parallels the earlier novels in many ways. It tells a hellish story within the context of a shipwreck on a Burmese island; except, in *John Dollar*, the leading roles are female. The hell created out of a forced life on a lush and wild island is one borne out of what Wiggins thinks is a perverse civilisation. The stranded characters do not 'revert' to their natural bestial state on the island, away from the safety of a watchdog society. Like Defoe's Crusoe, they try to maintain the laws and religion they were brought up to regard as superior. But Wiggins insists that this law and this religion are, in fact, as beastly as the

eastern cultures the British have come to replace. Highlighted, pared to basics and essentials on the island, Western civilisation is found to be not so much brittle and unable to withstand the wildness around, but as bestial, tribal and savage as the local cultures in the untamed east. Between the demented girls who feed on John Dollar in a fantastic and horrifyingly unholy eucharistic rite, and the native cannibals who kill and then eat the girls' fathers, there is very little difference.

Set first in Cornwall, the novel starts off with the death of Charlotte, the leading female character, and the attempts by her half-breed companion and one-time pupil, Menaka, or Monkey as she is better known, to bury her on holy ground. The rest of the story is an extended flashback, as Monkey, surreptitiously digging her mistress's grave in the dead of night after being refused a proper funeral by the vicar, remembers their lives in Burma in 1918. The British society in Rangoon that Charlotte found herself in was narrow minded, conspiratorial, and repressive. But beneath the obviously social exterior, Wiggins exposes the extremities the characters are capable of, in the privacy of their own uncensored musings. The atmosphere created is strange and surreal. Wiggins's portrayal of the children especially succeeds very well in drawing this out. In their naturalness, these British children teeter between two worlds, that of their parents' civilised and socially restrictive world, and that of the more uninhibited world they share with the natives. Theirs is the simple, uncomplex mind, which sees black as black; and it is this literalness in them which lends them their strangeness. The twins, Sloan and Sybil

(Sam and Eric of *The Lord of the Flies*), for instance, project the idea of children as little savages who must be trained and schooled to become civilized like their master-parents. The Burmese natives are identified with the British children; they too, have simple, uncomplex minds, blessed or cursed with a literalness beyond the understanding of the Western mind. The twins' mother, Kitty Ogilvy, hates them as the white overlords hate their Eastern subordinates. This hatred is born of fear. It is a fear of the unknown, and both the children and the natives are the unknown to the white adult colonials. *John Dollar* does not only set out to damage the reputation of the British colonials. That would be too dated. Wiggins looks not only at the Burmese natives but also the female natives (especially the female children who, stranded on the island, act out their mothers' hideous repressions), colonised and conquered in their own lands. The greater the repressions, the greater the perversions. Kitty Ogilvy hates and fears her twins also because they represent her darkest aspect. If they are monstrous, then, as Wiggins implies, they were born of a monstrous mother who dwells in Kitty's soul.

Such postcolonialist and feminist concerns aren't new, but Wiggins writes with a clever and subversive hand to get her point across. I read this novel at a go because it had enough elements in it to interest me. Still, this doesn't erase the fact that *John Dollar* is a book that I'm a little uneasy about. I recognise the intentions of the writer: anti-British imperialism, anti-white domination, anti-male chauvinism. It is clever and subversive in ways that should make any anti-

imperialist and 'coloured' feminist happy, but -- I find it rather condescending to be told that the British are as bad as the simple-minded Burmese cannibals, and that female repressions outclass male repressions in the degree and extent of their perversions. Wiggins hasn't done either the feminist cause or the East a favour. She hasn't really shed her white imperialist skin, but yes, one does get the impression that she's trying, if trying is all it takes.

LAWRENCE JONES. *BARBED WIRE & MIRRORS: ESSAYS ON NEW ZEALAND PROSE.* DUNEDIN: UNIV OF OTAGO PRESS, 1987. PP. 278.

Review by

C. S. Lim

This book of essays is basically new-critical in its approach though some of the essays go beyond the text to take account of the context. There is nothing like it to introduce a subject. At least it hugs the text and does not float free of its ostensible pretext.

It is often a dissatisfying experience to read a book of reviews. The centrifugal tendency of the volume is constantly threatening disintegration to any unifying ambition the author-compiler may aspire to. Lawrence Jones's book is no exception. It has a fragmentary feel in spite of what Jones claims is "a kind of coherence ... a coherence as a work of literary history". If one concedes that coherence, then it is the loose coherence of a clutch of literary-historical documents. Jones provides his own example to this disintegrative trend in the essays on the realist tradition and what he calls "the other tradition". "The second one," he tells us, "corrects the first while it complements it" (5). He hopes to bring out a full-fledged literary history of New Zealand fiction in the near future which might be more coherent and integrated in form.

Jones sees the critic's task as the search for the author's "idiosyncratic mode of regard" (a phrase he borrows from Thomas Hardy). This can be related to John Carey's search for the "master images" of an author's imagination which are supposed to help the reader to discover the author's idiosyncratic way of seeing. Basically we are still in the realm of the "objective characteristics" of formalist criticism.

There are good essays on Frank Sargeson, Janet Frame and C. K. Stead. From the Sargeson Tradition, Lawrence Jones traces the development of New Zealand fiction to the point where a claim is made on Janet Frame's behalf which does not seem to sound too extravagant -- Owls Do Cry ranks "as one of the very few novels of the last twenty-five years written anywhere in the English-speaking world that can be put next to the work Faulkner and Joyce without being dwarfed" (184).

The volume as a whole is full of sharp insights and helpful comments for readers who may want to explore the area of New Zealand writing as it has been and continues to be inscribed.

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