

Resisting Colonialist Discourse

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The deciphering of the codes of oppression is the first act of liberation.

Homi Bhabha 1984: 109

INTRODUCTION

This paper was born out of a private dialogue between brown skin and white mask. The brownness is an ethnic specificity that now demands to change the complexion of things in criticism. The mask was acquired after one century of British Imperialism and several decades of Canon-worshipping, Leavisite transcendental aesthetics and I.A. Richards's impractical criticism on the Equator. At the heart of the struggle is a newly found resistance that has not come easily to someone who grew up on "The Daffodils" in the First Form and the "Pardoner's Tale" in the Fifth, although neither daffodils nor Christianity then existed for her except in the words on the page. Resistance when it finally came felt like an act of betrayal against some powerful but benevolent Patriarch; and this, coming after 32 years of Independence, drives home the sad point that colonization of the mind doesn't end even when colonization of the land stops.

For the Cambridge School Certificate Eng. Lit. syllabus, incongruously transplanted into Equatorial soils such as Malaysia, has produced a hybrid that has tended to bend westward in search of light. Unsuspecting brown children such as I grew up to be dutiful adopted children of the Great Tradition and have thus become accustomed to the sophistication of its conventions, including the dynamics of novel reading.

I was, for instance, schooled in the rhetorics that turned omniscient third-person narrators into autonomous, autocratic demigods spewing "eternal universal truths". I learnt from the Canon of the Great Tradition that a good novel should deal with human problems of universal application that must transcend historical, social and political boundaries. I was trained to map typological features of plot, setting and character to gain passage to aesthetic enjoyment of a work of art. Point of view was something that only belonged to the author and his assorted fictional creatures while I must sit on their shoulders to view the world. Even the

more liberal reader-response theories disregard historical and cultural particularities of the “ideal” or “implied” reader in favour of universality, to avoid Babel. The fact that I might see things differently, being a Malaysian and a descendant of what was once a subject race, was totally irrelevant to the reading process. In short, I became the kind of universal (i.e. western) reader literary conventions wanted me to be.

However, my recent encounter with Marxist critical theory in general and Edward Said/post-Saidian theory in colonialist discourse in particular, and their concern with the eternal triangle of history-ideology-literature have made this position untenable. According to Marxist critical theory, texts negotiate meaning through history and ideology. According to Said, Western texts on the Orient are part of a rhetorical strategy by which the West attempts to control the East. With this new awareness, a native reader can no longer afford to transcend his ethnocentricity because his own historical, ideological and cultural consciousness is aroused and now demands to be counted. For the first time I see the relevance of my own identity (however it is constructed, by “us” or by “them”) and my own point of view (however it is influenced) that can be brought to bear upon the text. I cease to be a universal reader because an innocent eye, trained by reading conventions only to appreciate the universal aesthetics of fiction, cannot uncover ideological subtleties buried in the rhetorics. It cannot see, for instance, that a setting, while pretending to be an open space of the real, is actually an encampment of the ideological. It can only see plot and character as clever little devices that forge artistic unity and cohesion, not as part of a series of explanations and justifications for Imperial imposition of will on the “other”. Worse, it blinds us to the possibility that we have been trapped in “strategies of naturalization and cultural assimilation which make our readings unwillingly collusive and profoundly uncritical.” (Bhabha 1984: 98 – 9)

As will be more fully discussed later, what a colonialist writer (i.e. a writer from a dominant/colonising society writing on the colonial experience) chooses to include or leave out is not a random decision but one determined by a hidden ideological agenda. For this purpose variables are suppressed, contingencies are limited, complexities are avoided and the entire battery of literary forms and conventions is deployed for what is made out to be mere aesthetics. For the native reader, disturbed by the continual, persistent negative images of him/herself in the colonialist representation, a certain distrust takes shape against both content and intent. A resisting response such as this needs a critical procedure to legitimize itself within a more formal and disciplined hermeneutics.

To re-integrate himself with worldly actuality, the critic of texts ought to be investigating the system of discourse by which the “world” is divided, administered, plundered, by which humanity is thrust into pigeonholes, by which “we” are

“human” and they are “not”, and so forth. We will discover that even so innocuous a discipline as philology has played a crucial role in the process. Most important, we should be intent upon revealing the secrecy, the privatization of texts whose circumstantial thickness and complicity are covered by the other-worldly prestige of art or of mere textuality. (Said 1976: 93)

This paper, therefore, proposes an alternative reading position that will take on board ideological and historical specificities as well as the plurality of meanings created by cultural differences. It will attempt to devise a reading strategy that will unlock colonial text by a method of resistance to both reading conventions and ideological assumptions. It will argue against any tradition that assumes textual cohesion, authorial control and universality of meaning by destabilizing the ideological structure of the text, by detecting fault-lines of conflicting discourses or slippages from ideological projects. It will resist and subvert both the said and the not-said. I see in this act of rebellion a beginning of a more realistic and equitable relationship between reader and writer on one hand and “colonised” reader and colonising tradition on the other.

The text used for this analysis is *The Malayan Trilogy* by Anthony Burgess, a three-part story about, according to the blurb, “the racial and social prejudices of post-war Malaya during the chaotic upheaval of Independence”. There are many reasons why this novel is an apt choice. Firstly, the fact that it was written by a British administrator while still in the Colonial service of Malaya and Borneo (1954 – 1960) provides the best context in which to explore how the ideology of Empire is translated into colonialist literature. Secondly, the pre-independence (i.e. before 1957) setting of the story which is a site of much conflict between coloniser and colonised furnishes further material for ideological dissection. Thirdly, the abundance of dialogues between coloniser and colonised, on a range of controversial issues, provides a wealth of contending discourses for ideological analysis. Fourthly, the ideological content of a fiction rooted in a specific historical situation seems to cry out for the nit-picking tools of Macherey rather than the beauty kit of Leavis or I.A. Richards.

RESISTANCE AS A METHOD

I hope it has become apparent that the kind of resistance I am advocating as a strategy entails a conscious rejection of a number of reading conventions which prescribe authorial control, structural unity and cohesion, universality of meaning, consistency of “taste” and criticism-as-appreciation/evaluation. Such conventions turn every text into a moral discourse to be consumed with a prescribed dose of “appropriateness” and moral “intuition”. They preserve universality of aesthetic judgement

through the operation of taste and block the entry of historical and cultural differences into the system, thus denying the very grounds on which to pose questions of colonialism at the heart of colonialist discourse.

Differences of class, gender, race and contradictions as evinced in the struggle for hegemony, which constitute the text of politics and history, are always superseded in the quest for universal meanings. Such questions, then, will be repressed in the affirmation of a Transcendental Human Nature, the undying category of universalism. (Homi Bhabha 1984: 102)

Therefore, for my purpose, the Marxist approach of making history and ideology relevant to literature is a useful step in the right direction, bearing in mind the special circumstances and concerns of colonialism-in-Hulme's definition of colonialist discourse as "an ensemble of linguistically based practices unified by their common deployment in the management of colonial relationships" (Hulme 1986: 2). The most logical strategy for unlocking colonialist texts seems to be what Eagleton and Belsey have called an ideological analysis (Eagleton 1978 and Belsey 1980). My specific mode of analysis, however, borrows heavily from Macherey's theory of literary production.

Macherey's basic notion is that the novelist is seen not as infallible creator but as "the producer of a text" (Macherey 1978: 41), a worker who transforms diverse raw materials (literary genres, language, conventions, ideology, experiences etc.) into an end-product (the novel). Critics of various persuasions are quick to point out that this Machereyan figure is not unlike the Formalist user of devices or the Structuralist user of codes. But, as David Forgacs reminds us, Macherey has given his production model a distinctive Marxist twist "by bringing into play a theory of reading which sees texts as necessarily *incomplete* and contradictory and which is crucially concerned with *ideology*" (Forgacs 1986: 178).

Ideology is an imaginary consciousness that helps make sense of the world. When it enters the text, it is expressed in the language of illusion (fiction) but it is "an illusion *interrupted, realized, completely transformed*" (Macherey 1978: 62) and therefore not mere deception. Ideology, like everything else that goes into the end-product, is changed as it is pitted against other disparate elements and is consequently transformed into something different from what it originally was. As a result of this transformation, there is now a difference between the ideology of the writer and his society, and the ideology produced by the text. That is to say, the author's intended ideological project before entry into fiction may not work out as it was intended to do.

The change was certainly not part of the author's intention. One might even say that he had overlooked it: not because he had not noticed it... but because by the very logic of his work he had to let it happen. (Macherey 1978: 50)

In other words, the author is never fully aware of what his/her own text is doing. This is certainly a far cry from Stanzel's "omniscient" vision, or Genette's "zero focalization", or Rimmon-Kennan's "panoramic", Prince's "unrestricted" and Fowler's "unlimited" views ascribed to the author (implied or otherwise) who, according to Booth "knows everything" and "demands our absolute faith in his powers of divination." (Booth 1961: 161) In contrast, Macherey's authorial "gaze" is more human since the object of its vision is "never completed, always escaping from a fixed gaze, never completely grasped, mastered, or exhausted" (Macherey 1978: 56 - 7).

The text, equally unaware of what it is doing (this is its unconscious), admits and transforms the state of consciousness we call ideology, and in doing so creates "a conflict within the text between the text and its ideological content" (Macherey 1978: 124) The resulting discourse, "torn and gaping", exposes all its contradictions and the author displays lapses and omissions corresponding to the incoherence of the ideological discourse he has used, "for in order to say anything there are other things which must not be said." (Macherey 1978: 85)

Our task as critic is not to show how all the parts of the text fit together but rather to attend to the text's unspoken and suppressed "voices" because "the speech of a book comes from a certain silence" (Macherey 1978: 85) and always there exists, "at the edge of the text, the language of ideology, momentarily hidden, but eloquent by its very absence" (Macherey 1978: 60).

Thus we must go beyond the work and explain it, must say what it does not and could not say: just as the triangle remains silent over the sum of its angles. (Macherey 1978: 77)

In fact, the text's richness lies not in its unity but precisely in its contradictions which provide the critic with an archeology of knowledge for his/her theoretical understanding to bear upon.

However this method does not call for the critic to "unfold the line of the text to discover the message inscribed there" (Macherey 1978: 77, to unearth its hidden meaning in all its naked truth, its so-called universal essence. Neither does it require him to judge its credibility and its worth according to some pre-determined rules of the game. Its mode of analysis is descriptive, not interpretative or evaluative. The task of the critic is not to search for the ultimate meaning, or to decide whether a work is good or bad, accurate or inaccurate, but rather to explain the text in all its complexities and contradictions without smoothing over them, by recognizing the internal and external necessity that determines the work. To do this, the work must be considered not as an object of consumption (i.e. comprehension leading to meaning and value judgement) but of

knowledge (i.e. a theoretical fact requiring investigation) to be “used” but more importantly to be “left as it is”. Knowledge here is not knowledge of reality that can be judged true or false but as something the critic brings to bear on the text.

Another related conventional notion that this method rejects is one that sees criticism as a search for a single meaning intended by a powerful creative presence that “instructs us silently, through the design of the whole” (Chatman 1976: 148). As has already been mentioned, the text is a site where diverse and disparate raw materials undergo a range of metamorphic possibilities and is actually saying and not saying several contradictory things at once. A text is founded on the multiplicity of its meanings. To explain it is to recognize and differentiate the principle of this diversity and complexity.

By a kind of inward hesitation the text advertises the plurality of its voices. It is this diversity and multiplicity which will require elucidation. (Macherey 1978: 26)

The implication of all these to an analysis of colonial discourse is that colonial ideology, which had justified colonial domination for centuries, can now be seen for what it is, in all its contradictions. In the conflict between its contending voices and its divergent meanings, the text “criticizes its own ideology... its own values, in the sense that it is available for a new process of production of meaning by the reader...” (Belsey 1980: 109). An analysis of *The Malayan Trilogy* will first have to establish Burgess’ ideological project based on the colonial ideology that informs it, before examining the processes that undermine it.

IDEOLOGY OF EMPIRE IN COLONIALIST DISCOURSE

But first, a little ground-clearing, starting with the overgrowth of imperial ideology for two centuries and the organic way in which it crept and twined into colonialist discourse, no doubt nurtured by the sun that never set on the British Empire.

Imperialism is a confusing term that has meant different things to different people. As an umbrella word, it covers “the whole gamut of relations between a dominant and subservient society” and is generally used “to indicate the tendency of one society or state to control another, by whatever means and for whatever purpose” (Fieldhouse 1981: 1). Sometimes it is used synonymously with colonialism.

According to D.K.Fieldhouse whose distinction will now be adopted for my limited purpose here, there are three different usages of the term “imperialism”. To the Marxists, it represents a certain stage in the evolution of modern capitalism when it becomes necessary for European

capitalists “to divide the world between them, first into commercial empires, then into political empires, in order to safeguard their monopoly of markets and sources of raw materials” (Fieldhouse 1981: 2). Colonialism, which is the condition of dependent societies within these political empires, is both an inevitable historical product and also an integral aspect of capitalist imperialism.

To non-Marxists, imperialism can be understood in two ways. The first interpretation sees imperialism as an inevitable consequence of commercial (but not necessarily capitalist or monopolistic) rivalry between contending European powers, and the political necessity to take over ineffectual indigenous governments in order to better withstand the pressures of this competition. Colonialism is then seen as a solution: by dividing the world geographically, it resolves a conflict of interests; by imposing political rule, it creates order and a workable framework for Western enterprise. The history of the British Empire in Malaya is filled with “reluctant” political interventions driven by “inevitable” historical forces and economic “necessity”, as will become apparent.

In contrast, the other non-Marxist view includes intentionality in its perception of imperialism as “the deliberate act or advocacy of extending or maintaining a state’s direct or indirect political control over any other inhabited territory” (Fieldhouse 1981: 3), for a multitude of reasons ranging from protection of overseas interests to sheer national pride in territorial acquisition. The basic argument is that colonization is a matter of choice, not of necessity.

The motives of imperialism and colonialism remain a matter of controversy. What is more certain is that imperialism, however it was motivated, is the cause and colonialism, its product or effect. The two terms have been used synonymously until recently.

It was only in the early 1950’s that a conventional distinction came to be made between imperialism and colonialism. Imperialism was now restricted to the dynamics of empire-building and, for Marxists, to Lenin’s “the highest stage of capitalism” in more developed countries. Colonialism then emerged as a general description of the state of subjection – political, economic, and intellectual – of a non-European society which was the product of imperialism. (Fieldhouse 1981: 6)

One could view imperialism in many ways. One could see it as an unplanned enterprise and an inevitable albeit transient phase in the evolving relationship between more or less developed parts of the world. Or one could see it with Franz Fanon and other denouncers of imperialism as an exploitative enterprise by the West and for the West on the wretched of the earth who are forced to give up their freedom, wealth and cultural heritage in exchange for “civilization”. Or one could take any of the positions taken by various historians, as summed up by John P. Halstead:

Both Nicholas Mansergh and William Langer saw imperialism as a function of diplomacy. In their view, the colonies were mainly pawns in a larger game whose objectives and concerns were situated in Europe rather than in Africa or Asia. C J Lowe sees it as a function of European power politics, more particularly as one British response to declining influence in continental affairs and to the vulnerability of India's land frontier. Archibald Thornton has also advanced a power theory to the effect that the British governing classes of the late nineteenth century felt they had been endowed with a vocation for exercising power responsibly at home and abroad, and British imperialism was simply the Asian and African expression of their felt duty.... Gallagher and Robinson saw British imperialism as one facet of Britain's effort to maximize free trade around the world. They felt this created a continuity in British expansion throughout the century and that the "Scramble" for African territory which concluded the century was the final chapter of a story that began with informal controls and ended with formal annexations. (Halstead 1983: 4)

However, these are rationalizations after the event and may not reflect the nature of British Imperial ideology as it was then operative in the age of Empire. To most Victorians, imperialism was an acceptable means of dealing with troublesome natives, and the use of power or coercion of the weak by the strong, as long as it was justified by benevolence, was not yet regarded as immoral. It was felt that not only did the British have the power and the will to exercise that power but also the absolute right to use it. That ideology had a lot to do with how the British then conceived themselves, their imperial enterprise and the people they colonized. The prevalent self-image was one of a race morally, culturally, intellectually and administratively superior, while the imperial project was seen as a civilizing mission to bring light to an inferior race of savages living in the heart of darkness. This concept was modelled on the aspirations of late 18th. century universalist humanism for shared equality and rationality of the human race, and later on the reforming zeal of late 19th. century Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism (Williams 1988: 39). The Victorians believed deeply in progress which, they were convinced, could be achieved by imposing the superiority of English values and institutions on lesser breeds. In fact, good government became a major objective of British foreign policy, "guided by the practical imperatives of trade, the moral imperatives of philanthropy, the certainty that wars and revolutions were best avoided by enlightened rule, a conviction of righteousness and the superiority of English institutions..." (Halstead 1983: 33)

Unfortunately, for any reforming theory to work, first there must be a people in need of it, a society that was so morally, spiritually and socially depraved as to warrant Imperial (i.e. divine) intervention whether that society liked it or not. It therefore became important that this society at the receiving end of the benevolent gesture was seen to be in need of salvation.

It is fair, at this juncture, to point out that some historians are not convinced that Imperialism had created such negative images of primitive societies for its own purpose. These images had already existed in the pre-imperial world of science and popular literature and imperialism had merely hardened the picture. Be it as it may, by the eighteenth century which marks the beginning of British Imperialism in Malaysia, interest in primitive man was already sustained by traveller's tales, and from 1870's onwards by mass-produced "ethnographic novels" brought to the Victorian drawing-rooms by improved publishing techniques. The paradox of romanticism and savagery that conditioned attitudes towards native societies came about from the need to sensationalize such aspects of primitive life as will increase readership and profit. Thus was the native stereotype born and nurtured.

Learned institutions and scientific theories of race in mid-nineteenth century helped provide a framework of thought in literature. The Ethnographical Society was formed in 1843 to collate information about native societies for future travellers; ethnology became a sub-section of the British Academy in 1846; the Anthropological Society of London was formed in 1863; archeological discoveries provided added stimulus; and Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1853 was used to put the natives in their proper place.

While it is difficult to trace any consistent development in the image from mid-century to the early twentieth century, since some authors were in closer contact than others with anthropology, there are some recognisable trends. The inferiority of the native, so common in the earlier image, is reinforced by the popularity of evolutionary theory and the notion of the survival of the fittest. The use of race as a means of classifying mankind and the notion of the scale of value, with European man at the top and primitive at the bottom, are parts of the old image which lived on, strengthened further by post-Darwinian anthropology. (Street 1975: 9)

The criteria for race classification had its roots in the Mediaeval "Great Chain of Being" which arranged nature in a universal hierarchy – a convenient model for 19th. century scientists to classify man. The criteria varied from such features as hair, colour, stature, facial features and – something better suited to laboratory verification – the width of the skull.

One line was drawn from the meeting of the lips to the most prominent part of the forehead and another from the opening of the ear to the base of the nose.... the measurements would fall into an ordered series from Greek statuary as the ideal form, through the European races, to Negroes as the lowest human variety and finally to the lower animals. (Curtin 1965: 39 – 40)

The truth of the matter is, whatever the criterion, the colonised native would still find himself right at the bottom of the scale just above the animals. Worse still, as soon as he got there, his anatomy and physiology

would be automatically correlated with his intellectual and moral capacity. At the other end of the scale was the Caucasian "chiefly distinguished by the beautiful form of the head" (Curtin 1965: 231) and "elevated sentiments, manly virtues and moral feelings" (Curtin 1965: 232). Such correlations between external and internal qualities, not to mention the sexist overtones, were thus given scientific backing so important in the growing age of positivism.

Thus the writer could refer in passing, with a background of "scientific" authority, to primitive people's inherent "laziness", "childishness" or "cruelty" or to the whiteman's "honour", "intelligence" or "democratic principles" as though these features were "natural", given by racial background and inheritance to all members of a particular race. (Street 1975: 77)

Such theories offered eternal immutable categories for defining the native character that could be used to justify Imperial presence and colonial expansion. For how could the unchanging unruly natives in perpetual need of colonial arbitration ever dispense with the Guardian of Justice and Order? Later, in the wake of growing native nationalism, this argument was invoked again and again in various discursive forms to ridicule the folly of adolescent rebellion against paternal protection.

Many British administrators received notions of superiority from British public schools where many a would-be empire-builder learned and practised the virtues of being British. According to its ethics, Britishness was synonymous with moral superiority associated with notions of good conduct, manly activities (including games), hard work, anti-intellectualism, and the nature and position of women. These virtues must be visibly expressed in good exemplary conduct. In the colonies, so strong would this power of good example prove to be that it was thought the Empire could be held or lost simply through correct behaviour; and it thus became "the whiteman's burden" to be constantly "on show". Sex was regarded as a shameful urge to be harnessed into energy for tennis, jungle-trekking, quelling native revolts or other such "manly" and practical activities. There was the Victorian/Edwardian tendency to turn the private sphere into a desexualized zone. The role of the colonial wife was not as mistress of the bedchamber but aristocratic lady of the manor, turning little bungalow into a bit of Great Britain. She was expected to behave, her sexuality being superior to the native variety, a difference between proper sentiment and sheer animal passion. The English gentleman was supposed to school his urges and not engender racial impurity through union with lustful native women, or face ostracism by his own kind for losing the dignity of his race.

By early twentieth century, details of the image for both coloniser and colonised had thus gained credibility by establishing themselves as "in the

true” and circulated as “facts”, to use Foucault’s words. Edward Said has painstakingly traced this easy passage from mere assertion to “truth” in *Orientalism*:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (Said 1978: 3)

The discursive strategy used in this conversion from subjective image to objective truth (what Said calls “a form of radical realism”) is a common device used by writers of colonialist discourse, as an analysis of *The Malayan Trilogy* will demonstrate later.

...anyone employing Orientalism which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities and regions deemed Oriental, will designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality... The tense they employ is the timeless eternal; they convey an impression of repetition and strength... For all these functions it is frequently enough to use the simple is. (Said 1978: 72)

Our task as a critic is to examine the ideology of Empire behind the rhetorics, sometimes bugled, sometimes muffled, sometimes silenced, but as much manifested by its absence as it is by its presence. The possibility of a contradiction between, for instance, its discursively overt (civilizing) and materially covert (politically and economically exploitative) projects provides a fissure for ideological criticism to lodge itself. It is an inadequate critical procedure that does not recognise the need to disclose this network of social, historical and ideological currents or to unearth its subversive elements. To do that, however, requires an analysis that never loses sight of the historical specificities of the text.

COLONIALISM IN MALAYSIA

To present historical specificities, as I am now about to do, is to be caught up in a catch-22 situation. While it is necessary to “inform” innocent readers, such “information”, derived from a number of historical texts and now transformed into the present discourse, may have its own gaps and omissions. At best, it can only be a contending discourse to the one it is meant to explain. At worst, it requires the same kind of explanation itself. Perhaps an awareness of its limitation is all that is needed for the present analysis, because the other alternative is an endless back-to-square-one regression that will get us nowhere.

When we come to the specific case of Malaysia, there is enough historical evidence (ironically, most of my sources are British due to sheer exigency) to indicate that colonialism was motivated by European commercial interests. The sultanate of Malacca on the Malay Peninsula at the height of its power in the fifteenth century controlled the corridor that carried the traffic of the world's busiest East-West trade. Its strategic position at the centre of the spice and China trade was a temptation to foreign economic powers scanning the eastern seas for a base. The Portuguese seized it first in 1511, followed by the Dutch in 1641; and for almost a century after, it changed hands from the Dutch East India Company to the British East India Company, back and forth, according to how these two corporate rivals drew up their spheres of influence, much like a custody battle in a divorce case. Meanwhile, other attempts were made to find naval stations for British ships by enterprising traders and employees of the East India Company. In 1786, one Francis Light (later knighted, better known to school children in British Malaya as "founder of Penang") prevailed upon the Sultan of Kedah to the north of Malacca to cede the island of Penang for an annual payment of \$6000 "on conditions never strictly honoured by the East India Company" (Smith & Bastin 1967: 35), and later some 280 square miles of territory on the mainland for an additional \$4000 per annum. Similarly, in 1819 one Stamford Raffles (later knighted, better known as "founder of Singapore") prevailed on the Sultan of Johore to the south of Malacca to cede the island of Singapore in return for \$5000 per year plus an annual income of \$3000 for the resident Chief, both of whom pledged to grant "no treaty or settlement to any other power, European or American" (Tilby 1912: 304). In 1867, all three areas – Malacca, Penang and Singapore – became a Crown Colony known as the Straits Settlements.

On the eastern front, across the South China Sea on the island of Borneo, an adventurer from Norwich and the son of an East India Company employee, one James Brooke, began his reign as the first white Raja of Sarawak in 1841 after undertaking to make a small annual payment to the Sultan of Brunei as overlord. The same Sultan ceded 28,000 square miles of Sabah territory to the north between 1877-8 to what later became the North Borneo Company which quickly annexed all the independent rivers on the west coast. In 1888 all three areas – Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei – became British Protectorates.

In spite of the official British policy of non-intervention, the British government in 1874 decided to interfere in the affairs of four out of nine remaining states in Malaya, for various purported reasons, none of which cared to mention the relative economic wealth of the chosen territories. Suffice it to say that in time all four states agreed to accept British Residents who, under fiction of "advice" and consultation in "State Councils", then

promptly proceeded to exercise effective control of administration. The result was the formation of the "Federated Malay States". Outside the Federated territory, British influence moved in more mysterious ways; and the remaining five states known as the "Unfederated Malay States" soon accepted British Advisors by 1920s. The British take-over was now complete. Administration was centralized in the shape of the Governor of the Straits settlements who was also High commissioner for the Federated Malay states and the Borneo Protectorates.

The real British interest behind all these political manouvres might have a lot to do with a country that was fast becoming the world's biggest producer of tin. But such economic motives right from the beginning were discreetly silenced by Evangelical slogans and benevolent British foreign policy. Hugh Clifford, Governor of the Straits Settlement, High Commissioner for the Protected Malay States (1927 – 1929), was moved to proclaim that his task was the transformation of Malay society "to bring about some of those revolutions in facts and in ideas which we hold to be for the ultimate good of the race" (Clifford 1927: 53). Frank Swettenham, British Resident of a Federated Malay state, wrote in 1907 of the British right and might for intervention in order to govern and civilize.

My object is to show that, when the British Government at last consented to interfere in Malay affairs, the conditions of the problem to be solved were as complex as ingenuity could have devised. Further, that the means employed to grapple with this uninviting situation, and evolve order out of chaos were entirely novel. Finally, that the result obtained has been strikingly successful. (Swettenham 1907: 19)

Even the utilitarian Raffles had a higher vision, according to Mary Turnbull, whose thinly veiled eulogy of it in 1977 seems grossly anachronistic at a time when imperialism has gone out of fashion. Says she:

Raffles' personal ambitions and concern to boost British trade were backed by a sense of messianic mission. He did not seek territorial aggrandizement for Britain but rather a blend of commercial and moral pre-eminence.... he saw his country's role in South-East Asia almost as a crusade, to free the peoples of the eastern archipelago from civil war, piracy, slavery and oppression, to restore and revive their old cultures and independence, under the influence of European enlightenment, liberal education, progressive economic prosperity and sound law. (Turnbull 1977: 7)

Never mind the fact that as late as 1924 the British were still feeding opium to the population of Malaya because "between 1918 and 1922 approximately 30 per cent on average of Government revenue was derived from opium sale" (Syed Hussein Alatas 1977: 6); in fact the Government nationalized and monopolized the manufacture, sale and distribution of

opium from January 1st. 1910. Never mind too that European civilization had introduced large scale commercial slavery since the 17th. century, which prompted Raffles himself to observe: "These slaves were the property of the Europeans and Chinese alone: the native chiefs never require the services of slaves, or engage in the traffic of slavery" (Raffles 1965: 76). A pity Raffles could now never know the extent of abuse and debt-bondage among indentured Indian and Chinese labour on British and European plantations that persisted right into the early twentieth century (Syed Hussein Alatas 1977: 83 – 95) though, to be fair, it would please Raffles to know that the government did set up numerous labour commissions of enquiries from time to time to deal with the matter. This, incidentally, explains Malay refusal to provide labour on plantations: they were far better off in their own traditional occupations. The British who had to import labour called this "Malay indolence" because it was considered unproductive in colonial capitalist sense (Syed Hussein Alatas 1977: 95), an image that has been discursively perpetrated for over a century and loudly repeated in *The Malayan Trilogy*.

British immigration and labour policies (indentured labour was only finally abolished in 1912) born out of "economic necessity", brought into the country not only hundreds of thousands of immigrants from India and China but also the accompanying problems of a multi-racial society that the present Malaysian government has inherited, the very stuff of Burgess' Malayan fiction. In the past, the British found a solution in its divide-and-rule policy that kept the races apart in three different geographical and economic sectors (Malays in villages, Chinese in tin mines and urban areas, Indians on plantations), the very thing the present Malaysian government is crusading against by making it top priority policy to eradicate identification of race by occupation. The British method initiated and reinforced communal divisions and inhibited the development of nationalism, a strategy that might have been deliberate, for obvious reasons.

Political development was retarded in Malaysia because it tended to follow communal lines. The English-educated Malay aristocrats... urged the promotion of Malays in the civil service.... Among the Malay-speaking intelligentsia... there was interest in Pan-Islamic movement... and the idea of a unified, free Malay world... The Chinese tended to join branches of the Kuomintang and to focus their interest on China. A few joined the the Malayan Communist Party, which perpetrated some acts of terrorism and sabotage in the mid-1930s. In 1937 a Central Indian Association was formed... (McIntyre 1974: 232)

If there was anything good that came out of the Japanese Occupation of 1942 – 45, it must be the dramatic burst of Malay nationalism, an energy set free by a new awareness of British fallibility. Anti-colonialist sentiments reached their highest point when, on returning back to power, the British

overstepped their boundaries by forming the “Malayan Union” which vested “full power and jurisdiction” to the Crown and stripped the nine sultans completely of their power. Almost overnight numerous Malay organizations merged in 1946 into the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) which put up such fierce opposition as to make the British back down very quickly. By 1948 the Union was dead and was replaced by a representative government. At state level, British Advisers worked closely with Malay civil servants. In the Federal Legislative Council headed by the British high commissioner, British civil servants sat with Malay Chief Ministers from the nine states, representatives from the Straits Settlement and 50 nominated unofficial members representing the main economic interests and racial groups. Acts of government were made in the name of the Sultans jointly with the Crown (McIntyre 1974: 233).

Such an arrangement infuriated the Chinese and, in 1948, just as the Federation of Malaya got underway, the Malayan Communist party which had fought against the Japanese during the Occupation switched their military strategy from anti-Japanese to anti-British with the objective of setting up a Communist Republic of Malaya. Thus started the “Emergency” that lasted 12 years (1948 – 1960) during which “communist terrorists” wreaked havoc on administration and communication, killed English planters and businessmen including one High Commissioner, and forced the rural population to surrender their food supply.

Meanwhile, Malay leaders were pushing for a representative government leading to independence, resulting in the first Federal election under universal adult suffrage in 1955 and the appointment of a Malay Chief Minister of Malaya who had led to a landside victory a multi-racial coalition party called the Alliance (then comprising UMNO, Malayan Chinese Association and Malayan Indian Congress), now called the National Front. This Chief Minister later led a delegation to London to press for independence. Despite British scepticism of the new government’s ability to handle racial problems of its own Imperial making, better than it did itself in the past, Her Majesty’s government granted Malaya independence on 31st. August 1957 (Malaya was later to merge with Sarawak, Sabah and Singapore to form what is called Malaysia in 1963).

This was the political situation born out of a century of British Imperialism that greeted both Burgess and his fictitious character, Victor Crabbe, as they began their colonial service in Malaya in the 1950s.

RESISTING THE MALAYAN TRILOGY BY ANTHONY BURGESS

Narratively, *The Malayan Trilogy* (Burgess 1972) (henceforth referred to as *Trilogy*) is a collection of three novels, written at different times, each

with its own separate setting and characters, but all loosely held together by the rather unfocussed story of Victor Crabbe, education officer of British Malaya in the twilight of colonial rule. Ideologically, the seemingly disparate, disjointed narrative elements in fact constitute a single continuum of the unfolding problematics of a plural society and of colonialist mentality in its encounter with the racial Other. So absorbing is this ideological preoccupation of the writer that at times the private tale seems to be lost in the over-crowded historically significant events of the narrative.

Time for a Tiger (1956, henceforth referred to as *Tiger*), it is true, chronicles Crabbe's difficult relationships with his second wife and Malay mistress while the ghost of his first wife from some guilt-ridden past hangs over him. But what seems to come through more strongly is the image of a colonial administration losing its control and credibility, expressed by the sloppiness of the constabulary, the unprofessionalism of a school headmaster, the constant fear of communist attacks, the infiltration of communist ideas into the classroom, and open anti-British sentiments.

The thread of Crabbe's story is picked up again in *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958, henceforth referred to as *Enemy*) which sees the partial exorcism of his hang-ups via another act of infidelity with his superior officer's wife, ending in the parting of ways with his own. But the rest of the novel is filled with divisive elements of racial prejudices on one hand and, on the other, a united cry for Malayanisation in the civil service. It must be a new experience for a colonial officer like Crabbe, whose special privilege is always taken for granted, to find himself for the first time confronted with fierce open rivalry from a Malayan colleague impatient for change. Another jolt to colonial sensibility must be the marriage of a struggling, parasitic English lawyer to a wealthy Malay widow for money and his hypocritical conversion to Islam for that purpose; or more humiliating still, her complete physical and emotional domination over him in the end.

It is *Beds in the East* (1959, henceforth referred to as *Beds*) that finally integrates the personal into the political themes. This is embodied in Crabbe's conscious effort to promote inter-racial solidarity through the unconscious and neutral ground of culture and music, while all around him, his Malayan friends – Malays, Chinese, Indians, Penjabis, Eurasians – bicker and fight, make up and make love, until shouts of Independence finally bring the story to an uneasy, open-ended close.

There is much in *Trilogy*, therefore, that does not seem to be reflective either of the mainstream of imperial ideology or the norms of literary representation of coloniser and colonised, as outlined in the previous section. There is much evidence to suggest that Burgess' critical eye has refused to see the Malayan landscape and people through Conrad's

romantic mist; all that brooding mystery has been replaced by Burgess' own version of Said's "brute reality" (Said 1978: 5) in images of chaos, racial conflicts, communist insurgency, anti-British outbursts and many other things bad and ugly. Burgess seems equally determined not to be blinded by grandiose illusions of British supremacy that Somerset Maugham, looking out of his Bungalow window at the vast rubber plantations, had taken as a matter of course.

There is no doubt that Burgess thinks well of his clear, "realistic" vision acquired, presumably, from a close involvement with the natives (after all, *Tiger* was dedicated to his Malay friends, as his western readers would know if only they could read the Arabic script which he scribbled across the first page). There is an unsaid self-approbation in his apologetic preface to *Maugham's Malaysian Stories*:

A visitor like Maugham would talk and eat with these [Colonial Office civil servants or estate managers].... and the Malays and Chinese would merely bring drinks and serve dinner. Maugham cannot be blamed for making his stories centre on these expatriate Europeans, since they were the only people he could really get to know.... If Maugham had started writing Malayan short stories in, say, 1954, his plots and main characters might have been different...he did not become sufficiently aware of the changes that took place in the lives of the "natives"... (Maugham 1969: xvi)

As for Conrad, Burgess has a doctor in *Earthly Powers* say that Conrad did not know enough about Malaya and the East for he "left out the hookworm and the malaria and the yaws".

Whether Burgess wrote *Trilogy* out of an "anxiety of influence" against his literary predecessors or a noble urge to debunk the Imperial myth on behalf of the natives is something we will never know for certain. What is more important to the present analysis is that he has taken a certain *position* in relation to the then prevailing ideological climate against which his work must now be defined. That position seems to be in some kind of conflict with the norms of colonial ideology and discourse in that his representation of both coloniser and colonised appears to be out of joint with the temper of his time. It is a position deliberately assumed by the writer to formulate his way of looking at his subject. It is a position that explains *Trilogy's* preoccupation with "telling it as it is" by exploding the fallacy of British superiority on one hand and demystifying the exotic East on the other. Our task now is to decode the signs in *Trilogy* to see how this ideological project is worked out, to determine how far, *if at all*, it has truly veered from the Imperial constant, and at the same time to identify any contradictions that may emerge in the process of its unravelling.

The first indication of *Trilogy's* project is in its first three lines. Far from being a random opening gambit, it announces the start of a quest for the *truth*. It comes in the voice of Nabby Adams, the police-lieutenant whose

bawdy camaraderie with “Punjabis and Sikhs and God knows what” (Burgess 1972: 13) entitles him to speak with great disdain about lesser beings who lack his first-hand experience.

East? They wouldn’t know the bloody East if they saw it. Not if you was to hand it to them on a plate would they know it was the East. (Burgess 1972: 11)

It is probably the same kind of disdain Burgess would have for his compatriot arm-chair travellers of the Orient feeding on the fantasies of travel-writers. A novel born out of six years of direct involvement with Orientals up and down the country will surely place the author in a special position of credibility, if not superiority, for the wealth of knowledge he has thus acquired and must now display. And display Burgess does, with the mastery of an artist in full control of his material. His scenes are variegated and graphic in their details, as if he is painting a landscape he has known for years, not out of memory but simply “out there”. There is no mistaking his attempt to impress his readers with his superior knowledge of the little known colonial outpost in the East, in the following description:

The river Lanchap gives the state its name. It has its source in deep jungle, where it is a watering-place for a hundred or so little negroid people who worship thunder and can count up to two. They share it with tigers, hamadryads, bootlace-snakes, leeches, pelandoks and the rest of the bewildering fauna of upstream Malaya. As the Sungai Lanchap winds on, it encounters outposts of a more complex culture: Malay villages where the Koran is known, where the prophets jostle with nymphs and tree-gods in a pantheon of unimaginable variety. Here a little work in the paddy-fields suffices to maintain a heliotropic, pullulating substance. There are fish in the river, guarded, however, by crocodile-gods of fearful malignity; coconuts drop or are hurled down by trained monkeys called *beroks*; the durian sheds its rich fetid smell in the season of durians. Erotic pantuns and Hindu myths soothe away the depression of an occasional *accidia*. As the Lanchap approaches the coast a more progressive civilization appears: the two modern towns of Timah and Tah Panas, made fat on tin and rubber, supporting large populations of Chinese, Malays, Indians, Eurasians, Arabs, Scots, Christian Brothers, and pale English administrators. The towns echo with trishaw-bells, the horns of smooth, smug American cars, radios blaring sentimental pentatonic tunes, the morning hawking and spitting of the *towkays*, the call of the East. Where the Lanchap meets the Sungai Hantu stands the royal town, dominated by an Istana designed by a Los Angeles architect, blessed by a mosque as bulbous as a clutch of onions, cursed by a lowering sky and high humidity. This is Kuala Hantu. (Burgess 1972: 32)

Many rhetorical devices have lent “authenticity” to this description: the inclusion of native words, a show of knowledge in anthropology, in human and physical geography, in the fauna and flora of the land, and last but not least, in the use of “the simple is” which is the tense for “the timeless

eternal" and "reality". Still, assuming that Burgess is telling it as it is, and that this authenticity is a departure from the prevalent norms of colonialist discourse, there seems to be a number of things the text is quietly saying, sometimes even in chorus with other less "authentic" discourses, without the writer intending it or being aware of it.

Firstly, to be able to describe this setting is to be able to bring the land under descriptive control, a common enough western endeavour. The more "authentic" the description is, the more complete the control becomes. Since natives could not describe their own space, they could not be said to own it in the same way as the literate West can – after all, land claims require a specialized kind of linguistic notation. Malaya is a land to be understood and given the gift of identity by academic concepts of the West, expressed in the language of anthropology, biology, topography, human geography and economics. Only the distant, objective European eye could see the incongruity of mixing animistic and Islamic practices ("the prophets jostle with nymphs and tree-gods") or make out the difference between American and Moorish architecture or Malay and Indian literary genres ("Erotic pantuns and Hindu myths"). The setting thus described through a European vision suggests that the land under the rubric of European art is only capable of representation in European terms. The colony is thus laid out *for* the viewer, to suggest that it can embody a certain theatricality and narrativity. What colonialist writers like Burgess tend to overlook is that

The native, by contrast, has a complex attitude derived from his immersion in the totality of his environment. The visitor's viewpoint, being simple is easily stated.... The complex attitude of the native, on the other hand, can be expressed only with difficulty and indirectly through behaviour, local tradition, lore and myth. (Tuan Yi-Fu 1974: 53)

Secondly, Burgess is really in the same position as the amateur anthropologist, Fenella Crabbe, whose habit of mentally turning a page of a certain anthropological monograph he makes fun of elsewhere in the novel (pp. 136, 151). The irony is that, for all the superiority of a first-hand experience, the procedure for rationalizing the experience still comes from the same source which he is to ridicule in Fenella's case.

Thirdly, there are "torn and gaping" faults in Burgess' descriptive discourse, through which one can see unexpressed "facts" of British rule not consistent with its professed moral ideals. For example, the presence of 'little negroid people who worship thunder and count only up to two' in the 1950's after a century of British civilizing influence does not speak well of its Evangelical zeal. What are the "Christian Brothers, and pale English administrators" doing in the prosperous towns "made fat on tin and rubber" when there are pagan souls to be saved and literacy to be given? The Malay villagers, like the tribe up-river, remain an isolated unit left on

their own to subsist on paddy and fish from the river while the wealth of the land is exploited by the largely immigrant and expatriate population downstream where civilization is. How can unity be possible in such a culturally as well as economically divided society? The “conflict and confusion” colonial officers talk about in *Trilogy* is partly of their own making, a notion silenced by the noisy infantile bickerings of an inferior race.

Similar repressive silences are also present in Burgess’ own historical account of the country’s genesis, a slice of “truth” dished out to his reader with the relish of one who believes he really knows his stuff (not unlike, alas!, my own historical renderings with which it is now in contention). This is Burgess himself speaking, the omniscient narrator, the voice of authority.

A prince of Malacca settled on its river at the time of the Portuguese invasions... The Portuguese, sweating in trunk-hose, brought a niggling concern with commerce and the salvation of pagan souls. Francis Xavier preached about the love of an alien God, tried to fracture the indivisible numen and establish a crude triune structure, set schools where dreary hymns were sung, and finally condoned the rack and the thumbscrew. (Burgess 1972: 33)

This repressive ecclesiastical imposition of will (the silent comparison is with British diplomacy and religious tolerance) was then replaced by “the ruthless greed of the trumpeting Dutch”, after which appeared the enlightened figure of Stamford Raffles, “that great Englishman [who] fretted over the decay of Malacca and learned his Malay verbs” (Burgess 1972: 33 – 4). This sounds like the language of a rival out to discredit the enemy; the kind that the British East India Company itself might have used. It is as if the territorial struggle of the colonial era has survived the 20th. century.

Compare the Portuguese and Dutch “invasions” with the the British “intervention” that Burgess takes great pains to justify, in ways not immediately obvious.

After the death of Sultan Iblis there was trouble again. Five chiefs claimed the throne, only one of them – the Crown Prince Mansor – with any right. The bad days of anarchy returned, the kris whistled through the air and lopped innocent heads, there was pillaging and arson in up-river kampongs, the Bugis appeared again – a portent, like the anti-Christ Danes at the time of Bishop Wulfstan – and even the Siamese, who already held Patani, Kelantan and Trengganu, began to be interested. It was now that the British intervened. (Burgess 1972: 34)

That “now”, coming at the end, carries all the weight of a “rational” argument preceding it and the sense of historical inevitability that makes the act and the timing right. The argument is implicit in the grim images of impending chaos, anarchy, anti-Christ, and violence (notwithstanding the

inaccurate description of the native weapon which is actually designed to be plunged into the heart, not to lop heads). The unsettled dispute over the throne, especially the expressed doubt on whether any pretender has “any right” at all, removes all moral and legal obstacles by reducing the territory to a free-for-all status. It is precisely the same argument used in the history textbooks in British Malaya. What follows has the same air of *deja vu*, Foucault’s “already-said”:

Mansor fled to Singapore, imploring help from the Governor. Yes, yes, he would most certainly accept a British Resident if he could be guaranteed a safe throne, a permanent bodyguard and a pension of \$15,000 a month. And so the wars gradually died down like a wind, though not before some British blood had been spilled on that inhospitable soil. The state began to prosper. Rubber thrived, and the Chinese dredged for tin with frantic industry. (Burgess 1972: 34)

The implication is that the “reluctant” British was pushed by the urgency of “yes, yes”, a double-edged repetition that could also mean that the British was pushing equally hard for the Residency, in exchange for the financial and physical “liability” Burgess moans about. The terms “And so” to signal the end of the war and “began” to signal the beginning of prosperity are not mere time markers to indicate chronological sequence but serve a more important function as cause-and-effect connectors, discreetly and discursively transferring the credit to the intervention. We might also do well to ponder on the not-said of the text, to speculate on why Burgess has not tried to explain the genesis of racial conflicts engendered by the immigration and divide-and-rule policies of the British, a background so crucial to the theme of *Trilogy*. A chapter of historical beginnings and a direct reference to tin, rubber and Chinese surely constitute the most appropriate time to present this information. To withhold it is to betray a certain attitude not consistent with the apparent desire to tell it as it is.

As for the history of the Malay sultanate, Burgess displays the same ability of “playing around” with his historical material, as if his confident grasp of the knowledge allows him to pick and choose his telling details or to pitch his playful tone at a provocative level without feeling threatened.

The rulers themselves lived unedifying lives. Yahya never moved out of an opium-trance; Ahmad died of a surfeit of Persian sweetmeats; Mohammed lashed at least one slave to death every day; Aziz had syphilis and died at the age of eighteen; Hussain had a hundred wives.... then it was that Sultan Iblis – may God be merciful to him – crashed his mighty fist on the table, slaughtered a few Bugis, tortured a few chiefs, reformed the laws of inheritance, centralized the Customs and Excise, affirmed that women had souls, and limited wives to four in number. His name is remembered, his achievements commemorated in numerous institutions: the Iblis Club...the Iblis Cinema in Tahi Panas, the Iblis Koran School... (Burgess 1972: 33 – 4)

A Malaysian historian could write a whole treatise to refute such defamatory exaggerations, but that is not the point here. The point here is how the discourse is constructed, how the “realities” are selected and organised in order to reveal the East as it is; to demystify the East to Burgess is to go to the other extreme, to strip it of all the trappings of romance traditionally attributed to it so that its “brute reality” is exposed. The point is: there are many things that constitute the “brute reality” called Malaya, not the least of which is the history of opium trade and slavery (now that it is mentioned), once very much a part of colonialism, as explained in the previous section. Another “silent” truth is the facetious use of the Malay words “Tahi Panas” (hot shit) and “Iblis” (Satan or the Devil), the latter in deliberate juxtaposition with the Sultan, God and the Koran school. Elsewhere in the novel, equally unpalatable Malay words have been used as place-names, e.g. Kenching (to urinate, p. 213) three words away from “mosque”; Lancap (masturbation, the setting for *Tiger*); Bedebah (Damnation, p. 384), to name a few. Add this “truth” to Burgess’ dedication to his Malayan friends and you will get an attitude problem.

On closer examination, therefore, Burgess’ position in relation to Imperial ideology does not seem to be all that contradictory in spirit and in principle, in spite of his attempts to adopt a post-colonial stance by taking a neutral and omniscient position which he thinks allows him to be ironical in his criticism of coloniser and colonised alike. On the contrary, at the back of it all, there is the same identification with the dominators, the same complicity against the dominated, the same arrogant confidence with which details are established as “in the true” to acquire “reality”, the same will to repressive silences and omissions. Ironically, for all the “realistic” unsavoury details, his account of the past in this section still has the epic romance of far away lands and bygone days and his narrative style hovers uncertainly between history-writing and story-telling, drawn as he is, with his protagonist Victor Crabbe “into that dark world where history melts into myth”. The danger is, of course, the reader is likely to confuse the two and mistake myth for history or make the long jump from fiction to fact.

Burgess’ representation of coloniser and colonised share the same inconsistency of approach. There are images that are conventional and stereotypical; there are others that constitute a departure. There is, for example, the same repetition of laziness as a racial characteristic of the natives, stated simply like an accepted fact (“Workless Malays in worn trousers...” p. 45; “they loved rest better than industry” p. 36); or on native inherent irrationality ranging from lack of logic (“This was the East. Logic was a Western importation...” p. 58) to temporary loss of sanity (“some day a Malay boy will run amok...” p. 63 or “Only when Ibrahim was at the point of despair, ready to run amok...” p. 117). There is the same conspiratorial attack on Islam the West seems to find great pleasure in

doing: *Trilogy* is crowded with sinners and religious hypocrites from sultans to men of religion and everybody in between, who seem to have conspired en masse with Burgess to make a mockery of what, in reality, is highly revered by the Malays.

At the colonialist end, in spite of the unflattering portrait of the Lieutenant and the lawyer, the conventional British self-image of superiority is still there (what the natives think of them is another matter). They still hold superior posts, lording over lesser officers and servants, passing judgements on native antics and, like Fenella Crabbe and the Assistant Aborigines Protector, valuing them for anthropological reasons.

What is of more interest for analysis, however, is the way in which Burgess' representation seems to undermine comfortable assumptions of colonial ideology. In the characters of Nabby Adams of the police force and Rupert Hardman L.I.B reside the antithesis of the white man; one is an alcoholic whom several Chinese owners of coffee-shops (forbidden watering-holes for expatriates) are after for his debts (the man even borrows from his own servant and Indian corporal); the other commits the sin of marrying a native woman for money, losing honour, dignity, authority, manhood, everything that is exclusively white property, by being reduced to one very lame excuse of a man. In these two portraits, Burgess has successfully exploded a myth. However, there are two things that steal the thunder from his project. By making Nabby Adams a caricature instead of a real character, he becomes an endearing misfit and serious implications of what he represents in a colonial context are lost somewhere in the humour. By making Rupert Hardman take his wife for a ride on a pilgrimage, dump her in Mecca and then make his escape back to England, white superiority is once again reasserted and reaffirmed for all the energy that has gone into its deconstruction.

On the native front, never has the myth of the submissive oriental woman been so surely shattered. Salmah, Crabbes' mistress, plans a strategy to get him back through black magic; even so, while the initiative is new, the method is old (the west has always associated primitive society with witchcraft). The traditional wife of the Indian corporal rules the lord and master in her devious and delirious ways; but the comic domestic scenes make it hard to take her seriously. And we have seen the rich widow's splendid rise to power – a pity Burgess is not willing to go all the way to keep her there. Is it the invisible hands of his own culture that finally hold him back?

Burgess' ostensibly path-breaking approach in his time when colonial powers were jealously guarding their territories is his willingness to concede vast narrative spaces to his native characters and to give the hitherto inarticulate society a voice; it is the extent of this concession which I now want to explore. For instance, in this school controversy over House

names, how much freedom has Burgess given his Malayan crowd to speak in their own voices free from his compositional strategy for total effect?

The difficulties of organizing a house-system in a school of this kind had been partly solved through weak compromise. At first it had been proposed to call the houses after major prophets – Nabi Adam, Nabi Idris, Nabi Isa, Nabi Mohammed – but everyone except the Muslims protested. Then it seemed microscopically fitting to allot boys to houses bearing the names of their home states. It happened, however, that an obscurantist Sultan and a Union of Chinese Secret Societies in one state forbade, independently of each other, any patronization of the new educational venture. Thus it fell out that a rich and important territory was represented in the Mansor School by a Eurasian, the son of a Bengali money-lender, a Tamil and a dull but happy Sikh. The pupils themselves, through their prefects, pressed the advantages of a racial division. The Chinese feared that the Malays would run amok in the dormitories and use knives; the Malays said they did not like the smell of the Indians; the various Indian preferred to conduct vendetta only among themselves... Finally the houses were given the names of Britons who had helped to build the new Malaya. (Burgess 1972: 38 – 9)

The whole point of this discourse is to establish “the difficulties of organizing a house-system in a school of this kind” leading to, as always, the inevitable (“finally”) wisdom of British arbitration. The dissenting voices of the Malayan community, both inside and outside the school, are needed in order to explain these “difficulties”. It is amazing how well represented are the grievances of each ethnic (Malay, Chinese, Indian, Eurasian, Bengali) and religious (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh) community – surely a sign of contrivance. The last sentence betrays the voice of a typical colonialist believer in the inevitability of British intervention. It is used as an organizing principle to gather all the diverse racial “voices” into a single idea denoting disunity, a problem that only the British has any answer for (after all “The West always had an answer” p. 57).

In quite the same way but on a wider narrative scale, you will hear a cacophony of dissenting multi-racial voices orchestrated, in the final instance, by the organising presence of the writer who uses it to build up a sense of disharmony on a national scale. This is crucial for his argument that the country is not ready for self-government, that British presence is still needed even if only “to unify the diverse Asiatics in a common unrest at European rule” (Burgess 1970:), as Burgess informed his *Spectator* readers in 1970, after revisiting Singapore and commenting on the animosity between the Chinese-dominated government of Singapore and the Malay-dominated government of Malaysia. Various British officers in *Trilogy* firmly believe in British indispensability, including Crabbe who told his wife: “But who’s to do the work if we don’t? They’re not ready to take over yet. In their hearts they know it.” (Burgess 1972: 274)

But back to the cacophony. Here’s another example of a mouth-piece, from an Indian:

The name Malaya is unfortunate.... But it may yet get back its original Indian name of Langkasuka. That has already been proposed. Still... if only people would get on with their work – the Malays in the kampongs and the Chinese in trade – I think all people would be quite happy together... (Burgess 1972: 440)

The original divide-and-rule policy makers would be pleased to know at least one local understood their objectives and actually spoke in their voice. Here's another echo, this time from a Chinese:

The fact is that the component races of this exquisite and impossible country just don't get on. There was, it's true, a sort of illusion of getting on when the British were in full control. But self-determination's a ridiculous idea in a mixed-up place like this. There's no nation. There's no common culture, language, literature, religion. I know the Malays want to impose all these things on the others, but that obviously won't work... (Burgess 1972: 447)

"Exquisite", and "impossible" belong to the vocabulary of the West when expressing ambivalent feelings about the East. The whole vision of the Malayan condition (an illusion of getting on, a mixed-up place where people share nothing in common) is the British point of view. The Malay imposition of will can never be welcomed because it lacks the credibility and superiority of the colonial variety. How can a country be run by an emotional and irrational race, speakers of bad English at that, and with the vocabulary of a peasant, as the following Malay character represents, talking in a voice supposed to be his own:

"They felt differently about us then," said Crabbe. "They felt that we had something to give." "You still have something to give," insisted Inche Kamaruddin, "but in a free Malaya dat shall be ruled by the Malays." And the Chinese? And the Indians, the Eurasians? "Dey do not count," grinned Inche Kamaruddin. "Dey are not de friends of de Malays. Malaya is a country for de Malays." (Burgess 1972: 90)

My point is that the appearance of heteroglossia is only an optical/auditory illusion for the reader/listener, that the ultimate source of discourse in *Trilogy* is still the writer. In the final analysis, the colonised is still, albeit now to a lesser extent, inarticulate and dumb. I see this trilogy as part of a series of explanation, representation and rationalization that must intervene to justify colonial presence, a project no more different from that of any colonialist discourse with Malaysian themes. The portrayal of confusion and instability (communist attacks, racial tensions, chaotic administration, etc.) is not just a neutral narrative plot but a way of suggesting a need for continued British presence, using a popular device of colonialist discourse JanMohamed calls "the Manichean allegory" of man facing chaos (JanMohamed 1985). Any weakness in the British administration is attributed to the shabbiness of a few eccentric individuals,

not the entire race, and therefore can be set right again. The Malayan problem, on the other hand, goes right back to immutable racial characteristics and therefore seems doomed to have no way out.

CONCLUSION

This analysis is only an example of how resistance can be used to render the ideological subtleties of colonialist texts transparent and is, by no means, comprehensive or exhaustive. I hope to have shown that for such texts there is more than meets the eye, and a purely aesthetic look has far too many blind spots to give the right kind of insights to a native reader.

Obviously, the native reader is not the implied reader of colonialist discourse but has been coerced into being one by becoming the kind of reader prescribed by reading conventions. In the process of doing so, s/he loses her/his identity for the sake of universality.

My contention is that we don't have to adopt a reading position that can annihilate our very selfhood so completely. Through the method of resistance that I am advocating here, we can make our identity and historical/ideological specificities count in the process of reading.

I am a Malaysian and a descendant of a subject race and I see things differently. By virtue of a lifetime experience of being a Malay and a Malaysian, I am a more "informed" reader than my Western counterpart, having had access to the historical and cultural particularities of the land. My native view-point should not be marginalised or, worse still, ruled out completely; rather, it should be accepted as one of the many perspectives with which colonialist literature may be viewed.

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