Decolonisation of Asia in the Eyes of Alan Sillitoe and Anthony Burgess

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ABSTRACT

Post-war British working-class novels have largely been neglected from canonical works in postcolonial studies. In particular, Alan Sillitoe is often misread as a parochial writer, while his fictional commentaries on the Malayan decolonisation process exhibited in (*Key to the Door* 1961, *The Open Door*, 1989 and *Last Loves*, 1990) have been overlooked. There is also a tendency for studies on post-war British writing in the period of decolonisation to be inward-looking, and reluctant to engage with discussions about British colonies preparing for self-governance. This comparative study of the Malayan novels of Alan Sillitoe and Anthony Burgess aim to interrogate two key questions: how their texts respond to decolonisation of Malaya, and how their texts depart from earlier colonial writing that tend to rely on exotic settings and Orientalist tropes. This study examines their writing back to the colonial tradition and their employment of narrative strategies in relation to exotic portrayals of Eastern people, culture, and space in earlier colonial texts. I also assess their disparate treatments of the Malayan Emergency and anti-colonial movements in their writing. My reading of their texts reveals that they deconstruct the notion of 'white mythology' in traditional colonial writing, criticising its underlying racist assumptions. Sillitoe's protagonists display solidarity between the British working-class and the colonised subjects in working towards overthrowing colonial governments, while Burgess's narratives commit to a de-exoticising project. However, Burgess's narratives do not fully succeed in dispelling all traces of colonial tropes; in fact, they tend to recirculate them. Meanwhile, Sillitoe's texts carry a universalist message that transcends nationalism.

(Keywords: Sillitoe, Burgess, working-class, post-war British fiction, decolonisation, Malaya)

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INTRODUCTION

> 'To deny [the effect of cultural imperialism on the British working-class] is to perform the kind of silencing against which postcolonial theory has traditionally set itself and to disregard important links between colonial and class oppression.'
>
> - Jack Windle, 'Interwoven Histories' (2018), p. 46.[1]

The silencing that Jack Windle is referring to in the epigraph is the exclusion of British working class writing from the canonical works of postcolonial studies. Windle indicates that a sub-section of the postcolonial theory namely the Subaltern has been partially responsible for complicitly excluding the works of British working-class writers from colonial discourse. He argues that due to this 'silencing', it has led to a homogenised view of writings from the imperial centre on colonialism without interrogating their class background, ignoring the commonalities between colonial and class oppressions and therefore, performing what the ruling elites are similarly doing to the working-class people—excluding their cultural production from university curriculums and allowing middle-class socialists to speak on their behalf. Several critics such as Leela Gandhi and Graham MacPhee have pointed out this gap in postcolonial studies and posit that there was an expression of solidarity that was extended to the independence movements in the colonies not only by anti-

[1] Jack Windle, 'Interwoven Histories: Working Class Literature and Theory', in *Working-Class Writing: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Ben Clarke and Nick Hubble (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 41–60 (p. 46). Windle is referring to Gayatri Spivak's explanation of the subaltern in an interview by Leon de Kock at the 1991 New Nation Writers' Conference in South Africa. Windle took offense at Spivak's comment on the working-class where she states that they are oppressed but 'not subaltern' because unlike the subaltern, they can speak for themselves. See Leon de Kock, 'Interview with Gayatri Spivak: New Nation Writers' Conference in South Africa', *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 23.3 (1992), 29–47, (pp. 45–6).

imperial British intelligentsias from within the imperial centre but also by the British working class.[2]

Alan Sillitoe, one of the authors whose works I examine in this dissertation is a case in point of the systemic silencing of British working class writing on decolonisation so much so that his works are often misread as parochial. Timothy Brennan in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* (1989) for instance, argues that Sillitoe was only interested in a mainly white, post-war Britain, neglecting the realities of the mass immigration of citizens from the Commonwealth into the country.[3] Another critic, Zawiah Yahya in *Resisting Colonialist Discourse* (1994), claims that Sillitoe was only using the Malayan Emergency as a backdrop for his protagonist's 'personal drama' and that its incidental publication in 1961 where she argues that British colonialism was becoming an irrelevant discourse at this time, suggests that there was no commitment to engage in the politics of Malaya's decolonisation.[4] However, to put it into perspective, Sillitoe did intend to publish *Key to the Door* (1961) as his debut novel but it was rejected by many publishing companies including Anthony Burgess's publisher, Heinemann.[5] As Matthew Whittle notes in *Post-War British Literature and the "End of Empire"* (2016), traditionally, colonial literature was written by 'the elite and supercilious officer class' and was curated to have a

[2] See Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anti-colonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 2. See also Graham MacPhee, *Postwar British Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 27.

[3] Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), p. x.

[4] Zawiah Yahya, *Resisting Colonialist Discourse* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994; repr. Bangi: Penerbit Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2003), p. 77.

[5] Alan Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour: An Autobiography* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 191. The main reason cited for the rejections according to Sillitoe's literary agent was its 'strong language' (p. 208). Sillitoe have had to revise the earlier manuscripts of *Key to the Door* for potential publishers and retitled it three times. Another reason for the rejections is the novel's sympathy for the Malayan Communists which did not align with the official colonial narrative. It would take ten years for Sillitoe to finally get *Key to the Door* published.

'specifically British upper-class imperial identity.'[6] Two of the postwar British authors Anthony Burgess (1917–1993) and Alan Sillitoe (1928–2010), whose works I have chosen to study for this dissertation, do not fit into the elite officer class that Whittle refers to. Burgess's and Sillitoe's Malayan fiction are based on their first-hand experience serving as a member of the Malayan Civil Service and a wireless operator for the Royal Air Force during Malaya's decolonisation process, as well as the first wave of the Malayan Emergency from 1947 to 1955. As a Civil Servant, Burgess fraternised more with his Malayan colleagues, causing the British colonial community to ostracise him. As for Sillitoe, he was of a low military rank. The period that they were writing and publishing their Malayan novels also intersect with a time that saw an extensive global decolonisation in motion, the Cold War, the Suez Crisis and Americanisation. Burgess was writing in response to British withdrawal from Malaya in the late 1950s and he was among the last serving members in the colony. Sillitoe on the other hand, was writing in response to the Communist insurgency in Malaya in the late 1940s that aspired to expel the British from Malaya and install a Communist Malayan state modelled on Mao's China. Additionally, these two authors are not commonly read together, especially in the context of decolonisation.[7]

My study examines Burgess's and Sillitoe's self-reflexive assessment of colonialism in the era of decolonisation and addresses two key points: how their texts respond to decolonisation and how their texts depart from the earlier colonial writings of H. Rider Haggard (1856–1925), Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) and Somerset Maugham

[6] Matthew Whittle, *Postwar British Literature and the "End of Empire"* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), p. 27.

[7] As I have pointed out earlier, the main reason for this is the tendency for critics to read Sillitoe's texts as insular while overlooking his Malayan novels' criticism of colonialism.

(1874–1965). Burgess's and Sillitoe's Malayan novels interrogate the colonial tropes of the 'Other' as primitive and savage, and their cultural practices as exotic. Sillitoe's novels question the Orientalist tropes of sexualised and passive Eastern women. Burgess on one hand, responds to the anxious masculinity in the colonial adventure tales of Kipling, Haggard and Ballantyne in his Malayan Trilogy. Burgess's and Sillitoe's Malayan novels particularly deconstruct the notion of 'white mythology' in earlier colonial writings.[8] In doing so, Burgess uses a meta-narrative strategy (an experimental style of writing) in his Malayan novels to draw criticisms on what French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas terms as 'ontological imperialism' that underpins Western philosophy, scientific treatises and anthropological monographs.[9] We see Burgess for instance parodying James Frazer's anthropological study *The Golden Bough* (1890), the book that Fenella reads to understand the Malayan aboriginal culture in *Time for a Tiger* (1956). Apart from the use of metanarratives in his fiction, Burgess also attends to a de-exoticising project in his Malayan trilogy to upset his Anglo-American readers who expect them to be laden with exotic elements. While Burgess deploys a meta-narrative strategy for his Trilogy, Sillitoe looks to an

[8] The term 'White mythology' is used by Jacques Derrida in his essay 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy' in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 209–71 (p. 213). The term has been popularised by Robert C. Young in his book *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 2004). It denotes the fallacies in the ontological projected image of the European race. See also Couze Venn, 'Formation of Subjects, (Post)colonialism, and an Other Project', in *The Expansion of England: Race, ethnicity and cultural history*, ed. by Bill Schwarz (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 32–60. Speaking in the context of colonialism, Couze Venn expounds on Jacques Lacan's mirror image that the 'Western man' projects his lack of being onto the colonised 'Other' and in repercussion, uses the 'Other' as a 'site of redemption' where he 'absolves and resolves himself' (p. 42).

[9] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers and Duquesne University Press, 1969; repr. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991). 'Ontological imperialism' according to Lévinas, constructs the colonised people in the coloniser's 'egology' or self-image, where they project their repressed desires onto the colonised 'Other' and use their perceived moral transgressions as a space to absolve themselves (p. 44).

earlier mode of writing, which pivots to the proletarian literary tradition—realism.[10] This is particularly evident in his realistic portrayals of the violent atmosphere of the Malayan Emergency in *Key to the Door* (1961) and *The Open Door* (1989) which contrasts with Burgess's comedic depictions of the same event. His narratives also do not rely on any exotic imagery to describe the Malayan people, culture and landscape but rather he describes them in 'verbal economy'—a clear and concise style of writing without any grandiloquent expressions.[11] In the section that follows, I outline the historical contexts of the Sino-Malay communal violence that prefigured the first wave of the Malayan Emergency (1948–60) and Malaya's decolonisation process that underpins Sillitoe's and Burgess's Malayan novels.

Malaya's Civil Unrest during the Struggle for Independence

During the vacuum of power in August 1945, the interim period between the Japanese forces' withdrawal from Malaya and the return of British troops to reclaim Malaya as a colonial territory, the Malayan Communists which were largely made up of the ethnic Chinese minority group assumed control of the country and ruled with terror. It was the first power struggle in Malaya's history in the absence of foreign colonial powers in the post-war period. Former Malayan Chief Police Officer J. J. Raj who was witness to the fourteen days civil unrest recalls that the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) in their uniform and three-star caps 'occupied many towns and villages and had the communist flag flying mostly in the rural towns and villages.' He adds that one of the first things the Communists did

[10] Realism was a literary movement that was responding to an earlier 18th century literary movement—Romanticism. The aim of literary realism is to represent the realities of life as close as possible in writing.

[11] 'Verbal economy' is a term used by Margot Norris. See Margot Norris, 'Verbal Economy and Lying', in *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (London: The University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp. 65–70. The style of writing mirrors a military report.

was ‘set up “People’s Committees” […] followed by a “People’s Court” (Kangaroo Courts)” where they ‘introduced a reign of terror, meted out their brand of justice and mercilessly persecuted “so-called” [Japanese] collaborators and informers.’ Many of the victims, Raj asserts, were defenceless and were chosen at random.[12] The violent episode of the Communist takeover of Malaya after the Japanese withdrawal as indicated by Raj, was payback for the Communists to avenge the massacres of Malayan Chinese at the hands of the Japanese authorities, which they perceived were facilitated by Japanese informers and collaborators among the Malay people.[13] Cheah Boon Kheng claims that the Communist vendettas against the Malay community had its roots in the preferential treatment of the Malays by the Japanese authorities during their occupation of Malaya, causing severe strains on race relations between the Malays and the Chinese and that the Japanese forces’ ‘[r]epressive measures against the Chinese led to the formation of a Chinese-dominated movement’, creating ‘an undercurrent resentment and distrust among Chinese towards Malays’, which heightened their ‘Chinese nationalism and their sense of ethnic identity.’[14]

On the other hand, the Malayan Communists’ pursuit of the Malays for punishment and their claim to power was unsettling to the Malays and in effect, alienated their

[12] J.J. Raj (Jr.), *The Struggle for Malaysian Independence* (Petaling Jaya: MPH Group Publishing Sdn Bhd., 2007), p. 58. The three-star symbol on the Communists’ cap is meant to represent the three main races of Malaya – the Malays, Chinese and Indians.

[13] The Malays were specifically targeted by the Communists as Japanese collaborators because many of them were given administrative positions in government offices, schools and the police force by the Japanese authorities whereas the Chinese were treated with hostility. The Indians were also given opportunities by the Japanese to work in government offices and were also not spared from the wrath of the Communists. This was a reverse case during the British colonial administration where the Chinese were given preferential treatment whereas the Malays were disenfranchised in their own lands except for the elite Malays who attended British schools and were pro-British.

[14] Cheah Boon Kheng, ‘Sino-Malay Conflicts in Malaya, 1945–1946: Communist Vendetta and Islamic Resistance’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 12.1 (1981), 108–17 (p. 108). Due to the events of the Sino-Japanese war (1937–45) and the overt Communist Chinese anti-Japanese stance, the Japanese hostility towards the Chinese was extended to the Chinese abroad. The Japanese massacred 70,000 overseas Chinese in Singapore. See ‘Malaya: Chinese affairs and correspondence with Mr. H.T. Pagden’ (1948), CO 537/3757, *The National Archives*, pp. 27–8.

support for the Communists. According to Mohamed Ali Haniffa and Mohammad Redzuan Othman in their article 'Pergaduhan Kaum di Tanah Melayu Selepas Pendudukan Jepun Hingga Darurat Diisytiharkan ('Ethnic Conflict in Malaya After the Japanese Occupation until the Declaration of Emergency', 2017), the need for Malay survival in that Communist reign of terror also heightened Malay nationalism, which was aimed primarily towards 'preserv[ing] the sanctity of the religion [Islam] and to protect the interests of the Malays'. Their ultimate goal was also to liberate Malaya from Communist influences as well as British colonisation.[15] It should be noted that Malay nationalism was initiated by Malays from the non-elite background. Khoo Kay Kim wrote an excellent piece on the history of Malay intelligentsia in the nineteenth century until the 1920s which he indicates, was initiated by non-English speaking peasant Malays. He states that because their line of thought 'did not harmonise with the British pattern of thought and action,' the British authorities suppressed the freedom of expression in their publications and clamped down on their political activities. Khoo states it was because they were sympathetic towards the Middle East or Indonesia, while at the same time anti-British and anti-imperialist in their outlook.[16]

My analysis of Sillitoe's Malayan decolonisation novels will point out the preoccupation of his protagonists' association of anti-imperialist movements in Malaya with the Malayan Communists, as they were of peasant and working-class backgrounds. As Burgess highlights in his interview with Thomas Churchill, Sillitoe

[15] Mohamed Ali Haniffa and Mohammad Redzuan Othman, 'Pergaduhan Kaum di Tanah Melayu Selepas Pendudukan Jepun Hingga Darurat Diisytiharkan (Ethnic Conflict in Malaya after the Japanese Occupation until the Declaration of Emergency)', *SEJARAH: Journal of the Department of History*, 20.20 (2017), 97–123 (p. 97).
[16] See Khoo Kay Kim, 'Malay Society: 1874 – 1920s', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 5.2 (1974), 179–98 (p. 197).

was not fully aware of the dynamics of Malay nationalism as he lacked access to their literature.[17] It also explains Sillitoe's silent treatment of Malay nationalism in his fiction as he was under the impression that the Malay nationalist movement was only led by pro-British Malay bureaucrats.

Furthermore, the other aspect to highlight on the Malayan Communists that is also relevant to the discussion of Sillitoe's decolonisation novels is the debate on whether their struggle legitimately represent Malaya's nationalist movement as they claim, or whether they are in actual fact a foreign proxy to one of the key global key players of the Cold War, namely that of Communist China in their expansionist agenda to annex the territories in Southeast Asia. Victor Purcell asserts that Malayan Communism was not a 'national' movement and they do not speak for the aspirations of the Malayan people as Malayans generally were not in favour of the creation of the Malayan Communist Republic.[18] There were also concerns expressed by the Straits Chinese that the overseas Chinese in Malaya would become the '*imperium in imperio* under the control of the Government of China.' The majority Malays were similarly apprehensive of the 'Chinese expansionist motives' both from within and outside of Malaya.[19]

[17] See Thomas Churchill, 'Going on Writing Till Ninety or One Hundred', in *Conversations with Burgess*, ed. by Earl G. Ingersoll and Mary C. Ingersoll (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), where Burgess comments on Sillitoe: 'He never knew what was going on in the Malay's mind.' (p. 16)

[18] Victor Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1954), p. 31.

[19] Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?*, p.40. The Straits Chinese first migrated and settled in Peninsula Malaya in the fifteenth century in the heydays of the Malacca Sultanate. The first generation of the Straits Chinese have assimilated into the Malay culture and have adopted the language and customs while retaining some aspects of their Chinese heritage. Unlike the bulk of migrants workers who came to Malaya from Southern China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Straits Chinese are of an elite group and are mostly English educated.

On the other hand, as with Sillitoe's Malayan Emergency texts, Burgess's trilogy namely *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) and *Beds in the East* (1959) are also set against the same backdrop of the turbulent period of Malayan history, albeit at a later phase of the conflict in 1954–5, where the threats from the Malayan Communists on civilians and the security forces were not as severe as its early breakouts. There were three significant events at the time of Burgess's residence in Malaya (1954–5), which signalled monumental change in Malaya's history. The first was the departure of General Gerald Templer, then High Commissioner of Malaya (1952–4) and Director of War Operations, following his successful hearts and minds campaign in crushing the Communist revolt and cleansing Chinese settlements from Communist incursions.[20] It was also under Templer's tenure as High Commissioner that 'Malayanisation', a process of replacing British civil servants with the appointment of Malayans to administrative positions in the years leading up to Malayan independence was introduced.[21] The second event was the first Malayan general elections in 1955, with the Alliance party represented by component parties United Malay Organisation (UMNO), Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) and Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) winning the majority votes of 51 of the 52 seats contested in the Parliament. The results of the elections marked that a transition of power from the British colonial administration to a Malayan provisional government was underway. Finally, the third event was the 1955 Baling Talks, a negotiation deal initiated by the provisional Malayan government to grant amnesty to the Malayan Communist Party with the condition

[20] For further information on General Templer's strategies in handling the Communist rebellion, see Rhoderick Dhu Rhenick (Jr.), 'The Emergency Regulations of Malaya: Causes and Effect', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 6.2, 1965, 1–39 (p. 32). Templer lifted curfews and restrictions on Chinese villages in exchange of information on the Communists.

[21] See J.M. Gullick 'Prelude to Merdeka: Public administration in Malaya 1945–57', *South East Asia Research*, 5.2 (1997), 155–73. Gullick was a former British civil servant in Malaya (1945–56). His article elaborates on the measures Temple had taken in the Malayanisation programme.

that they surrender their weapons and struggle. The negotiation failed to reach an agreement for both parties, and the Communists returned to the jungle and continued to launch their guerrilla war on the Malayan government and civilians, even after independence.[22] The Baling Talks is referenced in *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), where the Communists whom Victor Crabbe's Chinese cook has been providing food supplies for, come out of the jungle and appeal to the inebriated Victor to call the police so they could turn themselves in to the authorities. They inform Victor that they have found out about the amnesty from a newspaper article that Victor's cook used to wrap rice with.[23] Therefore, in summation, in examining Burgess's treatment of the Malayan Emergency in his novels, it would be beneficial to refer to the three events that I have mentioned so we are able to see their parallels. In the final section that follows, I outline the chapters and address the key areas of my study.

Chapter Outline

The thematic structure of this thesis responds to Sillitoe's and Burgess's writing of Malaya's decolonisation process (1947–1957), which intersected with the Cold War. Chapters 2 and 3 examine Sillitoe's and Burgess's writing back to the colonial tradition and their employment of narrative strategies to intervene the exotic portrayals of Eastern people, culture and space that are found in earlier colonial texts. Chapters 4 and 5 assess Sillitoe's and Burgess's disparate treatments of the Malayan Emergency and anti-colonial movements in their writing.

In Chapter 2, I assess Sillitoe's Malayan fiction in light of Leela Gandhi's 'Affective Communities'. The first section examines the solidarity his British working class

[22] The Communist guerrilla war against the Malayan government would continue until 1989 after the fall of the Berlin Wall.
[23] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, pp. 204–6.

protagonists display towards the Malayan colonised subjects. The section also assesses the near absence of exotic descriptions of the Malayan people in his first two Malayan novels *Key to the Door* (1961) and *The Open Door* (1989). In the subsequent section, I confront Edward Said's thesis in *Orientalism* (1978) that Eastern women in Western literature are generally depicted as passive and submissive 'creatures of a male-power fantasy'.[24] Working in line with Nicola Wilson's assertion that Sillitoe's novels have a 'more complex treatment of gender' than feminist critics give credit for, I interrogate Sillitoe's portrayal of the Chinese taxi-hall dancer Mimi, in *Key to the Door* (1961) and *The Open Door* (1989).[25] I argue that Sillitoe presents Mimi as a defiant character and as the intellectual partner of Brian Seaton, the central character of the two novels. Her character is compared with the representation of Rahimah, the Malay dance hostess in Burgess's *Time for a Tiger* (1956). For my assessment of his novels' presentations of the Malayan space, I adopt a combination of approaches from Siti Nuraishah Ahmad's colonial 'garden archetypes' and David Spurr's theory of colonial rhetorics (surveillance, appropriation, debasement, eroticisation, negation and insubstantialisation). I argue that Sillitoe's novels renounce the depiction of Malaya as a negative space.

Chapter 3 examines Burgess's portrayals of the Malayan people, culture and space in his Malayan Trilogy in comparison to Sillitoe's novels. Burgess's Trilogy sets to 'restore balance' to Somerset Maugham's Malayan fiction by introducing Malayan protagonists, upending the colonial master/colonised dynamics by turning his colonial characters into subordinates to their colonised counterparts and equalising their positions. In the section, I also study the Trilogy's non-conventional colonial

[24] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978; repr. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995), p. 207.
[25] Nicola Wilson, *Home in British Working-Class Fiction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), p. 136.

characters' dalliance with 'going native' and their commentary of the Asian characters. The next section explores the theme of gender fluidity in the Malayan Trilogy that disrupts anxious masculinity in colonial fiction typically found in the Eastern novels of Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) and Somerset Maugham (1874–1965). Building on the historiography of cross-dressing in Javanese/Malay dance and theatre and the Jungian archetype of Hermaphroditism, I examine the transvestite character Ibrahim, which Burgess presents as an avatar of a degenerate man, masculine loss and imperial decline. The final section of the chapter probes into Burgess's presentations of the Malayan space in the period leading up to Malaya's independence, characterised by the juxtaposition between the 'eventful' metropolitan Empire centre in London and the peripheral colony (Malaya), where nothing significant was happening. In the section, I inspect the Malayan Trilogy's strategic dismissal of anti-colonial resistance during the Malayan Emergency. As an extension to Siti Nuraishah Ahmad's initiated reading of Burgess's Malayan decolonised space as the archetypal barren garden that I used as a framework to interrogate Sillitoe's Malayan fiction in Chapter 2, I angle my analysis of Burgess's representations of Malaya based on Saikat Majumdar's 'core-periphery' framework and Paul Gilroy's 'postcolonial melancholia'.

Chapter 4 explores Sillitoe's 'guerilla' writing against the British dominant culture and the official British colonial narrative of the Malayan Emergency. The first section examines the claim made by Burgess in a 1971 interview that Sillitoe's decision to have his protagonist in *Key to the Door* (1961) broadcast his support for the Malayan Communists is a case of misinformed knowledge of Malaya's politics of decolonisation. Building on Nick Bentley's model of close reading in

interrogating Sillitoe's novels in *Radical Fictions* (2007), I posit that Sillitoe's Malayan fiction *Key to the Door* (1961), *The Open Door* (1989) and *Last Loves* (1990) could be read as a 'semiotic guerrilla warfare' on colonial literature to communicate a sub-cultural voice of the British working-class. The second section looks into Sillitoe's strategies of translating the 'death event', or the carnage of the Malayan Emergency particularly in *Key to the Door* (1961), which varies from Burgess's comical depictions of the same event in his Malayan Trilogy. The section explores Sillitoe's efforts to capture the state of duress, violence and disorder which are characteristic of the atmosphere during the Emergency in the novel. The final section of the chapter delves into Sillitoe's resistance writing against 'middle-brow' decolonisation literature in comparison to Burgess's Malayan Trilogy, which cursorily treats the Malayan nationalist movements. In this section, I examine Sillitoe's protagonists' extension of support for the colonised people and their anti-colonial liberation movements that echoes Vladimir Lenin's critique of 'capitalist-imperialism' in *Key to the Door* (1961) and Sillitoe's other novels set in Algeria, namely *The Death of William Posters* (1965), *A Tree on Fire* (1967) and *The Flame of Life* (1974) as they complement the reading of *Key to the Door*'s treatment of decolonisation.

Chapter 5 examines Burgess's comedic treatment of the Malayan Emergency in comparison to Sillitoe's serious commitment in portraying the violent atmosphere of the insurgency in Chapter 4. The first section of the chapter is a follow up to my assertion in Chapter 3, where I note that Burgess's treatment of Malaya as a space of boredom and non-event at the end of British rule of Malaya, is an active resistance against 'postcolonial melancholia'. I argue that Burgess's characters' evasion of the

accounts of the Communist violence through the Malayan Trilogy's investment in comedy of errors is a sign of denying post-imperial melancholia. In the subsequent section while working within the frameworks of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of 'carnival', Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's psychoanalytic study of the inability to mourn, as well as Paul Gilroy's 'postcolonial melancholia', I uncover the anxieties underscoring the Malayan Trilogy's comedy façade in confronting the paramount changes taking place in Malaya's decolonisation process and Britain's national 'identity deficit' following its imperial decline.

Finally, the conclusion of the thesis reviews the key findings of my study on Sillitoe's and Burgess's decolonisation novels—their responses to Malaya's decolonisation and their criticism of the underlying assumptions of classicism and racism in early colonial literature. The conclusion also looks into future research that would explore more of anxious masculinity in 1950s Britain represented through the Angry Young Men literature and the inclusion of women working-class writers into the corpus of study.

CHAPTER 2
Sillitoe's Depiction of Malaya in the Period of Decolonisation and How his Class Background Shapes His Perceptions of Other Cultures

To assess the extent Sillitoe's texts depart from recirculating Orientalist tropes especially in the portrayals of the 'Other' and Eastern spaces in earlier colonial fiction, this chapter examines Sillitoe's representations of Malaya in the period of extensive decolonisation in his novels *Key to the Door* (1961), *The Open Door* (1989) and *Last Loves* (1990). This chapter looks specifically at his writing of Malayan people, women and landscape. I examine them in light of Leela Gandhi's 'Affective Communities', a concept derived from Derrida's theory of friendship and connotes a transnational co-operation between the British metropolitan anti-imperialists and the colonised subjects.[26] I also study Sillitoe's portrayals of the Malayan landscape within the frameworks of Siti Nuraishah Ahmad's 'garden archetypes' and David Spurr's theory of colonial rhetorics (surveillance, appropriation, debasement, eroticisation, negation and insubstantialisation).[27] Sillitoe's Malayan fiction continues the anti-colonial tone in the works of Leonard Woolf (1880–1969) and George Orwell (1903–1950). His novels reject the colonial master/colonised slave power dynamics, undermine the Orientalist trope of Eastern women as mere passive sexual objects and resist the exoticised portrayal of the Malayan landscape and its depiction in negative topography.

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[26] Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anti-colonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 2. Gandhi's 'Affective Communities' disrupts Edward Said's Manichean East/West distinctions. Matthew Whittle in *Postwar British Literature* (2016) describes this solidarity shown by a section of British metropolitan writers for the anti-colonial uprisings and independence movements in the colonies as 'internationalist and humanist' (p. 58) while Paul Gilroy terms it as 'planetary humanism'. See Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 79.

[27] Siti Nuraishah Ahmad posits that the Malayan space in British colonial fiction is presented in three incarnation of garden archetypes: the Romantic garden (Joseph Conrad), the restrained and disciplined Victorian garden (Somerset Maugham) and the barren wasteland (Anthony Burgess). See Ahmad, 'Malaysia as the Archetypal Garden in the British Creative Imagination', *Southeast Asian Studies*, 3.1 (2014), 49–84. I will discuss Ahmad's approach further in the chapter.

2.1 Sillitoe's Portrayals of the Malayan People

From a young age, Sillitoe had desired to travel and therefore immersed himself in books on Geography, History and Literature. This was the beginning of his interests for people of other cultures. Similarly, his character Brian Seaton, the protagonist in *Key to the Door* (1961), would regard the subjects with vigour as he indicates: 'Geography, history and English: in each there was a possibility of learning about other countries and people'.[28] Because Sillitoe could not afford to travel abroad on his own accord, he decided to join up as a conscript and was posted to Malaya in 1947 to serve in the Malayan Emergency. Malaya was his first expedition to a foreign land. Although Sillitoe was only in Malaya for a transitional period between 1947 and 1948, unlike Anthony Burgess who became resident in Malaya and Brunei for four years, he was very observant of the Malayan culture, landscape and society. This perceptive trait is reflected through his protagonists, Brian Seaton in *Key to the Door* (1961) and *The Open Door* (1989) and also through George Rhoads in *Last Loves* (1990).

Brian Seaton in particular is a case in point. Despite coming from a poverty-stricken working class background, he appears to be culturally sensitive to his surroundings. This is due to his deep-seated interests in literature, history and geography which make him stand out from his other working-class counterparts in *Key to the Door* (1961) and *The Open Door* (1989).[29] From a young age of nine, Brian had shown appreciation for different cultures and sympathy for the plight of the colonised people in third world countries. These are illustrated in *Key to the Door* (1961) as he

[28] Alan Sillitoe, *Key to the Door* (London: W.H. Allen, 1961), p. 120.
[29] Brian Seaton is a composite character loosely based on Alan Sillitoe's autobiographical life, the people he encountered in his life and his fictional creation. See Alan Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), p. 190, where Sillitoe discusses the process of creating Brian Seaton.

reflects cynically on the word 'love' while he is reminded of his teacher telling his classroom 'God loved everybody'. This made him think of the Abyssinians who were gassed and shot by Italians with machine guns which he overheard in a conversation between his mother and his uncle on the war in Abyssinia when Addis Ababa, its capital city was invaded by the Italians on 5 May, 1936.[30] On a separate note, while watching a play at the theatre, he marvels at the black actress entering the stage in 'flowing robes […] greeted by arabesques of eastern music'. He admires her 'elaborate robes' and 'turbaned headdress' and the silk and satins draped over her body 'with such neatness'. His admiration of the woman is in contrast with his Aunt Lydia's pejorative views of the Abyssinians who discourages Brian from going to Abyssinia and claims Abyssinians eat people.[31] If we examine the language closely that is used to describe non-Western people especially in Brian's account of the black actress entering the stage, there is a noticeable absence of exoticism. When Brian is posted to Malaya to serve as an RAF wireless operator, he would view the Malayan people with the same inclination as he did with the Abyssinians. One example drawn from *Key to the Door* is that Brian finds those who treat other people differently as obnoxious as seen in the way he perceives Hansford, the dark-haired southerner with an 'upper lip permanently curled' whom he shares the billet with.[32] Brian mainly dislikes Hansford for his arrogance and the way he treated Che Din, the Malay man who comes to shine their boots at their billet. Hansford throws a boot at Che Din on an impulse when Che Din replied to Brian's question regarding who he prefers to

[30] Brian was referring to the Second Italo-Abyssinian war which took place from 1935 to 1936. The war led to the fall of Abyssinia into the hands of Benito Mussolini's fascist regime.
[31] This is refuted by Brian who names his favourite black celebrity Paul Robeson whom he argues is Abyssinian but '"don't eat people"'. Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 101. Paul Robeson however is not Abyssinian but African American. Robeson was also known for his advocacy for the civil rights movement, his anti-imperialist stance and his affiliation with communism which led to a lot of controversies. See Barbara J. Beeching, 'Paul Robeson and the Black Press: The 1950 Passport Controversy', *The Journal of African American History*, 87 (2002), pp. 339–54.
[32] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 211.

rule Malaya to which he indicates that he neither prefers the Japanese nor the British to rule Malaya because they both '"make them work for nothing"'. While Hansford's impulsive behaviour led the others in the billet to curse him, Brian sympathises with Che Din as he notes that it was 'the bad luck of [Hansford's] accurate aim as for the impulse that led him to pick up the boot'.[33] It is later revealed that Hansford is condescending not just towards Malaya and the people, but also towards those who were labourers like Brian and Kirkby, a friend of Brian who had worked in the same cardboard factory in Nottingham. For Brian and Kirkby, Malaya provides a more comfortable life than in Nottingham which Hansford does not understand because of his affluent background.[34] In another instance, Brian also exhibits that he feels that he shares the plight of other people from around the world, including the Malayan people after the war and occupation. In *The Open Door* (1989), he states that he wants to write a novel showing a 'universal struggle' of different characters labouring in various countries:

> Even when there was work for everybody the fight went on, all over the world, for most of the people. In Malaya, after war and occupation, consumption was widespread, though he hadn't seen any starvation; but he would write a novel of fifty characters labouring in different countries, a few pages on the daily of each, a panorama of human beings showing the same universal struggle against the oppression, ignorance and nature.[35]

The excerpt indicates that Brian is acutely aware of the hardships faced by indentured labourers and peasants in Malaya. As he points out, although there were

[33] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 212.
[34] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 213.
[35] Alan Sillitoe, *The Open Door* (London: Grafton Books), p. 190.

no signs of starvation in Malaya as he had experienced growing up in the pre-war years in Nottingham, it was plagued by tuberculosis—a result of overcrowded housing quarters and unsanitary living conditions.[36] He had thought of writing the book when he was in hospital in England after demobilisation, recuperating with tuberculosis.

One poignant part in *Key to the Door* (1961) is Brian's encounter with a Chinese rice sower who was ploughing by his radio hut with his buffalo. He describes the incident of him giving the Chinese man a few of his canned food to his Malayan girlfriend Mimi. The man thanked Brian by bowing repeatedly to him to show his gratitude but he mistook this sign as a gesture of indicating his lower social status to the white man, the colonial master. As Brian recalls this incident to Mimi, he comments '[H]e ain't got the brains to think that everyone's equal'.[37] However, the manner in which Brian responds to the gesture, regardless of his misunderstanding, is significant. While the incident may have befuddled Brian, he refuses to be treated like a master and sees the man's action as unnecessary. It illustrates that rather than positing his superiority over the Chinese rice sower, Brian sees the man as his equal instead of a colonised person. Brian sees an affinity between the British working class and the colonial Malayan subjects, empathising with their plight because he has felt similarly exploited by the British ruling elites.[38] Furthermore, the Malayan Police as described by Brian are men on duty. There is no mentioning of their skin colour, or an attempt at caricaturing their appearance or presenting stereotypical portrayals of the major

[36] Lenore Manderson, *Sickness and the State: Health and Illness in Colonial Malaya, 1870–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 113.
[37] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 224.
[38] The economy of Malaya in the late 1940s were still dependent on agriculture such as rice, tin mining, and rubber. See Lim Teck Ghee, *Peasants and their Agricultural Economy in Colonial Malaya, 1874-1971* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Erich H. Jacoby, *Agrarian Unrest in Southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1961), p. 114 for reference.

ethnicities in Malaya as seen in Burgess's Malayan Trilogy. In *Key to the Door*, Brian describes the Malay police officer who asked where Brian and his colleagues were heading to when they were on their way to search for a plane crash in the jungle, as 'dapper and smart in clean khaki'. The officer was accompanied by his 'saried' attendant. The interactions between them were very cordial without Brian and his company asserting their superiority over the Malay policemen as colonised subjects. They treated each other with equal respect. When the officer listens to their explanations, he 'smiled brilliantly' and points towards the direction where the people in the village heard the plane crash and informed them to be cautious at the crash site as the Communists may be roaming the area.[39] Another instance where Brian demonstrates this sense of commonality is with the Malayan Police who patrol the jungle around his Transmitter compound. He made them tea and allowed them to take a nap in his hut, 'feeling sorry at their boring walkabout in the jungle darkness'.[40] Similarly, Brian describes the Malayan villagers as going about with their labour and livelihood. A Chinese peasant was described as ploughing the paddy fields with his buffalo (311), a Malay fisherman was walking by with his fishing net on his shoulder (439), an old Chinese woman was gathering wood (270), and a group of Malays and Chinese were watching the Ghurkha soldiers training for the war with the Communists (381). Even Brian himself and his two other colleagues, Baker and Kirkby, like the Malayan villagers, laboured under the hot sun to build a new hut until they 'burned brown'.[41] This is a stark contrast to Burgess's protagonist Victor Crabbe as we shall explore in Chapter 3, who made caricatures of the Malayan people and even made distinctions based on the areas they come from—the East coast, which was still mostly rural and the West coast in the Straits Settlements,

[39] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 407.
[40] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 375.
[41] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 375.

which Victor notes was more developed than the East coast due to its larger presence of European expatriates and improvements in infrastructure brought by the British colonial government. While Brian sees the Malayan people as making their livelihood just as other people elsewhere across the globe, Victor clearly makes a position of 'Othering' the Malayan people.

2.2 'Silence is Defiance: Sillitoe's Treatment of Asian Women in his Fiction

Nicola Wilson notes that while the writing of Alan Sillitoe had often been 'short shrift[ed]' by feminist critics, she posits that there is 'more complex treatment of gender' in his novels.[42] Gillian Mary Hanson had also written about Sillitoe's 'defiant' female characters and explored this theme in her book *Understanding Alan Sillitoe*.[43] However, these studies are more focused on proletarian women in Britain in Sillitoe's novels. Little attention has been paid to Sillitoe's portrayal of Mimi, introduced in *Key to the Door* (1961) and mentioned briefly in *The Open Door* (1989), the Chinese taxi-hall dancer.[44] In the note at the beginning of the first edition of *Key to the Door*, it is stated that Mimi's character is introduced to juxtapose Brian Seaton's courting and marriage to working-class women in Nottingham in the late 1940s.[45] At a glance, it appears as if Mimi's character, a representation of an Asian woman is sexually exoticised in a manner that Edward Said describes in *Orientalism* (1995) where women are depicted as 'creatures of a male-power fantasy', positing a sort of power-relations dynamic.[46] In *Key to the Door*, Brian sees Mimi as sexually uninhibited compared to his Nottingham girlfriends. She is depicted as having no

[42] Nicola Wilson, *Home in British Working-Class Fiction* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), p. 136.
[43] Gillian Mary Hanson, *Understanding Alan Sillitoe* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), p. 120.
[44] Taxi-hall dancer is another name for dance hostess.
[45] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 1.
[46] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 207.

shame at baring her body to which Brian suggests was 'a matter of climate and locality', contrasting the behaviour of women according to their geographical origins.[47] Brian also compares Mimi to a doll, with short black hair, round face and 'strangely angled eyes'—typical descriptions of women of the East Asian descent.[48] From such descriptions, it is easy to dismiss Sillitoe's treatment of Asian women in Claire Mabilat's words as 'pliable object[s] of male sexual fantasy' who are passive and submissive.[49] If, it is for certain that Brian treats Mimi only as a sexual object—the 'machine' as Flaubert describes Oriental women,[50] and that Mimi is also definitively passive and submissive, she would hardly be given a voice. However, when examined carefully, Mimi is found to be a much more complex character than she might initially appear. This section will henceforth explicate further on Sillitoe's treatment of her character in *Key to the Door* (1961) and *The Open Door* (1989).

Not a lot could be established about Mimi's background apart from the limited information about her which are obtained by Brian's recollective memory. Her father migrated from Canton to Singapore to seek a better job opportunity before eventually settling in Kuala Lumpur where Mimi would visit her family towards the end of *Key to the Door* (1961). She makes a living in the northern part of Malaya, closer to the Thai border entertaining army messes in a taxi dance-hall. Mimi has had a bleak past. Her boyfriend in High School, as Brian recalls, worked for an unidentified political party. As it is stated, he disappeared and left her pregnant at the age of sixteen when

[47] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 233.
[48] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 228.
[49] Claire Mabilat, 'British orientalism and representations of music in the long nineteenth century ideas of the music, otherness, sexuality and gender in the popular arts' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2006) <http://etheses.dur.edu.uk/2703/>[accessed 4 February 2016], p. 44.
[50] In a letter to Louise Colet, the French novelist Gustave Flaubert wrote that *la femme orientale* (the Oriental female) 'is no more than a machine', making 'no distinction between one man and another' qtd. in Said, *Orientalism*, p. 187. Flaubert is describing the boundless sexual licentiousness of Eastern women.

the British police and the Japanese were after him. He was later discovered to be a member of the Chinese triads in Malaya.[51] While not explicitly mentioned in the novels, it is insinuated that Mimi's occupation as a taxi-hall dancer was frowned upon by the society with some seeing taxi dancing as synonymous with prostitution.[52] In fact, even one of the characters in *Key to the Door*, the Eurasian nurse that one of Brian's friends Len Knotman befriends moans about how Len treats her "'worse than any prostitutes from the Boston Lights'".[53] Boston Lights is the dance hall Mimi works at. Therefore, Mimi, marginalised by the society because of her profession, shares a common trait with Brian who feels just as out of place as she does for his interest in literature. At the same time, Brian was not able to relate to those from the middle and upper-class, like Hansford, as mentioned earlier as they have not lived a life of extreme poverty. This is why Brian is more capable of relating to Mimi as he is able to see the struggles of a taxi dancer making her ends meet. Very rarely do we see humanising aspect of prostitutes in fiction, especially in the 1940s setting when they were largely ignored. Sillitoe allows us to get into the psyche of a prostitute and sympathise with her. This could be observed in *Key to the Door* where Brian indicates her aloofness:

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[51] Mimi's High School boyfriend could have been a member of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). This is deduced from the statements that Mimi make, indicating that she leans more towards Communism. See p. 383 of *Key to the Door* (1961). MCP was banned by the British Administration of Malaya for their anti-British propaganda. Their meeting places were also raided by the British Police. At the same time, they were also highly sought after by the Japanese Intelligence, the *Kempeitais* for their anti-Japanese campaigns following the Sino-Japanese war (1937–1945). See Chaps. 1 and 2 of Cheah Boon Kheng's *Red Star Over Malaya: Resilience and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation of Malaya 1941–46*, 4th edn (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012) for a comprehensive account of the Malayan Overseas Chinese's resistance to the British and Japanese imperial governments.

[52] A dance hostess in Shanghai remarked that the dancing profession is regarded as a 'low' life with some dancers 'operating on the same level of prostitutes' as dancers use their 'flesh for material gain, which is immoral according to moralists'. Cited in James Farrer and Andrew David, *Shanghai Nightscapes: A Nocturnal Biography of a Global City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 25.

[53] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 305.

> Many of [Mimi's] remarks seemed like meaningless counters, long since detached from inside her, with no real connection to her own self. These he imagined her having used freely to other lovers she must have had: he recognised and resented them, jealous because they stopped him getting close to her.[54]

Brian is frustrated with Mimi's detachment but also notes that in meeting the demands of her job, she becomes fatigued. Brian attempts to understand the life of a taxi dancer who has been trained not to be too attached to any man and resents the wealthier servicemen who could afford to pay Mimi for their company. While Brian on the other hand, who lacks the money to pay for Mimi has to wait until she is off duty to spend time with her. An exchange of dialogues between Mimi and Brian on the ferry while she was on her way to meet her clients transports us momentarily into Mimi's world to experience her survival in making ends meet that we could not help but sympathise with her. Brian catches her gazing into the sea on the ferry looking very exhausted. He notes that she was staring at the sea as if 'only the ploughed-up phosphorescence of it could give rest from the vivid colours of her eyes had been seeing the last five hours' indicating that Brian believes Mimi is in dire need of a rest and perhaps also sensed that she is not too happy with her job. Brian's intuition was right as Mimi confirms it by stating that '"You get tired whether you work or not,"'.[55] Apart from that, there is also evidence in *The Open Door* (1989) where Brian refuses to put the blame on Mimi for catching tuberculosis in Malaya although he could have easily accused her as a carrier. When Brian returns to England for demobilisation, his father Harold points out that his disease was due to his '"hanky-

[54] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 231.
[55] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 229.

panky with black women"'. Brian dismisses Harold's assumption that he might have caught consumption from Mimi and states he certainly 'picked up nothing from her'.[56] Throughout the entire novel, not even once did Brian pinpoint Mimi and held her responsible for the infection. Rather, after doing some research, he came to a conclusion that Malaya was grappling with widespread consumption and that he happened to be one of those affected by it. Here, it is shown that rather than treating Mimi as an Oriental female body that represents the entire Malayan culture, Brian treats her as an individual with her own struggles making a livelihood as a taxi dancer.[57] Therefore in *The Open Door* (1989), we see that Brian expresses his desire to write a book about the universal struggles of people across the globe, including the Malayan people's battle with consumption.

Furthermore, it is observed that Mimi is not only Brian's sexual partner but his intellectual partner. The biographer of Alan Sillitoe suggests that Mimi is an 'unillusioned pragmatist' meant to balance out Brian's idealisms.[58] Brian values Mimi's opinions and constantly seeks her thoughts on his future plans and the decisions he made. An example is when he tells Mimi about the communist terrorist he captured while on a jungle rescue operation. Instead of shooting him, he lets him go. Brian desperately seeks Mimi's approval of his decision. He had always thought that Mimi has a sense of maturity that runs off a tangent to his own, although she might be about the same age as he is. This is probably because her experiences make

[56] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 36. Harold Seaton, having not travelled out of England assumes that all Malayan people are black, without being aware that they are multicultural. It is not only Harold who holds this assumption. Brian's cousin Bert also wrongly assumes that there are only "Chinks and Blackies" in Malaya. See *The Open Door*, p. 41.
[57] It is Roxanne L. Euben who suggests that women's bodies are the indices of the entire culture. Kindly refer to her book *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 150.
[58] Richard Bradford, *The Life of a Long-Distance Runner: The Biography of Alan Sillitoe* (London: Peter Owen, 2008), p. 72.

her a cynic. '"I captured a bandit, a Chinese"', Brian says to Mimi. "'I let him go […] because I couldn't kill him. And later in the ambush, I didn't aim for anything. I fired where nothing could be hurt"', he confessed. Mimi however at the moment neither shows approval or disapproval. She simply throws back a question at him, '"Why?"' leaving Brian to ponder upon his actions himself.[59] Brian was angry when he thought that she had not understood his motive. Mimi did understand as she later demonstrates on the last night they saw each other before his train departure: '"What you told me the other night, about up in the jungle, you were brave. I understood. It was marvellous. You were right not to shoot at them,"' Mimi comments.[60] It shows how Brian needs Mimi's reassurance for his rationale of letting the communist go. Additionally, Brian also tries to seek Mimi's opinion on his future plans. He informs Mimi that he does not wish to return to England and wants to stay in Malaya longer. He tells her he will find work as a rubber planter and learn the Malay language to get by. Being a realist, Mimi replies that he must go back to England because he does not have a job. Mimi tells him that he would be in danger if he works as a rubber planter especially when the Emergency was going on. '"This isn't good for you,"' Mimi states. '"What will happen when the fighting starts? Everybody thinks that a communist army is going to come out of the jungle and kill the British. Nobody can stop them, they think. And maybe a lot of Chinese and Malays will get killed as well."'[61] When Brian tries to assure her that the Communists will not harm him because he is himself a Communist, Mimi speaks gravely. '"You shouldn't joke"', stressing on the severity of the situation.[62] Therefore, it is seen that rather than being portrayed as a one-dimensional character,

[59] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 436.
[60] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 441.
[61] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 236.
[62] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 237.

Mimi is given a voice. Her opinions are even valued by the protagonist as we see him constantly seeking for her response of his plans and actions. This is contrary to the treatment of Rahimah, Mimi's counterpart in Burgess's *Time for a Tiger* (1956) who like her, is also a dance hostess. The depiction of Rahimah reminds us of the way Edward Said describes Flaubert's Kuchuk Hanem—'dumb and irreducible sexuality'.[63] Unlike Mimi, Rahimah is reduced to being short-sighted.

Finally, Mimi is represented as a defiant female character. She refuses to submit herself fully to Brian's will. Mimi could be compared to Brian's mother, Vera Seaton who is equally strong-headed. Although there is an instance where Brian did mention Mimi possessing a 'one-sided character' and accuses her of being too passive compared to his wife Pauline, it is more of a result of misunderstanding on Brian's part and his failure to understand that her 'passivity' has a lot more to do with her reservations and not a portrayal of meekness. When the passages where Brian throws these accusations at Mimi are examined carefully, it is found that Brian was overpowered by anger that irrationality seems to be taking him over, making him calling Mimi derogatory names such as 'perverse witch' and 'whore' which explains the reason Alan Sillitoe's novels have often been read as misogynist.[64] What Brian sees as Mimi's evasiveness is misinterpreted as her passiveness. However, it is revealed that Mimi was being evasive not because she was passive. The reason for being so was because she found out that Brian has a wife and child back in England. On top of that, her occupation also makes her detached from opening up to Brian. The following excerpt demonstrates how anger clouds Brian's judgment of Mimi:

[63] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 187.
[64] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 303.

> Mimi was strange to him because her one-sided character appeared so complete […] that his only reaction to it was anger. He saw no way in which they could really and finally meet in love, his immediate dark reason for this being that they were too much strangers to each other for having been born and reared in different parts of the world. I understood Pauline, so why shouldn't I get through to Mimi? Still, some women are harder to get to know than others […]. Mimi is too passive, and I want somebody to grind myself to bits on maybe. […] Mimi's doing it on you, and it's looped your vanity in a half-nelson. You thought you were all set to make a go of it, live it up for good perhaps, get married maybe (after you'd ditched Pauline, you foul bastard) and fill her with a few kids. Well, think on it: you'll be back in England in six months.[65]

Part of the issue Brian has with Mimi is that she is very reserved, almost appearing unemotional. In his bouts of anger, he then concludes that it is difficult to access Mimi's emotions due to them coming from different cultural backgrounds. This is not the case as Brian knew from the beginning that her job hinders her from getting too attached to him but it did not bother him because they were both lonely and needed a companion. Brian accuses Mimi of being too passive but it is not that she was being passive but of her lacking the sentimentality which Brian craves. As soon as his anger subsides, Brian begins to realise that he expects too much from Mimi when he does not know for certain whether he will be returning to Malaya after going back to England and make a life-long commitment to Mimi. Mimi does not like to hold onto promises as her past experience had turned her into a cynic. '"You

[65] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, pp. 300–1.

never bothered to tell me you were married, out of kindness, I imagined"', Mimi remarks to Brian sardonically.[66] Therefore, as illustrated, Mimi is far from passive. Quite contrary, she is a resilient character and her silence to quote Gillian Mary Hanson, is her 'defiance'.[67] Brian is in fact complaining about Mimi's refusal to submit to his will.

2.3 Sillitoe's Presentations of the Malayan landscape

Like Burgess's Malaya, Sillitoe's Malaya is set in the period of decolonisation in Asia, although it is set in the earlier stage of decolonisation (1946–8) compared to Burgess's Malaya which is situated on the cusp between the twilight of the British colonial administration and early Malayan Independence (1956–7). It is significant to mention this timeline as the treatment of the Malayan landscape as claimed by Siti Nuraishah Ahmad in her article 'Malaysia as the Archetypal Garden in the British Creative Imagination' (2014)[68], vary greatly from the periods of early, high and late European imperialism (1512–1945). Drawing her analysis from a synthesis of frameworks derived from Carl Jung's theory of archetypes, David Spurr's (1996)[69] and Pramod K. Nayar's (2008)[70] theories of colonial rhetoric and

[66] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 384.
[67] Hanson, p. 120.
[68] The name 'Malaysia' should not be confused with 'Malaya'. Ahmad explains her use of 'Malaysia' instead of 'Malaya' in her study which includes British fiction on both West and East Malaysia. While 'Malaya' refers strictly to the British colony in Peninsula Malaysia, 'Malaysia' covers both the Peninsula Malaysia and the North East areas of Borneo which constitute modern Malaysia today. For further information on Ahmad's rationale of using the term 'Malaysia' kindly refer to Ahmad, 'Malaysia as the Archetypal Garden in the British Creative Imagination', p. 49. I use 'Malaya' as my study focuses on the depiction of Peninsula Malaysia in the period of the Malayan Emergency (1946–60) before Malaya officially changed its name to 'Malaysia' in 1963 when it merged with the states of Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo and Singapore.
[69] David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).
[70] Pramod K. Nayar, *English Writing and India, 1600–1920: Colonizing Aesthetics* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008).

Gayatri Spivak's adaptation of Martin Heidegger's concept of 'worlding' (1985)[71], Ahmad proposes a reading of Malaya in British fiction through garden archetypes. She notes that there are '[t]hree dominant incarnations of the garden archetype' which are each represented by the novels of Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), William Somerset Maugham (1874–1965) and Anthony Burgess (1917–1993), and each representing certain periods of imperialism.[72] Conrad's Malaya is the 'lush, Romantic garden'; Maugham's Malaya is 'the restrained, disciplined Victorian garden'; while Burgess's Malaya (end of empire) is 'the barren, dried-up garden'. In her analysis, she concludes that contrary to the earlier Romantic depictions of Malaya as the 'tropical Garden of Eden', Burgess's narrative which she identifies with the period of decolonisation, reverses this image and paints Malaya as a 'barren garden' or a wasteland filled with moral decay, filth and disease.[73] Ahmad is not the only critic to have indicated the portrayal of Third World countries in the period of decolonisation as a 'barren garden'. Along a similar line, Mary Louise Pratt discovers that 'postcolonial metropolitan [travel] writers' such as Alberto Moravia (1907–1990), and Paul Edward Theroux (1941–) depict the cities and landscapes of post-independent Africa and Latin America using images of 'grotesquery' in their books *Which Tribe Do You Belong To?* (1972) and *The Old Patagonian Express* (1978). She notes that this is due to the lamentations of former colonies'

[71] Spivak adapted Martin Heidegger's concept of 'worlding' from his article 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York, 2001), pp. 15–86. Interpreting Heidegger from feminist and postcolonial angles, Spivak redefines 'worlding' as a process of re-mapping the "Third World" narratives with an alternative version which ultimately puts the natives in the position of the "Other" instead of the source of authority of their own culture and history. See Spivak, 'History', in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 212).

[72] Ahmad's periodisation of the different stages of imperialism in her analysis differs from historians of colonialism. Therefore, instead of labelling Conrad's Malaya as 'early imperialism' and Maugham's Malaya as 'high imperialism' as Ahmad did in her analysis, I reference them as 'Conrad's Malaya', 'Maugham's Malaya' and 'Burgess's Malaya' to avoid any confusion. The important thing to note here is that I refer to Burgess's Malaya in the context of the post-war or decolonisation.

[73] Ahmad, p. 49.

'depredations of western-induced dependency'.[74] Ahmad's comparison of Burgess's Malaya to a barren garden is foregrounded here as Sillitoe is a contemporary writer of Burgess. Because Sillitoe's novels have never been examined from this perspective, this study therefore aims to investigate whether Sillitoe has any tendencies to replicate Burgess' depiction of Malaya and follow what Robert Hampson asserts as 'textual tradition' in his novels.[75] It is also pertinent to explicate and see how his working-class background to an extent shape his protagonists' 'worlding' of Malaya. Sillitoe's novels *Key to the Door* (1961), *The Open Door* (1989) and *Last Loves* (1990) locates Malaya in three different phases: the first being Malaya at the beginning of decolonisation of Asia; the second being Malaya as distant memories as Brian Seaton returns to England; and the third being postcolonial Malaya.

Before we begin with the analysis of Sillitoe's 'worlding' of Malaya, it is crucial to briefly review the colonial rhetoric of the landscape laid down by Spurr (1996) to determine whether Sillitoe had recycled them in his texts or whether his depictions differ from other colonial writers. They are surveillance, appropriation, debasement, eroticisation, negation and insubstantialisation. The first colonial rhetoric is surveillance. Surveillance refers to the imperial gaze of the landscape. In this rhetoric, the European explorer oversees the colonial landscape and appreciates the picturesque panorama before him. This appears to be innocent. However, Pramod K. Nayar asserts that it is not as innocent as it seems and states that surveillance has a

[74] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edn (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), p. 213.

[75] Robert Hampson, *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000), p. 1. Hampson refers to the template used by European writers in describing the Malay Archipelago. He proves that these writers draw the descriptions of Malaya from the same sources that even dates back to Ptolemy (c. 100-170 AD). The most frequently cited sources are William Marsden's *The History of Sumatra* (1783), Stamford Raffles' *The History of Java* (1817), and Alfred Russell Wallace's scientific book *The Malay Archipelago* (1869).

clear 'imperial intent'.[76]. Louise Mary Pratt elaborates on this point by stating that as soon as the colonial explorer enters the tropical jungles of Africa, Asia and the Americas, the presence of other human beings including that of the local people and other Europeans seemingly vanish from the scene, leaving him alone as he takes in his surroundings. Pratt draws a parallel to the Biblical 'Adam alone in his garden' where 'people seem to disappear from the garden as Adam approaches'.[77] Ahmad illustrates an example through Joseph Conrad's depiction of Willems, a Dutch trader who sets foot on a fictional island of Borneo, Sambir in *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896). When Willems arrives in the Bornean forest, he sees 'no other human being on his early excursions' as if the island is a *terra nullius* and the native people of Borneo strategically removed from the landscape.[78] As Nayar aptly puts it, surveillance could also be described as a process of 'empty[ing the landscape] of natives' to render it 'scenic'.[79] This eviction of the natives is not only unique to the colonial landscape. Raymond Williams posits that this strategy was similarly used in 17th century country-house poems where the image of peasants toiling on the English estates are cleared from the picture to make it appear like an idyllic pastoral landscape.[80] With the surveillance of the landscape, comes the rhetoric of appropriation which goes hand in hand with each other. Appropriation according to Spurr is a process where the 'territory surveyed' is claimed 'as the colonizer's own'.[81] In the strategy of appropriation, the wealth of the colonial space—its fertile lands, vast landscapes and wild terrains are seen as 'negative topographies'.[82] An example is seen in the glossary that is used by European travellers and colonial

[76] Nayar, p. 1.
[77] Pratt, p. 50.
[78] Ahmad, p. 63.
[79] Nayar, p. 145.
[80] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 56.
[81] Spurr, p. 28.
[82] Nayar, p. 38

administrators to describe the landscapes of the Third World as opposed to the European metropolitan. Nayar gives an instance of English travellers contrasting India's spacious landscapes and forests as 'uncontrollable excess' and 'disorder' against the images of England's cultivated, orderly and fenced *hortus conclusus* or enclosed gardens.[83] Another instance is the East India Company (EIC)'s view of India's spaciousness as 'wasted' lands and their desire to 'improve' India by altering its landscape with locomotive trains, constructions of ports, railroads and plantations. Writings by colonial administrators give the impression that they were on a moral mission of converting these Third World nations rich with natural resources into in Nayar's words, a '*Concordia discors'* to mimic the 'garden of Christian faith'.[84] However, when examined closely, appropriation bears traces of imperial capitalism and is evidently seen in the statements by Albert Sarraut (1872–1962), French colonial administrator of Indochina 1911–14 and 1917–19 where he mentions that 'the greatest accumulation of natural wealth is *locked up* in territories occupied by backward races who' do not know 'how to *profit* it by themselves' and 'are […] less capable of [supplying] the growing needs of humanity'.[85] Sarraut reveals the economic motivation behind the exploitation of the colonial space. Appropriation is also observed in the speech made by Sir Hugh Clifford, Malayan colonial administrator (1896–1900) on his journey through the East coast states of the Malayan Peninsula—Terengganu and Kelantan at the Royal Geographical Society in 1896. He was seen to be criticising the East coast for being 'less developed' compared to the West coast which he stated were 'comparatively civilised' due to the larger European population there and them being either under direct British rule or

[83] Nayar, pp. 15–7.
[84] Nayar, pp. 5–6.
[85] Emphasis added. Cited in Spurr, p. 29.

were in close proximity to the states governed by the British.[86] Clifford's comments implicate that in order for the Peninsular Malaya to be progressive, the British should be allowed to manage the resources and logistics of the Malay states on behalf of the native people.

The third colonial rhetoric is debasement. Debasement is a strategy that presents the cityscape, natural landscape and the rural area of the Third World nations in a period that leads up to decolonisation in an abject manner especially in a way where the descriptions manifest filth and disease. This is in contrast with the depictions of the colonial landscape at the height of imperialism as panoramic and fertile. Debasement employs the opposite aesthetics to that portrayed in the earlier periods of imperialism where they highlight the grotesque.[87] In the colonial administrators' imagination, the Third world was associated with poverty, slum areas and overpopulation and so perceived the native living quarters as unsanitary which they believed led to the spread of various endemic diseases. Lord Frederick Lugard, colonial officer of Nigeria (1914–19) took it as far as implementing a policy to segregate the European residential areas from the native living quarters with fear that the natives would contaminate the Europeans with diseases. In his speech, he welcomed the 'Indian or African gentlemen who adopts the higher standard of civilisation' to live in the 'civilised reservation as the European' provided that he does not 'bring with him a concourse of followers [of his own people]'.[88] On another note, while Lugard's speech was borne out of fear of contamination, Étienne Dennery (1903–1979),

[86] Hugh Clifford, 'A Journey through the Malay States of Trengganu and Kelantan', *The Geographical Journal*, 9.1 (1897), 1–37 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1773641> [accessed 16 May 2016] (p. 2).
[87] Pratt, p. 213.
[88] Frederick J.D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Oxon: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1922), repr. 2005), p. 150.

French academic and diplomat projects the filthiness and the stench of Chinese cities in his book *Foules d'Asie* (Asia's Teeming Millions, 1930).[89] He describes them as '[c]rowds in the great Chinese cities half sunk in dirt and mud, swarming like ants in dark, narrow, winding alleys, in which the sickening stench of decaying meat or putrid flesh ever lingers'.[90] Dennery's portrayal of Chinese cities is almost similar to the portrayal of the Malayan market in Anthony Burgess's *Time for a Tiger* (1956) that is filled with putrid smell and sights of rotting vegetables and fish.[91] It should be noted that Lugard, Dennery and Burgess each spoke from the periods of late imperialism (1914–1945) and decolonisation. Pratt suggests that the grotesque depictions of Third World nations is due to the 'lament[ations]' of these writers on the decreasing dependence on Western powers especially as these nations were moving towards self-governance.[92] Spurr states that the depictions of grotesqueness in the Eastern landscapes stretches as far back as the aftermath of First World War where he mentions that Dennery not only expresses his concern with the decline of European empires but also of the 'twilight of white races' where he feared Asians were quickly outnumbering Europeans in population.[93] Hence his fear was projected onto the Chinese cities. The following colonial rhetoric is eroticisation. In this rhetoric, the colonial natural landscape is gendered, is given feminine qualities and is described using sensual imagery. The eroticisation of the colonised landscape as Spurr points out is drawn from Michel Foucault's notion of 'hysterization of women's bodies' which originates from the womb. Spurr states that the colonised world are similarly designated the 'erotic' and '(re)productive' qualities assigned to

[89] Étienne Dennery, *Foules d' Asie: Surpopulation Japonaise, Expansion Chinoise, Émigration Indienne* (Asia's Teeming Millions: And Its Problems for the West),(Paris: Armand Colin, 1930; repr. 2006).
[90] Cited in Spurr, p. 88.
[91] Anthony Burgess, *Time for a Tiger* (London: Heinemann, 1956), p. 114.
[92] Pratt, p. 213.
[93] Spurr, pp. 87–88.

the female body.[94] Anne McClintock terms it 'porno-tropics'. It is according to McClintock an age-old European tradition in colonial and travel writings. Voyager Christopher Columbus for instance 'feminizes the earth as a cosmic breast' where the male explorer 'yearn[s…] for the Edenic nipple'. McClintock adds that for centuries, the Third World landscapes which were deemed exotic for its far distance from Europe were 'libidinously eroticized'.[95] Jeremy Hawthorn who analyses Joseph Conrad's Malaysian and African novels asserts that there is indeed sexual politics between the male colonial agent and the colonised landscape that is personified as an Oriental female body. Using Joseph Conrad's fiction as examples, Hawthorn illustrates traces of eroticisation in Conrad's Malay and African spatial settings such as in *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) and *Heart of Darkness* (1899). He indicates that Conrad's descriptions of the 'twisted roots' and 'creepers' in the jungles of Borneo and Africa are personified as a female entity 'writh[ing]' at the lone male explorer as if enticing him.[96] Ahmad suggests that the very act of the creepers and roots twisting and writhing is an 'overtly sexual image' of intercourse. She also adds that apart from the seductive creepers, the tropical jungle is reminiscent of John Keats' *femme fatale* in his poem 'La belle dame sans merci' (1819).[97] They are enchanting but also deadly. These feminised Oriental tropical landscapes lure in their male victims (the solitary explorer), entangle them and lead them to death, madness or disorientation.

[94] The etymology of 'hystera' comes from the Greek word 'hysterikos' which means womb. See Spurr, p. 170 for further information on 'hystera'.
[95] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 21–22.
[96] Jeremy Hawthorn, *Sexuality and the Erotic in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 63.
[97] Ahmad, p. 65.

The fifth rhetoric of the colonial landscape is negation. Negation, as Spurr defines, is a strategy that 'conceives of the Other [space] as absence, emptiness, nothingness, or death'. It is from this rhetoric that Ahmad derived the notion of the barren garden. Negation is related to the strategies of appropriation and debasement. In the process of justifying the exploitation of the wealth of natural resources and labour of the colonial space, it must empty it including negating its past history and civilisation.[98] Spurr illustrates an instance of negation in literature precisely in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). When Conrad's protagonist Marlow describes the African landscape, he refers to it as 'the biggest, the most blank' space on earth.[99] Christopher Miller indicates that Africa in Conrad's fiction becomes a representation of 'darkness', 'absence' and 'void' space.[100] Ahmad on the other hand notes the lifelessness and emptiness of Burgess's Malaya in the period of decolonisation where his protagonist Victor Crabbe inverts the symbolic Garden of Paradise in Islam and the Malay culture into a landscape of degeneracy and spiritual bankruptcy due to his disenchantment with the advent of Malayan independence and nationalism.[101] The next and final colonial rhetoric of the landscape is insubstantialisation. Insubstantialisation treads along a similar vein as debasement and negation and sometimes may overlap each other. The strategy of insubstantialisation emerged from Western writing's association of the non-Western world with the 'inner journey' of Sufism, Buddhism and Hinduism, where Spurr insinuates that 'in doing so renders the [Orient] as insubstantial' or lacking reality.[102] In employing insubstantialisation, the writer conveys the experience being in the Eastern world

[98] Spurr, p. 92.
[99] Spurr, p. 11.
[100] Christopher Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 174.
[101] Ahmad, p. 71.
[102] Spurr, p. 142.

makes him feel as if he was in a dream-like state. It is Hegel who has provided this template of the disorienting Orient when he describes India as a 'region of phantasy'.[103] This stems from his argument about the Hindu belief of the annihilation of the self which he claims 'has nothing concrete' and 'has no connection with the real'.[104] He further adds that it is because of the Hindu state of transience that 'makes them incapable of writing History' as '[a]ll that happens is dissipated in their minds into confused dreams' in what he states result from their inability to distinguish between what is real and what is imagination.[105] Hegel's association of the Eastern world with disorientation and withdrawal from reality is reproduced in some modern Western literature. An example is seen in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) where the narrator describes that Africa produced in him a 'dream-like sensation' that was experienced by the 'rest of the bewitched [European] pilgrims' after taking in the beauty and vastness of its landscape.[106] French writer André Gide also replicates Conrad's depictions of Africa in his book *Travels in Congo* (1962) where he describes the longer he stays in Congo, the more his psychological being is transformed to 'a state of torpor and semi-consciousness' as if he had drunk 'hemlock'.[107] In the strategy of insubstantialisation, the narrator also loses his senses and slowly succumbs to insanity due to the geographical setting or the hot tropical climate he is in. In another case, he would simply dismiss the Eastern world he is in as dizzying and could not make any sense out of it. Ahmad draws an example from Somerset Maugham's short story set in Borneo, 'The Outstation' (1934) which demonstrates the English settlers experiencing tropical disease. Ahmad states that

[103] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956; repr. 2004), p. 139.
[104] Hegel, p. 158.
[105] Hegel, p. 162.
[106] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Bibliolis Books Ltd., 2010), p. 41.
[107] André Gide, *Travels in Congo*, trans. by Dorothy Bussy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 93.

'The Outstation' is a classic parable of the sins, wrath, envy, and fratricide' where '[d]espite the seeming innocence and tranquillity of Sembulu's geophysical setting, a palpable menace can be felt in the air'. Consequently, its main character Wharburton is 'seduced into ceding to his baser instincts in such an environment'. Wharbuton's spiral into madness is then blamed upon the tropical heat and Borneo's landscape that is akin to William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) whose setting of the Pacific Island is the cause for the British children's descent into madness and savagery.[108] Therefore, with the presentation of the six colonial rhetorics, this section henceforth seeks to examine Alan Sillitoe's portrayals of the Malayan landscape and find out whether his novels deploy any of the strategies as outlined earlier.

For a start, the Malayan jungle is featured prominently in all three of Sillitoe's novels in Malaya: *Key to the Door* (1961), *The Open Door* (1989) and *Last Loves* (1990). Where Roxanne L. Euben had indicated that women's bodies are a catalogue to the entire culture in travel writing, the Malayan jungle similarly is a significant landmark in narratives of Malaya and its culture.[109] Ex-British military serviceman John Davis for instance who commandeered the clandestine Force 136 operation against the Japanese in Malaya during the Second World War describes the Malayan jungle as a 'substantial area of impenetrable swamp-jungle'.[110] In another instance, Chinese-born Han Suyin portrays the Malayan jungle like Arthur Conan Doyle does in *The Lost World* (1912) with 'enormous trees' that bears 'foliage too thick, leaves too many, too large' in her novel on the Malayan Emergency, *And The Rain My Drink.*[111] The Malayan jungle is hence an important precursor to the Malayan culture and it is

[108] Ahmad, p. 70.
[109] Euben, p. 150.
[110] Margaret Shennan, *Our Man in Malaya: John Davis CBE, DSO, Force 136 SOE and Postwar Counter-Insurgency* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2007), p. 71.
[111] Han Suyin, *And The Rain My Drink* (Singapore: Monsoon Books Pte Ltd, 2013), p. 25.

through a foreign writer's depictions of this natural landscape that elements of exoticism could manifest. The jungle in each of Sillitoe's selected novels however signifies the self-transformation of the main characters rather than simply a setting to their adventures. The Malayan jungle's effects on Brian Seaton's transformation is not very apparent at first in *Key to the Door* as this novel represents his initial phase of self-discovery. It is only towards the end of the novel that he begins to find comfort with the jungle as it begins to merge with Brian's 'Self'. The novel's sequel *The Open Door* would continue from the jungle's role in Brian's gradual self-discovery to self-renewal which is signified as sloughing a snake's skin after going through a period of spiritual discovery. While in *Last Loves,* although not connected to *Key to the Door* and *The Open Door*, it is a novel about two elderly ex-servicemen in the Malayan Emergency in their 60's who returns to modern Malaya, now Malaysia to reconcile with the past. Their final trip into the Malayan jungle leads to the death of George Missenden, one of the protagonists who dies peacefully '[l]ike a babe' after coming to terms with his desire to return to Malaya.[112] Each representation of the jungle in all three novels will be explicated further.

A study of *Key to the Door* (1961) by Allen Richard Penner notes Brian Seaton's materialist intent of climbing *Gunong Barat* (West Mountain). Penner asserts that despite Sillitoe's use of the excerpts from Dante's 'Divine Comedy' (c. 1380), he introduces them only to 'reject Dante's philosophy'.[113] As Penner points out, Brian's ascent of the mountain unlike Dante does not represent the soul's redemption but is rather a Godless modern take on the Dark Woods.[114] This is true in the beginning of

[112] Alan Sillitoe, *Last Loves* (London: Grafton Books, 1990), p. 182.
[113] Allen Richard Penner, 'Dantesque Allegory in Sillitoe's "Key to the Door", *Renascence,* 20.2 (1968), 79–103 (p. 84).
[114] Penner, p. 80.

Key to the Door where earlier on in the novel, Brian's soul-searching appears to have a materialist tone. Although prior to Brian's ascent to the mountain with his other jungle rescue operation team, he sees *Gunong Barat* as a symbolic figure for self-discovery, this perception changes when he actually begins his expedition. In the beginning, Brian is seen to desire climbing the mountain and see the jungle for himself. As he puts it, going on an expedition to the summit of *Gunong Barat* is necessary as he sees it as 'a stepping-stone to the future' which would allow him to get out of his comfort zone—Nottingham, which he also shapes as a symbol of familiarity. Brian also indicates that '[w]ithout the expedition there would be no future, only a present, an ocean of darkness behind the thin blue of the day, a circle of bleak horizons dotted by fires burning out their derelict flames'.[115] However, halfway through his journey up the mountain, he decided that it is best to abandon the idea of even scaling it as he finds it a 'dull place because no one of flesh-and-blood lived there'. He resumes by stating that 'All you could do was burn it down, let daylight and people in'.[116] It should be noted that Brian's statement goes against the grain of the colonial rhetoric of surveillance. Brian in the jungle is not the Adam figure assumed by Joseph Conrad's Willems in *The Outcast of the Islands* where the Bornean islanders disappear as he enters the scene. Instead, Brian hoped that there were civilisation on the mountain, actually wanting the Malayan people to settle there. What follows appears on the surface as a strategy of appropriation. Brian suggests that the forest is cleared for cultivation of lettuces and that roads are built to allow easy access up the mountain. His fellow expeditioner Baker on the other hand, wants a 'cable railway' to be built. However, when examined carefully, Brian and Baker were speaking in response to Knotman's comment '"What did you expect?

[115] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 303.
[116] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 351.

[…] A piece of cake?"' on observing their discomfort and struggles climbing *Gunong Barat*. Knotman, as he mentions is experienced in jungle trekking and is the leader of the group. Brian's and Baker's comments are also dismissed by Odgeson, a dental surgeon who is well-versed about Malaya and had lived there longer than the rest of the group. He laughs at their complaints and reminds them they are not in Switzerland. Therefore, Brian and Baker's view of the Malayan jungle denseness is not similar to the imperial capitalist intent of appropriating the Malayan landscape. They were expressing their discomfort charting an unfamiliar and challenging terrain. Besides, unlike Hugh Clifford who was a colonial administrator tasked to protect the trading activities of British private companies on behalf of the Empire, Brian, Baker, Knotman and Odgeson did not climb *Gunong Barat* to survey on the resources there or make notes on how they could transform its geophysical landscape. They were training for a jungle rescue operation. Furthermore, despite the discomfort, Brian is seen contemplating 'the battle against nature' he is experiencing and discovers that 'in spite of all discomfort, such exposure lit the recesses of his hermit soul with a light that made him feel more equal to himself than he had been before'.[117] This marks the beginning of Brian's soul-searching in the Malayan rainforest.

Moreover, Brian also decides that climbing a mountain and going into the jungle must have a purpose that is to draw a map, forage for food, collect wood or to settle there as the jungle is too overbearing for them. Because his rescue team did not manage to climb up to the peak of the mountain, due to the steepness of their path and his team's exhaustion, he reflects on the purposelessness of their journey as

[117] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, pp. 334–337.

'dull'. Brian also finds as they climb down the mountain that he could feel the stream they pass by mocking them for their 'purposelessness'.[118] He also feels '[i]t was loony not to get to the top after struggling so far' which upsets him because they were only able to climb the mountain halfway and not all the way to the top.[119] However, when they do have a purpose, he admits that it is good such as when they scale *Gunung Barat* to locate a plane wreckage and missing bodies. What follows after is interestingly a shift of tone from the mundane practicality of viewing the jungle to a spiritual connection with the jungle that is akin to Romantic poetry which sees nature transforming the individual. Returning to the jungle for the second time, Brian sees the jungle as a part of himself:

> To Brian the smell, humidity, quality of travail, the intense silence of desperation felt whenever they paused to rest, seemed now like home and second nature, an acknowledged fight on the earth connected to a lesser known and felt contest in the jungle deep within himself, a matching that in spite of his exhaustion made the trip seem necessary and preordained.[120]

Rather than simply a physical landscape, the jungle merges into Brian's 'Self' which he feels 'contest […] within himself'. While in his first expedition, the jungle was intimidating, it now seemed to him 'like home and second nature'.[121] The following excerpt reminds us immediately of William Wordworth's 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud'(1807) where being alone with nature has the capacity to heal the soul[122]:

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[118] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 351.
[119] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 345.
[120] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 411.
[121] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 411.
[122] It is not coincidental that there are resemblances of Brian Seaton's solitude with nature with William Wordsworth's aforementioned poem. It is documented that Sillitoe had read Wordworth's

> Brian was alone and liked it, walked from the nacelle with a feeling of ease as if taking a stroll on a quiet afternoon. The landscape was different, humid, arduous still when he had to clamber up a bank, yet being beyond the sight and sound of the group was an immense relief. The jungle appeared less alien, and he felt that it was somehow tamed for him, that he was beginning to understand even the harmlessness and maybe necessity of it.[123]

In his first journey, Brian finds the jungle uncomfortable and wished that there was civilisation there. In his second journey which is now purposeful, Brian finds comfort in the jungle as it now appears 'less alien' and 'tamed' to him.[124] He then understands his initial reason for climbing *Gunung Barat* which he saw as his 'stepping-stone to the future'.[125] The use of the jungle as a site of soul-searching is a contrast to the depiction of the Eastern wild terrains and vast landscapes as 'negative topographies' pointed out by Nayar. Writing against the Victorian textual tradition of Eastern landscapes, Sillitoe chooses to portray the Malayan rainforest instead as a positive topography, replicating Wordsworth's communion with nature. This is different from the way Burgess uses the Malayan jungle as the base to measure the gradations of progress in Malaya. In *Time for a Tiger* (1956), the jungle which is also the dwelling place of the aborigines is used to highlight the most base and primitive

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Lyrical Ballads (1798) and 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' (1807) while he was at the Wroughton hospital in Wiltshire, Bradford, p. 69 and p. 79. William Hutchings has also noted the heavy influences of Romantic literature on Sillitoe's works and even dubbed his protagonists the Byronic Proletarian anti-heroes. See William Hutchings, 'Proletarian Byronism: Alan Sillitoe and the Romantic Tradition', in *English Romanticism and Modern Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Allan Chavkin (New York: AMS Press, 1993), pp. 83–112.

[123]Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 414.

[124] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 414.

[125] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 303.

lifestyle in the most outer periphery compared to the 'core' of civilisation of the urban areas.[126]

The sequel to *Key to the Door* (1961), *The Open Door* (1989), continues to explore the role of the jungle as a symbol of self-discovery leading up to the complete transformation of Brian's soul that would change him entirely towards the end of the novel. Brian describes the ultimate process of self-transformation as shedding a snake skin to reveal a new man, coming out of it a more enlightened individual.[127] *The Open Door* (1989) follows Brian's demobilisation from Malaya and his return to England. It mainly revolves around his discovery upon being diagnosed with tuberculosis (TB) and his coming to terms with the possibility of death. With death looming and his soul dispirited, the Malayan jungle makes a returning appearance in the form of his memory. At first, when Brian returns to England, he feels a sense of disconnect with his home country and finds solace through daydreams, memories and his writing of the Malayan jungle. When he is at home in Nottingham, his consciousness wanders to *Gunong Barat* and the city of Nottingham is suddenly transformed into the Malayan setting:

> By the Castle his mind switched into a locker of consciousness where no one could follow, and he wondered whether this separation from his normal self was due to an exhaustion never before experienced, or a force over which he had no control, until he recalled descending the forest of Gunong Barat from the highest point and laying out camp by the […] waterfall. He scoured

[126] For the reference on Burgess's portrayal of the Malayan jungle, kindly refer to Anthony Burgess, *Time for a Tiger* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1956), p. 24. The 'core' of civilisation versus the periphery is a term used by Samuel P. Huntington is his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1996), p. 156.
[127] Sillitoe, *The Open Door* (London: Grafton Books, 1989), p. 356.

> among surrounding trees with a kukri to collect wood […S]uddenly he wasn't with five others in the jungle, but was boxed within a stockade of himself alone, […] connected to the world by the sound of water travelling the path of least resistance in the dusk like static in a radio, strengthening the wall that cut him off.[128]

Brian describes his consciousness momentarily wandering away from the streets of Nottingham into the excursions of Gunong Barat, transforming the present city of Nottingham into the Malayan jungle past and the reality into an imagination in a sensation he calls as switching into a 'locker of consciousness where no one could follow'.[129] His separation from his 'normal self' is also seen earlier in the novel where he is caught daydreaming of the '[d]awn [coming] from behind the escarpment of Gunong Barat' before his thoughts are interrupted by his wife Pauline who remarked 'Where were you? In your dreams?'[130] Brian strangely feels no connection with England as his mind continues to drift into the Malayan landscape, almost making him feel like an outsider, like a soul detached from his body. He views England as so remote that he 'could not imagine picking up his existence where he had left off' and that being away from home 'had paralysed his will'.[131] As he got on the taxi home from the hospital, he sees that the castle is 'dead to him'. The town 'the same' and 'dead in a different way'.[132] It is noted that instead of Malaya, it is Nottingham that is given the qualities of barrenness and death whereas Malaya is portrayed as an image of tropical paradise.

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[128] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 38.
[129] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 38.
[130] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 21.
[131] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 12.
[132] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 177.

Throughout the entire novel, Brian emphasised on how much returning from Malaya had changed him.[133] He alludes to the Malayan jungle's 'deadly bite' that affected his transformation and follows him around like a shadow.[134] From then on, he is seen to be constantly seeking to move away from England which he compares to an 'imprisonment' of his soul despite making attempts to reconnect with it by making several visits home to Nottingham and Kent.[135] Despite his attempts, he still feels '[t]he sense of belonging nowhere' which is reminiscent of Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) who wanders around the streets of Dublin and imposes a self-exile on himself.[136] Brian's eventual self-transformation is only realized when Lillian, his girlfriend who also suffers from TB passes away. While shaken by her death, images of the Malayan jungle makes another appearance in the form of flashbacks where Brian and his jungle rescue operation team were carrying his best friend Baker's dead body through the jungle for burial.[137] Baker is described to have been killed by the Malayan Communists. The novel culminates in Brian's realization of the significance of the Malayan jungle which had earlier on refused to leave him alone.[138] He realised that the jungle is symbolic of his societal upbringing:[139]

> The jungle he had been brought up in had instilled nothing but fear, which had shaped all his decisions. The Malayan forest had been congenial. The jungle was natural, but uncomfortable, and he no longer wants to live in one, would slough off the disadvantages like a snake its skin, fight to achieve a

[133] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 1.
[134] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 75.
[135] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 169.
[136] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 212.
[137] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 324.
[138] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 312.
[139] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 356.

> clearer consciousness (already half attained in inspired moments) which must eventually become all of him. Nor would he any longer waste his spirit trying to break beyond the radius of his basic self, but would move to wherever it was impelled to take him.[140]

Before Brian makes his realization towards the end of the novel, he had earlier on indicated that the jungle was his 'comfort and strength'.[141] Now the jungle has returned to being 'uncomfortable' as in his first expedition to Gunong Barat in *Key to the Door* (1961). However, it also signifies a new phase, which is Brian's self-renewal that he describes as shedding the disadvantages of the jungle like a snake's skin to attain a 'clearer consciousness'. The last part of the excerpt of 'break[ing] beyond the radius of his basic self' takes us back to Heidegger's proposition that to discover our authentic self is to untangle ourselves from the *dasein* 'they-self' such as the societal conformations and expectations that would prevent us from attaining our true potentials.[142] The jungle in the novel is therefore a representation of the *dasein*.

While *Last Loves* (1990) is unrelated to the Brian Seaton series *Key to the Door* (1961) and *The Open Door* (1989), it continues on the main character's spiritual journey through symbolisms of the Malayan jungle and concludes it in death. The Malayan jungle as seen in *Key to the Door* initially represents discomfort but gradually becomes home to Brian Seaton. In *The Open Door*, the jungle morphs into the *dasein*—all that symbolises comfort, the familiar and Brian's upbringing. This

[140] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 356.
[141] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 312.
[142] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), p. 125.

jungle is shed in the end of the novel to reveal Brian's basic 'Self' so he would become a renewed person. *Last Loves* on the other hand through George Missenden represents the final stage of this soul-searching. *Last Loves* centres on the journey of two elderly British men George Missenden and Bernard Rhoads who make a return to Malaysia in the late 1980s to reminisce their jungle war years fighting the Communists forty years prior during the Malayan Emergency in 1948.

In *Last Loves* (1990), the Malayan jungle imagery is alluded to George's destination represented by darkness—a symbol of death. Throughout the entire novel, George is found to be making repeated references of death—the light/dark binary for instance when he is about to board the plane to Malaysia, he reasons 'You go through the most intense light to get to the dark, and through the most incinerating heat to reach the cold – and stay there forever' referring to the light of civilisation to the darkness of the forests and the extremely hot weather of Malaysia to the chilling cold of death.[143] He also mentions about not being afraid of the dark and reveals that despite knowing he has a heart condition, he did not get it checked and mentions 'if a few years clipped off, what's that compared to when the lights fuse and you go into blackness without end?'.[144] Here, he makes another juxtaposition of the light and dark/black with the last flicker of life symbolised as 'lights fuse' and going into complete 'blackness' in a manner that foresees his own demise. When George enters the Malayan jungle, once again there is an emphasis on darkness and preparing for that darkness when the time comes. Part of him is also described in an imagery of the jungle:

[143] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 20.
[144] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 164.

> [H]e knew his jungle, glad to be back, I've missed you all these years, happy in a different way to when in bed with Gloria or sitting with her for those sublime moments in the car. That quintessential self he was born with and would die with was familiar at last, a neutral self neither loved nor hated by him, but the competent *complacent jungle self* who had survived so far and would go with spirit untampered into the dark when the time came.[145]

George's experience walking into the jungle could be compared to Brian Seaton's first time doing his expedition climbing Gunong Barat. While Brian feels uncomfortable and fearful of the danger and darkness lurking in the jungle, George is elated to be returning to a familiar territory and wants to be embraced by its darkness. He feels connected spiritually to the jungle in what he terms as his 'complacent jungle self' that has been dormant in him after years of living away from the jungle. As in the early part of the novel, he foregrounds his death and is prepared to 'go with spirit untampered into the dark'.[146] After a long and arduous struggle in the forest, he begins to show signs of getting a heart attack with his heart struck with pain as if a 'terrorist bullet' had gone right through him and 'aluminium sparks playing before his eyes' which once more makes the reference to the last flicker of lights before they are put off to symbolise the last moments of life before death.[147] There are also moments when he begins to perceive the jungle as the Garden of Eden in a way that is reminiscent of Conrad's depictions of the Malay world as a lush and fertile tropical paradise. The jungle in *Last Loves* is referred to 'England's green and pleasant outpost of a jungle'.[148] Eventually, due to George's

[145] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 170. [Emphasis added]
[146] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 170.
[147] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 172.
[148] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 173.

old age, he is taken over by fatigue. In the end of the novel, while in the car on the way back to the hotel, George in the backseat makes a reference to 'homing' after the long gruelling hours in the forest:

> Homing is quick and painless, unlike the hunger and anguish to reach the point of no return. You […] set out on a journey primed by an energy which makes it seem so easy. Whatever is desired comes gradually within bounds, until suddenly we are in a mire without stepping stones, then a forest without tracks, and endless mountains with impossible alp-like summits, so that one can only hope to keep the mind stable and the body nurtured, meanwhile eternally stoking the human machine for one more effort to reach the timeless paradise beyond the blue horizon where the spirit can exist in peace.[149]

'Homing' is first cited by Thomas Huxley in 1862 in the Oxford English Dictionary to indicate pigeons that are 'trained to fly home from a distance'.[150] In this instance, George likens his journey back to the tropical jungle in Malaysia in a similar manner of a pigeon flying back to its home after travelling a long distance. Despite not having the physical strength as he used to when he was younger, he makes an effort to return to Malaysia's rainforest—'the timeless paradise beyond the blue horizon' for the last time so that his spirit could rest in peace. Therefore, home is the metaphor for death—the home of the soul. The novel ends with George closing his eyes as the 'light was coming on'.[151] As in *Key to the Door* (1961) and *The Open Door* (1989), the figuration between the Malayan jungle and the soul is made in the beginning of

[149] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 181.
[150] Cited from Oxford English Dictionary. For further information see Thomas H. Huxley, *On our knowledge of the causes of the phenomena of organic nature: being six lectures to working men delivered at the museum of practical Geology*, 1 vol (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1862).
[151] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 181.

Last Loves (1990) with George Missenden highlighting the significance of his and Bernard's return to Malaysia with the jungle in *Last Loves* completing the cycle of soul-searching which culminates in death and finding peace with it.

In retrospect, this chapter sets forth to examine Sillitoe's representation of Malaya in the period of decolonisation. By studying Sillitoe's portrayals of Malayan people, women and landscape in his fiction we have assessed whether they recycle tropes in colonial fiction. His protagonists incline towards showing affinity with the Malayan colonised subjects and recognise that the British working class as well as the colonised peoples are both exploited by the British ruling class. This is evident in the way his protagonists view the Malayans as their equals rather than as their colonised slaves. On the other hand, while resisting the portrayal of Eastern women as passive or submissive sexual objects as in most colonial writings, Sillitoe makes his female Malayan character more complex. The character Mimi in *Key to the Door* is wise and has her own struggles. The protagonist Brian Seaton sees her as his equal, constantly seeking validations from her. Finally, the chapter also looks at Sillitoe's presentation of the Malayan jungle, which is not viewed as a negative topography, but as a symbolic site for his characters' soul-searching. In this sense, Sillitoe seeks inspiration from an earlier mode of writing—Romanticism (as in Wordworth's communion with nature).

CHAPTER 3
Burgess's Malaya in the Twilight of the British Empire

In Chapter 2, I assessed Sillitoe's fictional portrayals of the Malayan people, culture, women and landscape in the period of extensive decolonisation. Similarly, this chapter aims to compare the representations of the Malayan people, culture and space in Burgess's Malayan texts to that of Sillitoe's novels and study the extent of its departure from earlier colonial narratives. In a slightly different approach from Sillitoe, Burgess's Malayan trilogy disrupts the colonial master/colonised slave power dynamics by upending them, as well as equalising their positions. The meta-narrative of his trilogy also sets up a transvestite Malayan character to mock the anxious masculinity found in the popular colonial fiction of H. Rider Haggard (1856–1925), Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), W. Somerset Maugham (1874–1965) and E.M. Forster (1879–1970) – all of who were writing in response to the Oscar Wilde trial in 1895.[152] This chapter also looks at Burgess's de-exoticising project in the portrayals of the Malayan space.

3.1 Burgess's Representations of the Malayan People and Culture in the Twilight of Empire: Blurring the Boundaries between the Colonial Subjects and Agents

In a manuscript entitled 'Something About Malaysia' dated 1982 which Burgess had intended to post to the *GEO* magazine, he wrote that William Somerset Maugham's Malayan short stories had placed more focus on the European expatriate characters, while his Oriental characters are passers-by in the background signified by 'mere padding bare feet on the veranda'.[153] Seeing that there was an obvious lack

[152] The Oscar Wilde trial led to the fear of degeneracy among the British society. They believed that effeminacy was a sign of degeneracy.

[153] Anthony Burgess, 'Something About Malaysia', in *One Man's Chorus: The Uncollected Writings*, ed. by Ben Forkner (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1998), pp. 32–41 (p. 35). *GEO* is a German based tourism magazine which began its circulation in 1976. The Malaya in Maugham's short stories however as Burgess points out is wider than the geographical boundary that is constituted by Peninsula Malaya. Apart from the Peninsula and Borneo, Maugham also included the Dutch East Indies and certain Pacific islands. Maugham was most certainly referring to the Malay Archipelago.

of representation of the Malayan people in Maugham's stories, Burgess was persuaded to write his Malayan Trilogy or *The Long Day Wanes* as it is known in the United States, which he aimed to give a more rounded voice to the people and put them in the centre of his books.[154] Burgess's comment about Maugham's Malayan fiction is crucial to understand the rationale of his departure from the preoccupation of presenting Malaya solely from the perspective of European protagonists. In fact, Burgess is the first British writer to position non-European characters as central figures in fiction on Malaya, giving them as much weight as their European counterparts. Almost half of his Trilogy is written in the voice of the multicultural Asian people in Malaya, while the other half is reserved for his European main characters. This is seen in *Time for a Tiger* (1956) where one of the four main protagonists is a Punjabi police corporal, Alladad Khan. He presents the voice of an Asian expatriate transplanted to a foreign country. Like three of the other European main protagonists in the novel such as Victor Crabbe, Fenella Crabbe and Nabby Adams, Alladad Khan is 'an exile, […] liv[ing] among alien races.'[155] In *The Enemy in a Blanket* (1958), alongside the main protagonists Victor and Fenella, Burgess once again places his Malayan characters such as 'Che Normah, the controlling wife of Victor's university acquaintance, Rupert Hardman, and Yusuf the Abang, the patriarch of the state of *Dahaga* in the foreground of his narrative. Instead of merely appendages in the novel, each of these characters narrate the story from a first-person

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See also Burgess's introduction to *Maugham's Malaysian Stories* (London: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd., 1969), p. xiv.

[154] The title *The Long Day Wanes* is taken from a line in Alfred Tennyson's poem 'Ulysses' (1842): 'The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep/Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends/'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.' The poem recounts the restlessness of Greek legend Ulysses to leave his home Ithaca and travel again despite his old age and weakened spirit. His final voyage however is met by death at sea. Burgess's protagonist of his Malayan Trilogy Victor Crabbe is a reminiscent of the ailing hero who desires to live up to his victorious past and like Ulysses, also succumbs to old age and death. Burgess explains the derivation of the title in an interview with Charles T. Bunting. See 'An Interview in New York with Anthony Burgess', *Studies in the Novel*, 5.4 (1973), pp. 504–29 (p. 519).

[155] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 130.

perspective. Burgess also does the same to the treatment of the Malayan characters in *Beds in the East* (1959), where the novel opens with the voice of Syed Omar, a Malay policeman, when the last British officer in the Police Department is about to hand over his post to a Malayan successor. It also explores the inner psyche of Robert Loo, Victor's musical understudy who is tasked to compose the independent Malaya's national anthem, and the complex hybrid identity of Rosemary Michael, the Indian woman who has a fetish for European culture.

Burgess's foregrounding of his Malayan characters is a change from his literary predecessor Somerset Maugham (1874–1965), whose Malayan characters were given a peripheral treatment as seen in in his collection of Malayan short stories. In Maugham's Malayan short stories, only his European protagonists are the ones passing judgments about other Europeans and Asians in Malaya as evidently seen in the short story 'P&O' about an Irish rubber estate planter, Mr. Gallagher, who is afflicted by black magic. The witch doctor who attempts to help Mr. Gallagher by performing an exorcist ritual to rid him of evil spirits is erroneously interpreted by the English characters as making a sacrificial rite 'to the strange gods of the East' and is consequently blamed for his death.[156] Maugham's 'The Letter' is also another indication of his underrepresentation of Eastern characters. The plot revolves around the arrest of Mrs. Crosbie for the murder of fellow expatriate, Mr. Hammond. As it turns out, while the expatriate community are eager to see Mrs. Crosbie acquitted from her murder trial due to her social class, she indeed killed Hammond out of jealousy for keeping a Chinese mistress. The Chinese woman whom Maugham described as a 'woman of character' however is noticeably silent throughout

[156] W.S. Maugham, *Collected Short Stories*, Vol. 4 (London: Mandarin Paperbacks), p. 124

Crosbie's defence lawyer's dealings with her in obtaining the letter. Similarly, the depiction of Malayan characters as appendages as in Maugham's narratives are also observed in the Malayan fiction of Clifford and Swettenham.

On the other hand, Burgess did not spare his Asian characters. Their characterisations are explored abundantly. Burgess also maintained his difference from Maugham in a sense that he considered becoming a Malaysian citizen and was also fluent in the local language, which to an extent, enabled him to probe into the Malayan people's consciousness and help translate this into his fiction. Burgess was in Malaya from 1954 to 1957. In 'Something About Malaysia', he wrote that he 'resisted repatriation' in 1957 when Malaya gained its independence, and wanted to be 'accepted as a genuine Malayan'.[157] It is also documented in his autobiography that he passed all his Malay language examinations with distinction as part of the requirements for colonial officers to remain longer in Malaya, including a Standard Three optional examination which required him to learn difficult Arabic and Sanskrit loanwords in the Malay language and *Jawi*, the old Malay system of writing based on Arabic scripture and alphabets.[158]

His proficiency in the Malay language and desire to remain in Malaya in a way sparked a deep interest in the Malayan people because of his access to the language, history and culture. As a result, he creates unconventional European protagonists, who do not conform to the Kiplingesque mould. Burgess's main protagonist, namely Victor Crabbe, defies the stereotypical colonial figure. His name, an irony in itself, demonstrates a colonial officer in the Education Service who aims to emulate the

[157] Burgess, 'Something About Malaysia' (1982), p. 8.
[158] Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 384.

victory of British colonial administrators, such as Stamford Raffles (1781–1826), the founder of modern Singapore and James Brooke (1803–1868), the first white Rajah of Sarawak but fails tremendously.[159] However, while Burgess's European protagonists appear to 'go native' and that his Malayan characters as he claimed are introduced to 'restore balance' to Maugham's peripheral treatments of them in his fiction, his narratives seem unable to escape the trope of traditional Orientalist discourse. This section henceforth aims to explicate them further.

Pushing the Envelope by Writing Colonials who 'Go Native' and Erasing the Colonial/Colonised Boundaries

> '[M]y God, I don't understand you chaps. I simply don't. Here's the old fool McGregor wanting to bring a nigger into this Club for no reason whatever, and you all sit down under it without a word. Good God, what are we supposed to be doing in this country? If we aren't going to rule, why the devil don't we clear out? Here, we are, supposed to be governing a set of damn black swine who've been slaves since the beginning of history, and instead of ruling them in the only way they understand, we go and treat them as equals. And all you silly b—s take it for granted. There's Flory, makes his best pal of a black *babu* who calls himself a doctor because he's done two years at an Indian so-called university. And you, Westfield, proud as Punch of your knock-kneed, bribe-taking cowards of policemen. And there's Maxwell, spends his time running after Eurasian tarts. […] You all seem to like the

[159] Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was a governor of British Java (1811– 1815) and Bencoolen (1817–1822), and founder of modern Singapore in 1819. Sir James Brooke who is also known as the first white *Rajah* of Sarawak was the first non-aristocrat Englishman in the colonial outpost to be granted the title *Rajah* and given a land mass in Borneo to rule by the Sultan of Brunei as a token of appreciation for Brooke's successful campaign in suppressing piracy in the region. Sarawak was ruled by the Brooke family from 1841 to 1946. Both Raffles and Brooke were very fluent in the Malay language and Victor Crabbe tries to imitate their qualities.

> dirty black brutes. Christ, I don't know what's come over us all. I really don't.'[160]

Ellis's dinner rant at the colonial community in Kyauktada who seem to be content among the Asian natives in the quotation from George Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1935), set a few years before India's and Burma's independence, is the kind that would be directed to colonial characters like Victor Crabbe, Nabby Adams, Rupert Hardman and Father LaForgue in Burgess's Malayan Trilogy who, in their varying degrees, have 'gone native'. In fact, the snobbish Ellis is reminiscent of similar characters in the Trilogy such as Flaherty in the beginning of *Time for a Tiger* (1956), who admonishes Nabby Adams for his constant mingling with his Punjabi Muslim corporal, Alladad Khan, and for murmuring Hindustani in his sleep:

> 'You're English right enough but you're forgetting how to speak the bloody language, what with the traipsing about with Punjabis and Sikhs and God knows what. You talk Hindustani in your sleep, man. Sort it out, for God's sake. If you want to put a loincloth on, get cracking, but don't expect the privileges—''[161]

Another character from *Time for a Tiger* (1956) who is a reminder of Ellis is Rivers, the violent planter who threatens to whip Alladad Khan for whistling in the colonial club: 'Bloody club servants. I'll tan his black hide […] Insubordinate bastards.'[162] In Ellis's rant, he mentions the members of the colonial club who have begun to treat

[160] George Orwell, *Burmese Days* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935; repr. London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1989), pp. 22–3).
[161] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, pp. 4–5.
[162] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 71.

the colonised subjects as their 'equals'.[163] Both Burgess and Orwell were writing in the period of the decolonisation process. With portrayals of supercilious British colonial characters such as Ellis, Flaherty and Rivers and their disapprovals of a section of the colonial community who were cosying up to the natives, Burgess and Orwell are levelling criticisms against the stiff upper-lip culture among the British colonial community, which was in their time as colonial officials in Malaya and Burma respectively, becoming insufferable. In *Taming Cannibals* (2011), Patrick Brantlinger who writes about the Victorian scientific racism at the height of British Imperialism, notes that 'going native' is considered a 'backsliding from civilization' and could result in a 'permanent [damaging] change of behaviour and culture' but most importantly, there is the fear that it could cause 'racial degeneration.'[164] However, as we will see shortly, Burgess enjoys testing boundaries and would push the 'going native' envelope a step further by presenting unconventional colonial characters who would cross the cultural divide in various spectrums, from the initiated (Victor Crabbe) to the 'in-between' (Rupert Hardman) and then finally to the complete abandonment of their racial identity (Nabby Adams and Father LaForgue). Not only that, Burgess would also invert the colonial/colonised power-structures by positioning his British colonial characters sometimes at the same level as the Malayan colonial subjects and at other times, as subalterns to their Asian counterparts.

For a start, we will begin by examining the lead character of the Trilogy, Victor Crabbe. Victor Crabbe is described as a 35 year old colonial civil servant attached to the Education Service. He is posted to Malaya a few years before its independence

[163] Orwell, *Burmese Days*, p. 22.
[164] Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (London: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 67.

from British rule in 1957. Victor as well as the other British civil servants is given the task to prepare the Malayan people for self-governance in the British mould. In *Time for a Tiger* (1956), he is assigned to teach History to a class of multiracial students at Mansor school, an elite public school modelled on Britain's Eton college in Kuala Hantu (translated as 'Ghost Estuary').[165] In *The Enemy in a Blanket* (1958), he is transferred to a rural north-east coast state of Peninsula Malaya in the fictional state, Dahaga (translated as 'Thirsty'), and is appointed as the headmaster of the state's sole English school. Meanwhile, in *The Beds in the East* (1959), he is promoted to the post of Colonial Education Officer and resides in an unnamed location in Malaya.[166] Like his crustacean surname, Victor Crabbe always progresses backwards. When he does however make progress, he is impeded by the memory of his first wife's death. Victor is portrayed to be very critical of the British authorities in Malaya. He loathes the European expatriates' racism towards the Malayan people and the exclusivity of the club. This is seen from his resentments of Boothby, the headmaster of Mansor school who is depicted to be blatantly racist towards the Malayan students. Victor also distances himself from the world of the club and from the other European expatriates. To demonstrate this, Burgess sets the spectacle of Victor walking into the town of Kuala Hantu in the beginning of the novel to let readers ingest that he is different from the other European expatriates, and would be seen as one of the Malayans. One of the *hajis* in Kuala Hantu remarks as he sees Victor walking that he '"would be like the ordinary people"' asserting that it is

[165] In the introduction to the *Malayan Trilogy*, Burgess wrote that the name *Kuala Hantu* is inspired by *Kuala Kangsar*, a royal town in Perak, a west coast state of Malaya where Burgess was posted to for his Colonial Education Service in 1954. The Malayan Public School that Victor Crabbe teaches History at is modelled after an actual public school the Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK) where Burgess taught English. MCKK is dubbed as 'Eton of the East'. See Burgess, *The Malayan Trilogy* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. ix. Burgess also mentions about MCKK in his autobiography, *Little Wilson and Big God*, pp. 377–8.

[166] Burgess states that the location in *The Beds in the East* is an 'unnamed territory which may be identified with any part of the [Malayan] federation the reader wishes'. See Burgess, *The Malayan Trilogy*, p. ix.

unseemly for a white man '"to walk to work like a labourer"'.[167] What the *haji* means is that it is unusual for a man of Victor's stature, a colonial master to be walking into town without a car and a chauffeur and perspiring profusely. Where the delineation between the colonial master and the colonised subjects is observed for instance in Maugham's Malayan fiction with the former sustaining the upper hand over the latter, Burgess eliminates this boundary. The colonial master has lowered himself to share the same pedestal as the colonised natives. Instead of depicting Victor in the state of 'positional superiority', he like the natives, walk 'to work like a labourer' and would be seen as one of them—the colonised, instead of one of the European expatriates. His walking into town instead of driving is the first sign of his eccentricity and a challenge to society's expectations of a colonial master.[168] Another instance where the Trilogy challenges the colonial/colonised power structure is when Victor allows Nik Hassan, an English educated Malay officer whom he trains to be the successor to his post of Chief Education Officer, to be idle while Victor on the other hand, is the one doing most of the legwork in *Beds in the East* (1959). This is another instance of inversion of roles as demonstrated earlier in *Time for a Tiger* (1956) where Victor, the colonial master is put on the same level as the colonised Malayans as one of the *haji*s remarked in *Time for a Tiger* (1956) that he is becoming like the Malayan common man.[169] Similarly, Victor considers himself 'demoted' to the 'rank of the Duke' in Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure* (1623) where he describes himself as a 'god whom all men might touch'.[170] In this case, it is Nik Hassan, not Victor who assumes the figure of authority in the office

[167] *Haji* is an honorary title given to a Muslim man who has performed his pilgrimage in Mecca. For a Muslim woman, she is called *Hajiah*. See Burgess, *Time for a Tiger,* p. 39.
[168] 'Positional superiority' is a term used by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) to denote the colonial/colonised power structure.
[169] Kindly refer to p. 61 of this chapter.
[170] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 52.

despite being mentored by Victor. It is also Victor the colonial master, who is the one seeking the colonial subject, Nik Hassan's approval to endorse a symphony to be played on Malaya's Independence Day as in the following quotation: '"Imagine a full orchestra playing this symphony in the capital, […] You [Nik Hassan] must do something about it"' to which Nik Hassan replied, '"Look here, Vicky [Victor], the average Malayan won't care a damn. You know that as well as I do."'[171]

However, Victor is conscious about going full native. In a scene where he follows through with his students' request to have a word with Boothby regarding his student Hamidin's dismissal, while being aware that it would be the talk of the higher authorities and result in his further seclusion from the European community, he begins to regard his meddling with the Asian affairs as a common stage veteran expatriates reach after a long period of time in the East. The effect from that makes him view the white skin as an 'abnormality' and likens Europeans to patients in a mental hospital before the 'spirocaete', a bacteria that causes Lyme disease to break down the brain completely.[172] Victor's comparison of Europeans staying in the East for a long duration to mental patients is reminiscent of Hugh Clifford's claim of corrosion of identity, when the European man stays in isolation among the native people: 'In the beginning, when first a man turns from his own people, and dwells in isolation among alien race, he suffers many things. […] The solitude of the soul […] eats into the heart and brain of him as a corrosive acid eats into iron.'[173] In *Beds in the East* (1959) when he is about to deliver a speech about nation building and racial unity in postcolonial Malaya, his fear of being broken down by a 'spirocaete' which

[171] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 53.
[172] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 49.
[173] Hugh Charles Clifford, *In Court and Kampong: Being Tales and Sketches of Native Life in the Malay Peninsula* (London: Grant Richards, 1897), p. 248.

he had earlier described in *Time for a Tiger* (1956) as the state of the European man in the colonial outpost being extremely eccentric, returns to haunt him: 'Crabbe cleared his throat and called: "Ladies and gentlemen." The words "spirochaete" and "ginger ale" lagged into the near-silence.'[174] Towards the end of the novel where he makes a journey to the rural areas in the jungle, he is reminded by the prophetic warning of his former colleague in Mansor school, Mr. Raj about his complete assimilation to Malaya and his gradual loss of identity, which has been foretold in *Time for a Tiger*.[175] On his last day of work at Mansor school, Mr. Raj, Victor's colleague from Ceylon makes several remarks about Victor that would hinder him from 'going native'. Mr. Raj states that Victor's life will be ruined as Malaya will '"absorb him"' and he will lose his identity:

> "The country will absorb you and you will cease to be Victor Crabbe. You will less and less find it possible to do the work for which you were sent here. You will lose function and identity. You will be swallowed up and become another kind of eccentric. You may become a Muslim. You may forget your English, or at least lose your English accent. You may end in a *kampong*, no longer a foreigner, an old brownish man with many wives and children, one of the elders whom the young will be encouraged to consult on matters of the heart. You will be ruined."[176]

[174] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 87.
[175] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 160.
[176] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 199. *Kampong* means village in Malay.

Like the Oracle in *Oedipus Rex* (c. 429 BC), Mr. Raj warns Victor of the ramifications of 'going native'.[177] His warning is reminiscent of Clifford's statement that the longer the European man remains in isolation among the alien races in the colonial outpost, the more it corrodes his European identity. Mr. Raj predicts that Victor will no longer be who he is, but an entirely different person who has lost touch with his own culture and faith in order to embrace a new culture and religion, as Victor mentions '"the land of a later prophet."'. He adds that Victor '"will be ruined."'[178]

The lawyer Rupert Hardman, Victor's university acquaintance who became a Muslim convert in *The Enemy in a Blanket* (1958), is another unconventional European character in the Trilogy who serves as a cautionary tale to Victor about the consequences of 'going native'. This is because while Victor does contemplate about converting to Islam to marry Rahimah, the Malay woman he meets at a cabaret and staying on in Malaya after Malaya's independence, Rupert actually converts to Islam to marry an Achinese Malay widow, 'Che Normah. The main reason for Rupert's conversion is to settle his financial debts. In a manner like William Savage in John Masters's *The Deceivers* (1952), Rupert finds his initial conversion to Islam and total isolation from the European community very conflicting. Similar to William's act of praying to the goddess Kali, Rupert experiences a similar psychological dilemma. He finds that he simply cannot embrace Islam without foregoing his Christian and European background. He ends up becoming a hypocrite who pretends to be a Muslim. All is well with his pretensions until fasting month comes. Rupert realizes then that when he becomes a Muslim, he loses the privilege of the white man. He

[177] Coincidentally, Victor also calls himself 'Club-foot the Tyrant' (Oedipus Rex) in Burgess, *The Beds in the East*, p. 189.
[178] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 206.

also feels that he is completely cut off from his fellow European expatriates and 'drifting away from the West': 'And there was no release. He could no longer look at himself from the outside, for there was no one to talk to now. He was genuinely drifting away from the West, and the fancy dress of Islam began to feel like his ordinary clothes.'[179] Mr. Raj's warning to Victor Crabbe and Rupert Hardman's cautionary tale of 'going native' resonates with Burgess's own personal experience and contemplations which he wrote in 'Something About Malaysia' (1982):

> [T]here was a time, […] when I resisted repatriation [in 1957] and wanted to be accepted as a genuine Malayan. I proposed entering Islam, which would have entitled me to four wives but barred me from eating ham for breakfast. My name was chosen for me – Yahya bin Abdullah – and I started reading the Koran. […] I would beget a host of particoloured children who would respect me and call me *bapa* [father]. I would make the pilgrimage to Mecca and come back wearing a turban with the title *Haji*. […] But one night in sleep I was admonished by the *voice of Europe*: this is *not* your world, go back to the *cold lands* where you belong. I still, in old age, wonder whether I made the right decision.[180]

The excerpt from Burgess' typescript above shows the inspiration for the internalisations of Victor Crabbe and Rupert Hardman when they contemplate about 'going native'. Similar to Rupert, it is the 'voice of Europe' that is telling him that he does not belong in the East. At the end of *The Enemy in a Blanket* when Rupert and his wife make their journey towards Mecca for pilgrimage, he becomes so restless

[179] Burgess, *The Enemy in a Blanket*, p. 153.
[180] Burgess, 'Something About Malaysia', p. 8. [Emphasis added].

about not staying in touch with his English roots that when he arrives in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, he decides to fly a plane back to England. It is not mentioned whether Rupert managed to return to England, but it is found from a conversation among two Malay men at the end of the novel that Rupert had crashed into an unnamed 'cold country' presumably in Europe. Victor on the other hand would be reminded of Mr. Raj's warning against 'going native' and of the possibility of losing his identity throughout the entire Trilogy. Victor who does attempt to become Malayanised also meets his death. While Rupert's tragic story of 'going native' in his conversion to Islam and becoming a Malay is used as a cautionary tale in the Trilogy, there are real figures who are counterparts to him who became 'native' and saw it as a positive experience, which at the same time, refutes the Victorian claim of racial degeneracy. They are the former British colonial officer Tan Sri Dato' Mubin Sheppard (birth name: Mervyn Sheppard, 1905–1994) and Mat Dan (birth name: Daniel Tyler, 1989–). Sheppard joined the Malayan Civil Service in 1928, fell in love with Malaya and stayed on to apply for Malaysian citizenship. He also later went to found the Malaysian National Archives and the National Museum.[181] Like the case of Sheppard, Bristol born Mat Dan initially wanted to travel to Malaysia for a vacation but fell in love with an island in Terengganu in the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia that he decided to settle in the country for good and picking up a local dialect in the process. The BBC article by George Wright (1 September 2019) writes of the 'international hybrid accent' Mat Dan developed as a result of his long stay in Malaysia: 'almost a decade speaking Malay and Terengganu has resulted in Dan developing an international hybrid accent almost unrecognisable from before.'

[181] For more information on Sheppard, please see his memoir, Tan Sri Dato Mubin Sheppard, *Taman Budiman: Memoirs of an Unorthodox Civil Servant* (Petaling Jaya: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd., 1979).

Wright also states that Mat Dan, rather peculiarly, considers Malay as his first language and that he views himself as 'more Malay than English'.[182]

On a similar note as Mat Dan, who, despite his English background, considers Malay as his first language, are the Trilogy's two other unusual colonial characters—Nabby Adams, a police-lieutenant who served in India before being posted to Malaya and Father LaForgue, the French Catholic priest who had done missionary work in China for a decade prior to his settlement in Malaya. They both, in the words of Kathryn Tidrick in *Empire and the English Character* (1992), became 'Lost Legion[s]' because they have completely shed their racial identity and permanently gone native.[183] Not only that, Nabby Adams considers himself Indian whereas Father LaForgue could no longer speak his native language French and lives in one of the decrepit shop house rows in a Chinese neighbourhood. The colonial Police Lieutenant Nabby Adams as we have seen earlier in this chapter, is rebuked not only for his company with Indians but also for speaking Hindustani even in his sleep. In a scene in *Time for a Tiger* (1956), where Nabby Adams is perched uncomfortably at the European only club, we get to delve into his insights and identify his concern for his deteriorating proficiency in English:

> Nabby Adams did not propose to stay at the Club for the entire evening. Somebody might come in and stand by the bar and Nabby Adams might have to talk to him. Nabby Adams was not very happy about his English lately. He liked to speak a language well, and he was conscious that his English

[182] George Wright, 'Mat Dan: 'I became an accidental celebrity 6,000 miles away from home', *BBC News*, 1 September 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-49466721> [accessed 14 November 2019]
[183] Kathryn Tidrick, *Empire and the English Character* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1992), p. 39.

> grammar was deteriorating, his vocabulary becoming so weak that he had to eke it out with Indian words, and his pronunciation hardly proper for patrician society. He was content to speak Urdu with Alladad Khan, sitting nice and cosy in one of them little *kedais*.[184]

When there are characters such as Rivers and Flaherty who see Nabby Adams, an Englishman who is unable to string proper sentences in English as a sign of degeneracy, it is no wonder that Nabby would rather isolate himself than be in the company of other British colonials. At least, as Nabby reasons, in the *kedais* (stalls), he will be away from their chastisement. It would seem that the only people who would not mind his eccentricity is a company who is equally eccentric, such as that of Victor Crabbe, Fenella Crabbe and Alladad Khan. A similar character like Nabby, the lapsed French Catholic pastor Father LaForgue, finds his French 'coarse through lack of use, halted and wavered, searching for the right word which Mandarin was always ready to supply' due to his more frequent use of Mandarin in China than French.[185] According to Brantlinger in *Taming Cannibals* (2011), European missionaries were the earliest to have 'gone native'. Some of them he states, 'went native in unacceptable, heathen ways.'[186] As in the case of Father LaForgue, his long stay in China 'had impaired his orthodoxy' and he had succumbed to 'falsify[ing] the doctrine of the Trinity in a polytheistic parish'.[187]

[184] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, pp. 66–7.
[185] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 60.
[186] Brantlinger, p. 67.
[187] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 63.

The Ambivalent Treatment of the Asian Characters

As I have mentioned earlier in the opening to this chapter, while Burgess sets up his Trilogy with a number of unconventional European characters who had 'gone native' in varying degrees and conflates the power structure binary of the colonial/colonised subjects, there are also instances where his Trilogy treats its colonised Asian characters with ambivalence, revealing an underlying latent Orientalism. This can be seen in the way Victor views the Malayans. While Victor's criticisms leveraged against the British establishment in Malaya is pronounced and clear, his attitude towards the colonial subjects however is ambivalent. He is critical of the colonial authorities but is not critical of colonialism per se. An instance is seen when Victor's students plead with him to intervene in what they believe was a wrongful expulsion of their classmate Hamidin by Boothby for a minor infringement of kissing a girl in the school compound. Victor was at first touched by the class 'weld[ing] itself into a single unit' on Hamidin's expulsion. He observes that his classroom of Tamil, Bengali, Sikh, Malay, Eurasian and Chinese students 'found a loyalty that transcended race', then mulls over their unity being a 'common banding against British injustice.'[188] Another instance is when Victor speaks up against the unfair expulsion of Hamidin to the headmaster, Boothby. When Boothby calls Hamidin a 'Wog', a desultory term for dark skinned natives, Victor attempts to correct him by stating '"I didn't realise Hamidin was a Wog. I thought he was a Malay"'. When Boothby resumes to call his Malayan staff 'Wogs', Victor defiantly retorts, '"Presumably we're all Wogs, then?"' as if to show solidarity with the Malayan people.[189] It is expected that Victor would level this criticism against racism

[188] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 46.
[189] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, pp. 54–6.

towards the colonised Malayans, until he makes his way into the Staff room and has fears of what the Indian, the Chinese and the Malay would do to him:

> Crabbe thought, 'I should want to go home, like Fenella. I should be so tired of the shambles here, the obscurantism, the colour-prejudice, the laziness and ignorance as to desire nothing better than a headship in a cold stone country school in England. But I love this country. I feel protective towards it. I somehow enclose it, contain it. I feel that it needs me. This is absurd, because snakes and scorpions are ready to bite me, a drunken Tamil is prepared to knife me, the Chinese in the town would like to spit at me, some day [sic] a Malay boy will run amok and try to tear me apart. But it doesn't matter. I want to live here; I want to be wanted.[190]

Victor suddenly thinks of imaginary events such as the 'drunken Tamil' who he fears would stab him, the Chinese who is going to spit at him and the Malay boy who will 'run amok' and kill him. This is the image of postcolonial Malaya that he has in mind as he makes a mental note to remain in the country. This is ironic as it is seen earlier that he was critical of Boothby for his racism towards the Malayan people. It is also from these thoughts that it is revealed that he desires to feel validated. This brings us to the question of whether his love for Malaya was truly genuine at all if he is prepared to feed these irrational fears to himself. This is added with his previous comparison of a European man who lives among the native people for an extended period of time to a mental patient.

[190] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 57.

As the novel progresses, it is discovered that in a manner similar to William Savage in *The Deceivers* (1952), Victor's attempt at 'going native' as he delves into the Malayan languages and cultures is akin to an Orientalist. In a scene where he is studying for his Malay language examination with his colleague Inche Kamaruddin, he observes that the *Jawi* scripture is 'sprawled, from right to left, in clumsy unco-ordinated [sic] curves, sprinkled with dots' and makes a dismissive remark that the language does not seem to have any rules.[191] Victor's conviction of the Malay language is confirmed by Inche Kamaruddin who replies that '"Dere are no rules […] Every word is different from every oder word. De words must be learnt separately"' adding that '"De English look for rules all the time. But in the East dere are no rules."'[192] However, shortly after their conversation, Victor moans about why there is the need for different sets of vocabularies used for the royalties and for the common people.[193] For example the word 'sleep' for the *sultans* is '*beradu*' while it is '*tidor*' for the commoners. This feature in the Malay language and the fact that Victor was learning how to write from right to left are indications that it is bound by a structure and refutes Victor's claim that it has no order. For the case of Inche Kamaruddin who agrees with Victor that there are no rules in Malay, this is reminiscent of Gayatri Spivak's argument on 'Worlding' that puts the natives in the position of the 'Other' instead of the authority on their own culture and history.[194] Inche Kamaruddin, a Malayan character who is supposedly the authority of the Malay culture is recast into reinforcing Victor's statement. Nabby Adams, another non-conventional European character also shares the same sentiment as Victor

[191] Kindly refer to p. 56 of this chapter on explanations about the old Malay writing system, *Jawi* in this chapter. See also Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 84.
[192] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 84.
[193] Burgess, Time for a Tiger, pp. 84–5. The distinctive vocabularies used for the royalties and the commoners have its roots in Sanskrit which the Malay language heavily borrows from.
[194] Gayatri Spivak, 'History', in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (London: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 198–311 (p. 212).

regarding languages spoken in Malaya. In the same novel, Nabby compares Malay to Urdu and believes Malay is 'not a real language'. He purposely mispronounces 'Kuala' in Kuala Lumpur as 'Cooler' and refuses to correct it. He not only views Malay negatively. He also believes the Chinese language which sounds to him like 'Plink plank plonk' is a 'bloody hoax'.[195] The question on language recurs in *The Enemy in a Blanket* (1958), where Victor observes that the Malay dialect spoken in the north-east coast of Malaya, sounded like a 'terse barking language that seemed all vowels and glottal checks.'[196] This demonstrates Victor's condescending attitude towards the local language and dialect. His nit-picking of the Malayan culture and language as chaotic is pointed out by Douglas Kerr in his reading of Burgess' *Trilogy* where he states that the 'Western order' is contrasted with the 'endemic Eastern chaos'.[197] It reflects Victor's anxieties of being displaced in an independent Malaya. This is revealed in the ensuing dialogues with Inche Kamaruddin when they discuss the probable situations of a post-independent Malaya. Victor is perplexed when Inche Kamaruddin informs him that the students of Mansor School who have become politically conscious are beginning to talk about evacuating the British 'white oppressors' from the country. Although Inche Kamaruddin assures Victor that U.M.N.O., the Malay nationalist party is pleased with him due to his criticisms of Boothby's expulsion of Hamidin which they have mistaken for his support of Malaya's independence movement, Victor is worried that due to his background as a British colonialist, his presence in Malaya would provoke hostility and violence among the Malayan people.[198] Apart from that, Victor is also seen to be reminiscing

[195] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger,* p. 67.
[196] Burgess, *The Enemy in a Blanket* (London: Heinemann, 1958), p. 11.
[197] Douglas Kerr, *Eastern Figures: Orient and Empire in British Writing* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), p. 191.
[198] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 86. U.M.N.O. is an abbreviation for the United Malays National Organisation. It is one of the components of the Alliance coalition party (today renamed '*Barisan*

the past where he mentions that Malayans used to revere the British in the early colonial days and felt they had something to give. Whilst in the period leading up to Independence, he points out that Malayans wanted to expel the British as soon as possible. He refers to a passage in *Hikayat Abdullah* ('Abdullah's Autobiography') (1849) written by Abdullah Munshi (1796–1854), the Malay language teacher of Stamford Raffles, where Abdullah recounts his disappointment when Raffles informed him of returning to Europe.[199] Malaysian historian Syed Alatas in his seminal book *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977) points out that Abdullah's autobiography is an uncritical acceptance of British rule, which explains why it is widely used for reference by British colonial historians and academicians to justify British colonisation of Malaya, using Abdullah as an example of the 'good native'.[200] The fact that Victor quotes a passage from Abdullah Munshi regarding the Malayan people's acceptance of the British in the early colonial period and compares it to the twilight of the Empire is rather telling of his apologetic stance of colonialism and betrays his contention with Malaya's self-governance. Victor is also seen to be belittling the Malay word for freedom and independence from colonial rule – '*Merdeka*' which he asserts to Inche Kamaruddin that it is a 'foreign importation' and therefore unoriginal as it is borrowed from the Sanskrit language.[201]

Another instance where Victor seems to be exhibiting latent Orientalism, is seen in the *The Enemy in a Blanket* (1958) in his treatment of Jaganathan. Jaganathan, the

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Nasional' or the National Front) which also comprised of M.C.A. (Malayan Chinese Association) and M.I.C. (Malayan Indian Congress). Prior to the declaration of Malaya's Independence on 31 August 1957, the Alliance coalition party contested in its inaugural General Elections in 1955 and won by a major landslide, effectively putting them in power after the British withdrawal from Malaya.

[199] In *Hikayat Abdullah*, Abdullah Munshi is seen to be wiping his tears with his handkerchief when Stamford Raffles informs him that he will be leaving Singapore. Kindly refer to Abdullah Munshi, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla (Bin Abdulkadar Munshi)*, trans. by J.T. Thomson (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1874), p. 176.

[200] Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (London: Frank Cass, 1977), p. 134.

[201] See Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 88.

Indian teacher as depicted in the novel, is resentful towards Victor's appointment as the new headmaster of the English school, Haji Ali College in the state of *Dahaga*. It is only natural that Jaganathan would feel betrayed by Victor's appointment as the State Education Officer Mr. Talbot puts it, he has been promised the headship of the school when the former headmaster returns to England. However, instead of extending his sympathy for Jaganathan's predicament, Victor jumps on Mr. Talbot's bandwagon to ridicule him. Mr. Talbot asserts that the promise made to Jaganathan was only an 'electioneering promise' and therefore meaningless as he states that the 'poor devils' which he refers to the Malayan staff, 'never had an election before'.[202] Instead of questioning Mr. Talbot's decision and the hurt it might have caused Jaganathan, Victor responds to Mr. Talbot's comments with '"It's hardly my fault, is it? People shouldn't make promises they can't keep. Besides, this Jaganathan doesn't sound too bright"', speaking about Jaganathan condescendingly.[203] His role as the good European in *Time for a Tiger* (1956) where he confronts Boothby for his racism towards the Malayan people diminishes here. To add salt to injury, he even presumes Jaganathan to be naïve. He also attempts to undermine Jaganathan's capacity first by snubbing what he characterised as his overconfidence that he is as competent as the colonial master to have an equal chance of holding the post of headmaster and then by demonising his rival's appearance, portraying him in grotesque imagery. Victor visualises Jaganathan as a 'black tub of a man, with a jutting rice-round belly and black trunks of legs below his white shorts' and his head 'like a huge piece of coal'.[204] His portrayal of Jaganathan almost sounds like a monstrous figure instead of a human, invoking David Spurr's colonial rhetoric of debasement.[205] In a scene

[202] Burgess, *The Enemy in Blanket*, p. 45.
[203] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p.45
[204] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 73.
[205] Kindly refer to Spurr, 'Colonial Rhetoric of Debasement' in *The Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 87–8.

where Jaganathan warns Victor of the repercussions of privileging expatriate children into their school while at the same time limiting admissions of Malayan children, Victor explains that the decision was already predetermined by the higher authorities and that since the expatriate children were the children of the expatriate officers who had been promised places in the school, he had to relent to it. Not the naïve person Victor paints Jaganathan to be, he senses the discrimination in the selection of students for the school. However, Victor is quick to brush it off and reproaches Jaganathan, stating that he is sick of being accused that he is '"bloated with the blood of the down-trodden Asian"' while pointing out that Jaganathan's salary is higher than his.[206] He also diverts the issue that Jaganathan is trying to raise by persisting on his lack of qualifications to hold the post of headmaster. This situation provokes an argument between the two men. Victor reasons with Jaganathan that his appointment as the headmaster of the school is due to the 'specialist knowledge' or academic qualifications that he possesses which he insinuates Jaganathan does not have, while refuting Jaganathan's claim that it was his white privilege that qualified him for the post. However, Victor fails to recognise that it is exactly his privilege as a colonial master that enabled him to secure the position of head administrator of the school as seen earlier in his conversations with the State Education Officer. Apart from that, Victor is also seen to be averse of Jaganathan's assurance of his 'competence to take over the white man', behaving exactly like Boothby when he was the headmaster of Mansor school.[207]

In hindsight, Burgess's Malayan Trilogy set out to rebalance the peripheral treatment of Malayan characters in Somerset Maugham's Malayan fiction by including them as

[206] Burgess, *The Enemy in a Blanket*, p. 74.
[207] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 73.

central characters. The Trilogy also erases the power dynamics between the colonial/colonised by inverting their positions – lowering the colonial figure below the colonised subjects and sometimes levelling their positions to make them equals. However, there are instances where the Trilogy is critical of colonialism but only to a point; rather, the Trilogy contends against Malaya's self-governance through its foregrounding and counterpoising of western order against an assumed inherent chaos in postcolonial Malaya.

3.2 Burgess's Deployment of Ibrahim the Cross-Dresser to Intercept Anxious Masculinity in Colonial Narratives

Burgess has a penchant for turning fixed identities and imperial narratives on their heads. As indicated in the earlier discussion of this chapter, he dismantles the colonialist European/colonised Asian dimorphism by reversing their roles, where the European colonial figures such as Victor Crabbe, Fenella Crabbe and Rupert Hardman are seen to gradually become disempowered under the tutelage of their Asian colonial subjects. In a similar vein, Burgess's explorations of the theme of gender fluidity in his novels, specifically those touching on the androgyny and cross-dressing signify his fascination with deconstructing the masculine/feminine gender configuration. In a 1977 interview for the *Iowa Review* with William M. Murray, while addressing Murray's queries of his 1962 dystopian novel *The Wanting Seed* which prominently features the themes of gender conflation and homosexuality, he states:

> [S]ociety is changing […] We have the prominent *unisex* in which you can't tell whether you're looking at a boy or a girl from the back, and even from

> the front sometimes. You can't be like each other in sex. Homosexuality is coming out in the open, both kinds. We'll end with societies for *castration*, back to origin, back to the Church fathers. And these are all patterns which stem from a feeling that it is obscene to beget children. That is a kind of the will not to live, of apocalyptic motif […] That our view of the nineteenth-century mother bearing twenty-five children as a great virtuous woman is replaced by a much thinner, more *masculine* image of woman who is not going to beget children at all unless she wants to, in which sex is becoming a kind of game.[208]

Burgess's commentary of the androgyny or the unisex and homosexuality, belies his paranoia that he perceives would disrupt the natural order of the world. He also notes the confusion that results from them—the inability to tell someone's gender at first glance and women bearing masculine traits. However curiously, he sees a consonant between the indifference to the acts of procreation and the ascetic practices of the church. As it has been established, Burgess's engagement with the androgyny in his novels is clearly directed towards a social commentary of the evolving culture of the postmodern world. His novels are also beset with the ingenuity of imperial writings that intersect with the period of decolonisation, one that no longer models on the necessity to portray the colonial British male protagonist as the adventurous, masculine and virile archetype but an anti-hero, with a lot of flaws and have assumed effete qualities that would have horrified British readers and administrators in the heyday of Empire building. He often makes references to Kipling, Conrad and Maugham, each credited as masters of imperial writings of the East, only to frustrate

[208] William M. Murray, 'Working on Apocalypse' in *Conversations with Anthony Burgess*, ed. by Earl G. Ingersoll and Mary C. Ingersoll (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), pp. 111–2. [Emphasis added].

the 'masculine anxiety' in their narratives.[209] 'Masculine anxiety' or 'anxious masculinity' as Mark Breitenberg terms it, is defined as 'staging masculine loss and vulnerability for the purpose of maintaining control of the performance of one's gendered identity.'[210] It results from varying anxieties of meeting expectations of a patriarchal culture that men should be masculine, potent and authoritative. According to Breitenberg, any attempts at cross-dressing and gender ambiguity in a conservative society for instance agitates the stability of the distinct gender binary, which Burgess was aiming for when he destabilises gender identities through his depictions of transvestite characters.[211] Burgess's interest in gender fluidity is particularly expressed in his fiction *The Wanting Seed* (1962), set in a dystopian future at the time where there is an imminent fear of overpopulation. This alternate future, parallel to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), has a totalitarian government that promotes homosexual relationships and self-sterilisation, while outlawing heterosexual relationships for the fear that procreation between heterosexual couples would lead to overpopulation. Infants for instance are euthanized under the orders of the government.[212] Apart from that, gender identity is completely subverted in the novel. Lipstick and perfume are described to be only

[209] Burgess's biographer Andrew Biswell indicates Burgess's acquaintance with the Asian fiction of Kipling, Conrad and Maugham in *The Real Life of Anthony Burgess* (London: Picador, 2005), p. 154. In his analysis of Maugham's work, Phillip Holden writes that despite Maugham's known homosexuality, he 'creates a heterosexual, masculine public persona' in his writing. See Phillip Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation: W. Somerset Maugham's Exotic Fiction* (London: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 152. This was in line with the Victorian construction of masculinity that work to expel every single trait 'that is effeminate' which David Newsome indicated (qtd. in Ronald Hyam, *Empire and sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 72.)

[210] See Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious masculinity in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 6.

[211] Breitenberg, p. 150.

[212] *The Wanting Seed* opens with a mother who confronts a government doctor for putting down her sickly son. The doctor informs her it was necessary so that the earth would not 'get overrun' and that everybody would get enough food to eat. See Anthony Burgess, 'The Wanting Seed' in *Future Imperfect: The Wanting Seed and 1985* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp. 3–282 (p. 5).

reserved for men while women are to eliminate any traces of 'womanly presence' and make themselves appear as unfeminine as possible.[213]

Another novel by Burgess exploring the theme of gender fluidity and identity is *A Vision of Battlements* (1965). The novel focalises on the protagonist Richard Ennis, a British sergeant stationed in Gibraltar during World War II, who indulges himself in dinner parties where there is an intense epicene atmosphere.[214] Ennis also looks up to his billet roommate Julian Agate oddly enough, as a maternal figure, confounding the male/female identity.[215] Burgess's preoccupation with the epicene continues on in his memoir *Little Wilson and Big God* (1987). Reflecting on Manchester's cultural scene, he wrote '[w]hat Manchester University needed, but what seemed reserved to the older seats of learning, was a touch of the *epicene* exquisite, the flavour of wealthy and cultivated decadence summed up in Waugh's Anthony Blanche.'[216] Anthony Blanche is a character from Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) who has a rather flamboyant and effeminate demeanour. The 1981 television series adaptation of the novel has Blanche, portrayed by actor Nickolas Grace speaking in an exaggerated upper class English accent. Using Blanche as an illustration, Burgess makes a connection between affluence and effeminacy, as if they are in a symbiotic relationship. This invokes a comment made by Stephen Holden in his article in *The New York Times* 'Film; Yes, the Rich are Different (Mostly British)' where he states:

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[213] Anthony Burgess, 'The Wanting Seed', p. 7.
[214] Anthony Burgess, *A Vision of Battlements*, ed. by Andrew Biswell (London: Sidgwich and Jackson, 1965; repr. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 77.
[215] Julian ensures Ennis would get clean linen, clothes and helps him wash like a mother for a child. Ennis then thought to himself, 'He [Julian] became a mother to Ennis'. See Burgess, *A Vision of Battlements*, p. 75.
[216] Anthony Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God: Being the First Part of the Confessions of Anthony Burgess* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1987; repr. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1988), p. 201. Emphasis added.

> Among men, the upper-class British accent raises the dreaded specter of effeminacy. Our pioneer macho society has always looked askance at men who appeared too-too. One reason Cary Grant (ne Archie Leach) became the one British actor accepted as upper class by an American mass audience was the roughness beneath his suavity. Born into poverty in Bristol, England, he retained an English accent that was working class, not Oxford.[217]

Due to Burgess's incessant explorations of homosexuals and transvestites in his writing, it is unsurprising that this led to speculations that he was really a closet homosexual himself. For instance, his portrayal of Victor Crabbe's transvestite servant Ibrahim in *Time for a Tiger* (1956) led Christopher Ricks to write in the *New Statesman*: '[Burgess] has apparently been trying to make his mind about the epicene' as he makes an observation of the 'uncensorious lilt' of the 'androgynous Ibrahim'.[218] He also suggests that Burgess perceived homosexuality to be 'not wicked, not ethereally spiritual, not necessarily the source of anxiety or agony, not incompatible with other things' but a 'pleasant virtuosity' and implies the introduction of Ibrahim's character to be subversive, which baffled Burgess upon reading the article.[219] In another instance, James Mitchie, his editor insinuates from reading *Time for a Tiger* and from meeting him personally that Burgess came across to him as gay and points out that he was 'perhaps mentally homosexual but not

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[217] Stephen Holden, 'Film; Yes, the Rich are Different (Mostly British)', *The New York Times*, 30 January 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/30/movies/film-yes-the-rich-are-different-mostly-british.html> [accessed 29 January 2017].

[218] Christopher Ricks, 'The Epicene', in *Anthony Burgess*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), pp. 9–12 (p. 11).

[219] Ricks, p. 10. After reading this particular extract from the Ricks's article, Burgess asked his publisher at Heinemann ''Who is this *New Statesman* man who says I am epicene?'', as cited in Andrew Biswell, *The Real Life of Anthony Burgess* (London: Picador, 2005), p. 305.

actively'.[220] In spite of the accusations made of Burgess's sexuality, Burgess insists that he never had such proclivities and that he does not understand the cause of its inversion, which he declares 'goes against biology'.[221] The only plausible explanation of Burgess's sexual orientation is indicated by Deborah Rogers, his literary agent from 1967. She states: ''With his sexuality, I think, as with everyone else, the distinction between life and fantasy was completely blurred […] I think an awful lot of him was self-invented. If you have that sort of fertile mind, maybe self-invention is the most satisfactory way of being.''[222] Burgess of course addresses the rumours floating around his sexuality in two separate interviews. With Thomas Churchill, he states that authors are hesitant about portraying protagonists or narrators that are 'sexually impotent or sexually incompetent' because readers may see these qualities as reflection of their own sexual incompetence. Burgess jests about a likely scenario where readers tended to conflate the author and the main character of a work of fiction: '"Naturally," I mean, you know, "this is obviously a portrait of Mr. Burgess. He's sexually incompetent undoubtedly, or he's probably homosexual and probably won't admit it."'[223] With Don Swaim, he reiterates that he does not have any homosexual tendencies but is fascinated by the possibility of Somerset Maugham being one and toys with this imagination in his novel *Earthly Powers* (1980). He also addresses the criticism of an author writing about a homosexual protagonist when he or she is not personally a homosexual. Burgess indicates:

[220] James Mitchie to Andrew Biswell, 15 November 2000, as cited in Biswell, p. 305.
[221] Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, p. 387.
[222] Deborah Rogers to Andrew Biswell, 4 January 2002, as cited in Biswell, p. 306.
[223] Thomas Churchill, 'Going on Writing till Ninety or One Hundred', in *Conversations with Anthony Burgess*, pp. 9–10.

> I was teaching a [Creative Writing] class at the University of New York at Buffalo which contained blacks and women, and I was told […n]o men could write a novel in which a woman was the chief character […] and […n]o white man could write a novel about a black. […] We've got to take a chance at it, I think. [Similarly w]e've got to assume that we know what a homosexual is like, even if we don't.[224]

Regardless, amidst the speculations on Burgess's sexual orientation, there is one aspect that is certain. Burgess did intend for the gender ambiguous Malay servant of Victor Crabbe, Ibrahim in *Time for a Tiger* (1956), to be subversive.

Having said that, in this particular section, I would like to centre my arguments on a minor but significant character in *Time for a Tiger* (1956), Ibrahim, who is Victor and Fenella Crabbe's Malay house servant and cook, and is also the only transvestite character in the novel. This is because he represents the destabilising factor that surrounds the notion of masculine anxiety that is inherently fearful of the deconstruction of the essence of manliness in colonial narratives especially in the period of decolonisation, where Burgess reiterates in his other novel *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), the concern of the British colonials devolving into an 'effete race'.[225] As demonstrated earlier, Burgess likes to push boundaries and Ibrahim seems to serve this purpose. Therefore, in order to examine how Ibrahim could symbolically be represented as a trajectory of annihilating the bifurcation of gender identity in masculine colonial narratives, it is pertinent to briefly mention his background for contextualisation. Ibrahim in the novel is described to have been a

[224] Don Swaim 'Getting Your Day's Work Done Before Breakfast' in *Conversations with Anthony Burgess*, pp. 149–50.
[225] Anthony Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1958), p. 8.

source of scandal for the Crabbe household as it is insinuated that he may be a transvestite prostitute. Victor's decision to keep him as their servant implies that Victor as the head of the household is encouraging Ibrahim's shady business with male prostitution—something that both the conservative Malayan and British colonial communities would find perverse culturally, given their revulsion for homosexuality and cross-dressing. Concerned about their reputation, Victor's wife Fenella informs Victor that she had been hearing rumours about numerous sightings of Ibrahim outside the cinema at night wearing women's clothes, seeking European men for customers. Before working for the Crabbe household, Ibrahim was a cook at the Malay Regiment Officers' Mess but was fired when he was caught 'waggling his bottom' at the soldiers and made them uncomfortable with his advances.[226] Ibrahim has a rather tragic backstory. He was forced into a marriage at the age of seventeen by his mother, who thought it was going to cure him of his sexual attraction for men, and return him to 'the true path of Muslim manhood'.[227] He resisted the marriage and is depicted to be fearful of his domineering wife and is seen to be constantly running away from her at every opportunity. Ibrahim is in love with his master, Victor Crabbe. However unfortunately, his love for him is never reciprocated and this angers him, leading him to steal his money and trinkets for revenge. Concurrently, Ibrahim is also a *ronggeng* dancer, performing at festivals.[228] In *Time for a Tiger*, he performs at the Sultan's birthday. His involvement with *ronggeng* dancing became known when Victor Crabbe who came to the fair with Fenella, and the two other

[226] Anthony Burgess, *Time for a Tiger* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1956), p. 37.
[227] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger,* p. 115.
[228] The *ronggeng* dance is a dance that originates from Java. Due to its erotic portrayal from the dancers, *ronggeng* became associated with prostitution. Dutch explorer J. Sarluy hints at the impropriety of *ronggeng* in Henry Spiller, *Erotic Triangles: Sundanese Dance and Masculinity and West Java* (London: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd, 2010), p. 87.

protagonists of the novel Nabby Adams and Alladad Khan, saw him in full drag dancing with Nabby Adams.

Ibrahim is inspired by Burgess's personal cook in Malaya, Yusof bin Ibrahim, when he was posted to teach at the elite preparatory school, the Malay College Kuala Kangsar. Yusof, as Burgess described, like Ibrahim, dyed his hair with henna.[229] In the novel, Ibrahim's dyed red front bang of his hair reminds Victor of the headmaster of his school, Boothby, whose hair is vivid red.[230] Burgess also recounts the advances Yusof made with him, in particular his request to have a wedding studio photograph of them taken, with Burgess dressed as the groom and Yusof as his bride. When Burgess declined his advances, Yusof would try to lace his drinks with a love potion and steal his belongings.[231] Ibrahim in the novel also makes attempts to seduce Victor with his swaying gait and epicene charms, and when Victor does not reciprocate the feelings Ibrahim has for him, he would steal his money out of a 'mild sexual outrage'.[232] Another resemblance between Yusof and Ibrahim is that both are described to have picked up their culinary skills from the Malay Regiment Officers' Mess.[233] Both Yusof and Ibrahim are also into cross-dressing. Biswell wrote that 'One evening in Kuala Kangsar town square, Burgess and Lynne [his wife] saw Yusof taking part in a *ronggeng* dance in full drag.'[234] In the novel, Victor Crabbe discovers Ibrahim at the *ronggeng* party in heels and sarong.[235] However, Burgess made some alterations in fictionalising Yusof to create Ibrahim. While Ibrahim

[229] Spiller, *Erotic Triangles*, p. 379.
[230] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1956), p. 60.
[231] Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, p. 379.
[232] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 114.
[233] Yusof's cooking background is mentioned in Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, p. 379. On the other hand, Ibrahim is seen to have flashbacks of him in the kitchen of the Malay Regiment Officers' Mess in Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 116.
[234] Biswell, p. 158.
[235] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 111.

clearly has an effeminate disposition and a wife, Yusof on the other hand was not married and was 'far from effeminate'.[236] These comparisons between Ibrahim and his real life counterpart Yusof the character formation of Burgess's fiction: how he incorporates some aspects of a real figure and fictionalises them.

Cross-Dressing in *Ronggeng* Dance Performance and its Rootedness in Hindu and Animist Rites

> An electric-lighted dream-world. The Malays, who awaited their turns to dance, courteously let the two white men go before them. Crabbe saw the sweating faces of the band, rakish *songkok* over saxophone, a young *haji* playing the drums. In delirium he saw huge Nabby Adams, tall as a crumpled tower, stiffly backing and advancing, drawing and drawn by his pigmy partner, an invisible cat's-cradle wound on wiggling dancing fingers. The crowd clapped and cheered.
>
> "Victor!" cried Fenella. "Victor! Come down!"
>
> But Crabbe was paralysed, staring with open mouth at Nabby Adam's hip-wagging partner. A red bang of hair, a stylish sarong, a cheerful greeting to Crabbe—"*Tabek, tuan*"—skilled high-heeled shoes, an undulant bottom. It was Ibrahim.[237]

The extract follows a scene at the fair that was held to celebrate the Sultan's birthday in *Time for a Tiger*. The protagonists Victor Crabbe and Nabby Adams are seen to be trying out *ronggeng* dancing with Malay female dancers dressed in their traditional outfit of tight fitting blouse and sarong, accompanied by a percussion playing drums, saxophone and other musical instruments on a makeshift stage. While waiting in line

[236] Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, p. 379.
[237] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 111.

to dance with one of the women, Victor noticed Nabby's dancing partner was not a woman, but his house servant Ibrahim, in drag.[238] When Victor recounts the red bang he saw on Nabby's dancing partner, as readers, we are immediately taken back to the scene when Ibrahim first appeared in the novel, with dyed red bang that reminded Victor of his headmaster's red hair: 'Ibrahim entered, bearing a tray, simpering at his master, dressed in wide-sleeved, wide-trousered silk. He had dyed the front bang of his hair a vivid red. "For God's sake don't try and look like Boothby," said Crabbe.'[239] The scene on the *ronggeng* stage takes a comical turn when Ibrahim in his elaborate female costume, make-up and heels turns to salute a flabbergasted Victor '"*Tabek, tuan*!"' ('Salute, sir!'), while dancing with Nabby.[240] This particular scene is significant in revealing not only Ibrahim's double life as a transvestite dance-performer at a small town carnival in Malaya but also opens a window to an ancient practice of cross-dressing in the Malay world and the dance art performance of *ronggeng*, which are deep-seated in pre-Islamic rituals. The androgynous Ibrahim therefore presents a microcosm of this dying traditional performance art that conflates and unites the masculine/feminine gender identities in order to connect with the spiritual world. To understand how Ibrahim could be symbolically linked to Burgess's strategy of intercepting masculine colonial narratives, it is pertinent to first explain a brief contextual background on cross-dressing in *ronggeng* dancing and its link to Animist and Hindu rites.

While there is no clear documentation of the origin of cross-dressing in the Malayan Peninsula, terms that describe transvestites and cross-dressers exist in the Malay language, albeit with negative connotations. Ibrahim Baba indicates that the common

[238] Burgess, 'Time for a Tiger', p. 106 and p. 111.
[239] Burgess *Time for a Tiger*, p. 60.
[240] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 111.

terms used for male-to-female transvestites include *pondan* (gay/effeminate), *mak nyah* (transvestite/cross-dresser), *bapok* (effeminate), *darai* (impotent) and *kedi* (hermaphrodite).[241] These terms are interchangeably used to describe transvestites, transsexuals and cross-dressers in the Malay language. Burgess also notes that male-to-female cross-genders in Malaya as of 1954–1957 when he was there, were described with various designations from the benign '*limau nipis*, or thin-skinned lime' to the more denigrating '*kaum nabi* Lot, the tribe of the prophet Lot'.[242] The hostility towards transvestism is drawn from the provision of the hadith 'The Apostle of Allah [Prophet Muhammad] cursed the man who dressed like a woman and the woman who dressed like a man' that explicitly condemns men dressing as women and vice versa.[243] This mainstream view on Islam's perception of cross-dressing echoes Breitenberg's insinuation that conservative societies tend to discourage promotion of gender ambiguity for the reason that it threatens the masculine/feminine gender fixture.[244] However, in spite of the suppression of cross-dressing in the Malayan society, they do exist, as evidently witnessed by Burgess and his wife at a fair in Kuala Kangsar, where they saw their cook Yusof dancing in a traditional Malay female costume.[245]

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[241] Ismail Baba, 'Gay and Lesbian Couples in Malaysia', in *Gay and Lesbian Asia: Culture, Identity, Community*, ed. by Gerard Sullivan and Peter A. Jackson (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2001), pp. 143–64 (p. 145).

[242] Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, p. 387. Emphasis original. Prophet Lot as he is known in the Old Testament or *Lūt* in the Koran was sent to forewarn the tribes of Sodom and Gomorrah of God's retributions if they continued to indulge in homosexual acts. As of recently in Malaysia, the term that Burgess heard that were used to describe transvestites as in '*limau nipis*' is no longer in use. They have since been replaced with newer slang terms such as '*sotong*' and '*kunyit*', both meaning effeminate. '*Khunsa*' is another word used for hermaphrodites. It is a term that was also familiar to Burgess. *Khunsas* are individuals described to have been born with both female and male genitals.

[243] Hadiths are a compilation of reports of Prophet Muhammad's sayings, actions and habits. It is used as a secondary source in Islamic jurisprudence. The particular hadith is from Sunan Abu-Dawud, narrated by Abu Hurairah, Book 27, No. 4087 <http://www.iium.edu.my/deed/hadith/abudawood/027_sat.html> [accessed 6 February 2017]. See also Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, p. 387.

[244] Breitenberg, p. 6.

[245] Biswell, p. 158.

Since the advent of Islam in the Malay Archipelago, the art form of cross-dressing became an alien concept and is divorced of its historical significance. However, it is believed to have taken its roots in pre-Islamic rituals that were common across Southeast Asia. Will Roscoe posits that these rituals were performed by 'gender-variant' temple functionaries who 'share the traits of devotion to a goddess (or female spirits), gender transgression, homosexuality and ecstatic ritual techniques'.[246] These rituals that began in temples were gradually adapted into a dance and theatre performance that would be celebrated not only in court palaces but also in villages. As Southeast Asian empires largely depended on their agricultural produce, the rituals revolve around ensuring the fertility of the crops involves invoking the rice goddess in a series of elaborate dance performances, accompanied by music. While this particular ritual in present-day Malaysia is hardly practiced, there are indigenous tribes in the states of Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo who still subscribe to these animist cultural traditions of paying homage to the harvest spirits in the *Gawai,* and rice goddess in the *Kaamatan* festivals annually.[247] Henry Spiller who specialises in Sundanese dance and music from West Java and has a chapter in his book *Erotic Triangles: Sundanese Dance and Masculinity* (2010) dedicated to detailing the origin of *ronggeng*, corroborates with Roscoe's claim that there is a co-relation between ritualistic dance performance and act of worship. Spiller traces the roots of the *ronggeng* dance to the worship of the rice goddess, Nyi Pohaci in Sundanese and Javanese cultures.[248] When the Javanese kingdoms embraced Hinduism from the 8th to the 10th century, elements of Hinduism were syncretised

[246] Will Roscoe, 'Precursors of Islamic Male Homosexualities', in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature,* ed. by Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (London: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 55–86 (p. 75).
[247] *Gawai* and *Kaamatan* are harvest festivals. *Gawai* is celebrated by the Dayak tribe in Sarawak while *Kaamatan* is celebrated by the Kadazan and Dusun tribes in Sabah in Borneo, East Malaysia.
[248] Henry Spiller, 'How Not to Act Like a Woman: Gender Ideology and Humor in West Java, Indonesia', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 29.1 (2012), 31–53 (p. 32).

with their animist beliefs and the rice goddess was given an Indic name – Dewi Sri.[249] The introduction of *ronggeng* in the Malayan Peninsula as Jan van der Putten suggests, are more than likely to have been imported from Java. While closely studying the traditions of *ronggeng* in both Indonesia and Malaysia, he deduces that there 'may have been at quite an early pre-colonial stage where Javanese court traditions dominated cultural expressions in the Malay world.'[250] R.J. Wilkinson, the scholar of Malay literature and culture even insinuates that the Malay *ronggeng* was a 'debased form of the Javanese original', confirming its Javanese link.[251]

Ronggeng is a social dance that involves the partnering of professional female dancers and their male patrons accompanied by an ensemble of musicians playing traditional Gamelan music.[252] The *ronggeng* dance described in *Time for a Tiger* (1956) however has taken Western influences. The traditional instruments of gong, *rebana* (tambourine) and *kacapi* (zither) were replaced by a saxophone and drums.[253] Van der Putten states that this was typical of the inevitable contact with other cultures due to colonisation and an influx of immigrants after the Second World War, plus the competition from the booming industry of European and American ballroom dancing in Southeast Asia.[254] *Ronggeng* according to Clara Brakel-Papenhuyzen, is sometimes interchangeably referred to as '*taledhek*', derived from the verb '*nandhak*', which means 'improvised' or 'spontaneous'.[255] This makes it different

[249] Spiller, 'How Not to Act Like a Woman', p. 32.
[250] Jan van der Putten, ''Dirty Dancing' and Malay Anxieties: The Changing Context of Malay Ronggeng in the First Half of the Twentieth Century' in *Sonic Modernities in the Malay World: A History of Popular Music, Social Distinction and Novel Lifestyles (1930s – 2000s)*, ed. by Bart Barendregt (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 113–34 (p. 117).
[251] As cited in van der Putten, p. 116.
[252] Gamelan is a traditional Balinese and Javanese instrumental music from Indonesia.
[253] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 106.
[254] Van der Putten, p. 114.
[255] Clara Brakel-Papenhuyzen, *Classical Javanese Dance: The Surakarta Tradition and its Terminology* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1995), p. 3.

from its more refined counterpart, the '*bedhaja'*, the more restrained high art dance form performed in courts and palaces.[256] *Ronggeng* is a social dance that is similar to the commercialised American taxi-dancing where male patrons are charged with a fee to dance with one of the female dancers.[257] By the 1930s, according to Van der Putten, when *ronggeng* became synonymously known as the 'national dance' of the Malays, it 'had become part and parcel of a thriving colonial club and party culture, and became one of the popular attractions in the amusement parks.'[258]

Ronggeng is characterised by its erotic dance movements. In his analysis of *ronggeng*, Spiller notes the accentuated femininity of its dancers displayed through their erotic dance movements and grooming. This further explains Ibrahim's impersonation of the female gestures and physical appearance as a *ronggeng* dance performer where Victor observes the curling of Ibrahim's fingers, his 'hip-wagging', 'undulant bottom' as well as his stylish sarong and heels as he dances with Nabby Adams[259]:

> *Ronggeng* bind together the various elements of dance events by performing femininity in several sensory modes. Visually, *ronggeng* accentuate their feminine attributes through extraordinary dress and grooming. Aurally, *ronggeng* voices incite desire through melody and poetry. Tactilely, *ronggeng* interact with men on a one-to-one basis, dancing in close proximity to—even

[256] James L. Peacock, 'Symbolic Reversal and Social History: Transvestites and Clowns of Java', in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. by Barbara A. Babcock (London: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 209 – 224 (p. 211).
[257] Van der Putten, p. 116.
[258] Van der Putten, p. 115. *Ronggeng* was described as a 'national dance' in the article 'Quaint Customs of Malays in Malacca', *The Straits Times*, 13 April 1907, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19070413-1.2.69> [accessed 16 February 2018] (p. 7)
[259] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 111.

> touching—their partners. As objects of desire in multiple dimensions, *ronggeng* force the male participants to make a choice: either to indulge their desires or to transcend them.[260]

As mentioned in the extract, Spiller states that *ronggeng* is a performance of femininity. This implies that this performance is not only reserved for women, but also boys and men who could successfully imitate the graceful movements of women and veil their manliness. James L. Peacock terms this impersonation of feminine qualities as '*luwes*' or 'refined softness' that emanates an ''illusion of femininity''.[261] Margaret J. Kartomi details this feminine art performance as having two kinds. The first is *alus* (soft/refined) that is defined by the performer's graceful imitation of female gestures while trying to mask as much as they can of their masculine traits and the second is *kasar* (coarse) where the performer parodies femininity and does not make any attempt to hide any of his manly traits.[262] In the novel, it is demonstrated that had it not been because of Ibrahim's distinctive red bang, Victor Crabbe would not have noticed Ibrahim in drag compared to his dance partner Nabby Adams, who is completely blinded by Ibrahim's convincing display of *luwes*. This practice of gender-switching in theatre and dance is deep-rooted in Javanese philosophy and culture, which is hugely influenced by Hinduism. Benedict Anderson states that hermaphroditism in Javanese culture is reflected in the iconography of Ardharanari (the half man-woman), the merging image of the Hindu god Shiva and his consort Shakti, where the 'left side […] is physiologically female

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[260] Henry Spiller, 'Negotiating masculinity in an Indonesian pop song. Doel Sumbang's "ronggeng" in *Oh boy! Masculinities and popular music*, ed. by Freya Jarmen-Ivens (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 39–57 (p. 41–2). [Emphasis original].
[261] Peacock, p. 216.
[262] Margaret J. Kartomi, 'Performance, Music and Meaning of Reyog Ponogoro', *Indonesia*, 22 (1978), pp. 84 – 113 (p. 108).

[while] the right side male' that represents a cosmological balance. He adds that the Ardharanari indicates a synergy of forces—which are generated from the male and female entities and fused into a single entity thus 'express[ing] the vitality of the ruler, his oneness and his centre-ness.'[263] This union of the female and male deities into one to create a cosmic power is replicated in Javanese performing arts, where there are recurring androgynous characters and female impersonators. The most popular transvestite character in Javanese theatrical performances is the clown, or Semar as he is called. He is gender ambiguous and is physiologically half man-woman. Then there are transvestite dancers which Sutton (1993), Wolbers (1989), Peacock (1978) and Kartomi (1978) pointed out which are very common.[264] Therefore, cross-dressing in Javanese dance and theatre has a sacral link and that the character Ibrahim in drag while being involved in *ronggeng* dancing, represents a continuity of this tradition.

Ibrahim and the Jungian Archetype of Hermaphroditism

As purported earlier, one of Burgess's critics, Christopher Ricks, hypothesizes that the transvestite character Ibrahim in *Time for a Tiger* (1956) is designed to be subversive. To put it into context, what was meant by Ricks of this particular statement is that the presence of the effeminate Ibrahim who dresses as a woman in the narrative and his colonial master Victor Crabbe's encouragement of his effeminacy, is seen as a destabilising agent in imperial writings, which

[263] Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, 'The Javanese Balance of the Cosmos' in *The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture*, ed. by Claire Holt (Singapore: Equinox Publishing (Asia) Pte Ltd., 2007), pp. 1–69 (p. 14).

[264] See R. Anderson Sutton, 'Semang and Seblang: Thoughts on Music, Dance and the Sacred in Central and East Java' in *Performance in Java and Bali*, ed. by Bernard Arps (London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, 1993), pp. 121–43 (p. 139) on men performing as female dancers. This is supported by Paul A. Wolbers, 'In Search of Contextual Background for the Gandrung and Seblang traditions of Banyuwangi, East Java', *Progress Reports on Ethnomusicology*, 2.6 (1989), pp. 1–21 (p. 8). See also Peacock, 'Symbolic Reversal and Social History', p. 211 and Kartomi, p. 89.

conventionally have focused on cultivating a masculine façade, although some colonial writers themselves are homosexuals, such as the case of Somerset Maugham (1874–1965) and E.M. Forster (1879–1970). Robert Aldrich demonstrates in his book *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (2003) that Forster's condemnation of the 1919 Amritsar massacre had more to do with his unrequited love and friendship with an Indian educationalist, Syed Ross Masood.[265] Meanwhile, in the case of Maugham, his biographer Selina Hastings notes that it was a well-known fact that he was a homosexual and was in a long-term relationship with his secretary, Frederick Gerald Haxton.[266] However, both Forster and Maugham had kept their private lives under wraps and even managed to conceal their sexual orientation in their colonial writing prior to the 1967 Sexual Offenses Act, which then decriminalised homosexuality in Britain. Philip Holden who analyses the homoerotic gaze in both Forster's and Maugham's fiction, indicates that out of the two writers, Forster was more forthcoming than Maugham about his sexuality in his novel *Maurice* (1971). Holden states: 'The creation of the Maugham narrator seems very much to be a device to keep Maugham himself securely closeted, and indeed the author's few published remarks on homosexuality seem conventionally *homophobic*. His novels themselves do not actively thematize [sic] homosexuality.'[267] Hastings mentions in Maugham's biography that this was due to the effect of the Oscar Wilde trial and his subsequent incarceration from 1895 to 1897. Hastings asserts that the trial 'was to cast a long shadow, and for seventy years Maugham's generation [Forster included] had to live with the very real fear of blackmail, exposure, public scandal and arrest' for same-sex love and adds that this made homosexual authors develop a habit of repressing

[265] Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 367–368.
[266] Selina Hastings, *The Secret Lives of Somerset Maugham* (New York: Random House, 2010), pp. 209–10.
[267] Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p. 2. [Emphasis added]

their homoerotic desires in silence.[268] The Oscar Wilde trial had spawned a lot of fears of degeneration among the British public. Stephen Arata wrote extensively on the anxieties of the collapse of the British Empire and in fact even on the decadence of the 'Anglo-Saxon' race at the turn of the nineteenth century in his book *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle* (2010).[269] Numerous publications were made to explain the problems of degeneracy following the Wilde trial. One of them was an influential work by Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1895) who attempts to explain effeminacy and homosexuality among artists and writers as forms of degeneracy and a 'mental weakness'.[270] He draws examples mostly from Wilde's obsession with aestheticism in paintings and literature. Arata states as an example that Kipling's 'masculinist imperial adventure' is a direct response to the 'dangers of Wildean aestheticism'.[271] Up until the point when homosexuality was decriminalised in 1967, there was a permeating homophobic atmosphere leaving homosexual writers such as Maugham and Forster having no choice but to follow the trend of hyper-masculine colonial writings, with the fear of their sexuality being discovered.

Noticing Maugham's masculine masquerade in his short stories as he researches Maugham's Malayan fiction for inspiration, Burgess parodies him in his novel *Earthly Powers* (1980), depicting the difficulties of writing as a closet homosexual at a time when homosexuality was criminalised in England.[272] Burgess reveals in an interview with Samuel Coale regarding the novel's narrator Kenneth Toomey, the Maugham-like inspired character that while he is a homosexual, has an old-fashioned

[268] Hastings, p. 49.
[269] Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle: Identity and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 1.
[270] Max Simon Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: D. Appleton, 1895; repr. London: Heinemann, 1898), p. 19.
[271] Arata, p. 6.
[272] Homosexuality in England was criminalised from 1533 according to the Buggery Act until 1967 when it was decriminalised under the Sexual Offences Act.

view of homosexuality and saw it as a 'perversion'. Burgess also adds that the novel is set in 1919, a time when authors 'cannot write novels candid[ly] explor[ing…] homosexuals [and s]o he has to pretend it's men and women [heterosexual relationships], and he's sick of the whole business.'[273] This then brings us to Burgess's treatment of Ibrahim in *Time for a Tiger* (1956). It is worth noting that this novel was published when homosexuality was still criminalised under British law, and coincidentally two years after Alan Turing (1912–1954) who broke the Enigma code was charged for the same offence as Oscar Wilde.[274] The epicene charm of Ibrahim may well suggest Burgess's social commentary of the issue via the body of a brown male colonial subject, instead of a European *tuan* (master), as the depiction of an effeminate British male colonialist as a central character would be very controversial for its time in 1956. This is why Victor Crabbe, though morally flawed, rejects Ibrahim's romantic gestures politely and in doing so, salvages the last bit of his virtue as perceived in a homophobic social environment, and is prevented from as Eve Sedgwick describes, falling further down the heterosexual-homosocial 'continuum' to become definitively homosexual and completely fallen.[275] Furthermore, it is only in the years leading up to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in England in the 1960s that Burgess's explorations of gender ambiguity and same-sex relations in his novels became more pronounced, as seen in *The Wanting Seed* (1962) and *A Vision of Battlements* (1965).[276]

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[273] Samuel Coale, 'Guilt's a Good Thing', in *Conversations with Anthony Burgess*, p. 133.
[274] *Time for a Tiger* was first published in 1956, two years after Alan Turing's death in 1954.
[275] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 1–2.
[276] It should be noted that *A Vision of Battlements* (1965) was first presented to Burgess's publisher, Heinemann in 1952 but was rejected. See James Michie, internal memo dated 17 1962, Anthony Burgess papers, William Heinemann archive, as cited in Burgess, *A Vision of Battlements*, p. 4.

The presentation of the cross-dresser Ibrahim with a sexual appetite for men in a 1956 novel therefore is very daring and is a provocation on all fronts on conservative notions of gender identity. That being said, I have chosen to interrogate Ibrahim's character in light of Jung's archetype of hermaphroditism. This is because while reading Jung's illustrations of the hermaphrodite figure in mythology, I notice a striking resemblance between Jung's descriptions of the syzygy and the Javanese/Hindu man-woman Ardharanari figure, a representation of the union between the god Shiva (masculine energy) and his consort Shakti (feminine energy) that when combined, form a complete whole. It is identical to Jung's core substantiation of the anima/animus representation of the soul. Under the category of the child archetype, Jung states that the 'majority of cosmogonic gods are of a bisexual nature', and that '[t]he hermaphrodite means nothing less than a union of the strongest and most striking opposites', which are also traits that the Ardharanari share. He also adds that the hermaphrodite is a 'product of primitive non-differentiation'[277]. Luc Brisson explains this point in his book *Sexual Ambivalence* (2002) to mean that the androgynes are 'primordial beings […] the forebears of the gods, men, and animals […] endowed simultaneously with both sexes, since they existed before the "split," the break from which gender resulted.'[278] A similar point is driven by Janice G. Raymond who states that the result of gender split is a consequence of Adam's and Eve's fall from Eden and posits that Adam in the Garden was 'originally combining and/or transcending maleness/femaleness'.[279] Raymond believed that Adam, the primordial man, was originally androgynous.

[277] Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. by R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 173.
[278] Luc Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence: Androgyny and Hermaphroditism in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, trans. by Janel Lloyd (London: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 2–3.
[279] Janice G. Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire* (London: The Women's Press, 1980), p. 156.

To put it into perspective, I have mentioned earlier regarding cross-dressing and the gender ambiguous clown character Semar in Javanese theatre and dance that they supposedly simulate the cosmic power generated by the hermaphrodite Ardhanaranari. That being said, Ibrahim's character has a fundamental role in *Time for a Tiger* (1956). In an article Burgess wrote for the BBC weekly magazine *The Listener*, he addresses the need for novelists to either 'revivify old myths' or 'create new ones', where he explains that new myths can be attained through 'cross-fertilization of old myths or a direct act of creation.'[280] Having the knowledge of Hindu mythology in Malayan and Indonesian history, literature and culture, as well as the *Malay Annals* (1612), he marries them with Western mythologies in his novel, while injecting his own invention.[281] It is most likely that Ibrahim is Burgess's version of Semar, or the clown, fittingly so as he is a half man-woman. Like Semar, he dresses and behaves like a woman but is physiologically a man. It is also plausible that Burgess had designated the transvestite Ibrahim as the divine servant clown Semar to Victor Crabbe's role as the god or divine prince/king. In *Beds in the East* (1959), Victor calls himself a god 'whom all men might touch' then proceeds to refer himself to Oedipus, the fallen Greek king in a later part of the novel.[282] In Javanese shadow puppet plays and its live theatrical performance counterpart, the *Wayang Wong*, Semar the clown provides a comic relief to the epic stories adapted from the Ramayana and Mahabharata that is quite similar to the role of the Vidusaka

[280] Anthony Burgess, 'The Corruption of the Exotic', *The Listener*, 16 September 1963, pp. 465–7 (p. 466).
[281] The *Malay Annals* (1612) or in Malay 'Sejarah Melayu' is a romanticised work of literature which traces the genealogy of the sultans of Malacca. The opening of Chap. 2 of *Time for a Tiger* parodies the highly embellished language of the *Malay Annals*, filled with fantastic descriptions and the myth surrounding the origin of the Malacca sultanate. See pp. 24–6.
[282] Anthony Burgess, *Beds in the East* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1959), p. 52. In p. 189 of the novel, Victor declares that he is 'Club-foot the Tyrant', another name for Oedipus.

clown in Indian Sanskrit plays.[283] Similarly, Ibrahim also provides a comic relief to the novel with his hilarious escapades from his verbally abusive wife Fatimah when she chases him with a '*kuali*' (frying pan) as well as his constant flaunting of his effeminacy to Victor with his simpering and his swaying hips.[284] The androgynous Semar acts as the servant to the heavenly princes/kings in the Hindu epics. Regarding Semar, Kartomi states: 'Semar […] the much-loved divine clown of the *wayang*, is neither exclusively male nor female; his dualistic being reflects the dualistic cosmos and the complementarity between heaven and the underworld.'[285] In Greek mythology, Semar is likened to Tiresias, although not a clown like Semar, he is a mediator between two worlds: the world of the gods and human beings. He is also a bridge between the worlds of men and women.[286] Ibrahim like Semar, is a servant, a transvestite and through his cross-dressing in the commercialised version of the ancient dance performance of *ronggeng*, connects the old world of pre-colonial Malaya and the new, cosmopolitan Malaya; the East and the West; the colonial and the colonised; the master and the servant, the divine and spiritual associated with the religion Islam and the profane, erotic and the worldly in *ronggeng* dance; and most importantly, his constant vacillation between two gender identities – the male and the female. However, apart from the hermaphrodite archetype as Jung indicates 'unites opposites' and is a 'subduer of conflicts', at the same time, it also projects a symbol of monstrosity.[287] Northrop Frye in his book *Anatomy of Criticism* (2000) characterises the hermaphrodite figure, the *res bina*, as a 'demonic imagery'.[288] In this context, Burgess presents the transvestite Ibrahim as the avatar of a degenerate

[283] James R. Brandon, *On Thrones of Gold: Three Javanese Shadow Plays* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), pp. 3–4.
[284] See Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 60 and p. 115.
[285] Kartomi, p. 108.
[286] Brisson, p. 4.
[287] Jung, p. 174.
[288] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 157.

man or race that began to take shape from the fin-de-siècle of the nineteenth century and which continued until the period of decolonisation—one that represents masculine loss and downfall of imperial Britain. This is particularly expressed in Victor Crabbe's lamentations in *The Enemy in a Blanket* (1958): 'The intrepid British of the past, who had ruled the waves. Ah, they were becoming an *effete* race.'[289]

Overturning Masculine Anxiety in Colonial Narratives with the Cross-Dresser Ibrahim

British imperial writing as Philip Holden observes, are laden with heteronormativity, which means that it gravitates towards 'heterosexuality as [its] preferred sexual orientation.'[290] Diana Fuss explains in her book *Inside/Out* (1991) that with this kind of *weltanschauung*, homosexuals were viewed as the 'contaminated other' and had to be 'excluded'.[291] Maria Davidis who examines John Buchan's adventure novel *Prestor John* (1910) set in South Africa sums up the reason British colonial fiction would not publicise homosexual relationships: 'Particularly in the wake of the Wilde trial of 1895, such words as "effete," "decadent," and "degenerate" in descriptions of the middle and upper classes signaled more than physical weakness. Physical frailty was presumably accompanied by sexual and emotional effeminacy—in a word, by homosexuality.'[292] It was apparent that with the fear of British men becoming 'degenerate', homosexual inclinations had to be culled in order to maintain the empire. Holden states that New Imperial fiction with the likes of Maugham and Forster for instance mourn the

[289] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 8. [Emphasis added].
[290] Philip Holden, 'Introduction' in *Imperial Desires: Dissident Sexualities and Colonial Literature*, ed. by Philip Holden and Ricard J. Ruppel (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. xi. 'Heteronormative' as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary.
[291] Diana Fuss, *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 3.
[292] Maria Davidis, '"Unarm, Eros!": Adventure, Homoeroticism, and Divine Order in 'Prestor John'', in *Imperial Desires*, p. 226.

masculine adventure narratives depicted by earlier empire builders and 'indulges in misogynist scapegoating of European women in the colonies as enforcers of respectable bourgeois, and debilitating, morality'. He adds that there was a thirst for the renewal of 'primitive masculine energy' in the production of colonial fiction.[293] This explains part of the reason why Kipling's Indian novels were enthusiastically embraced. As Anjali Arondekar notes, Kipling's reviewers raved about how he rejuvenates the 'tired, debauched [British] national spirit' as the Englishmen 'retreat, surrender and collapse under the pressures of the Raj.'[294] However, writing from a period where decolonisation is inevitable, it is a completely different ballgame altogether for Burgess. While Kipling, Maugham, Forster and their contemporaries were struggling to uphold the last vanguard of colonial masculinity in their fiction, Burgess takes it a few notches down by portraying epicene traits in men and celebrating them in his novels, hence subverting gender roles and identity. This is seen particularly in one scene in *Time for a Tiger* (1956) where Victor, the colonial master does the unthinkable in conventional masculine colonial narratives by praising his house-servant Ibrahim as a 'pretty boy':

> Ibrahim entered, bearing a tray, simpering at his master, dressed in wide-sleeved, wide-trousered silk. He had dyed the front bang of his hair a vivid red.
>
> "For God's sake don't try and look like Boothby," said Crabbe.
>
> "*Tuan*?" [Sir?]
>
> "But there's no danger of that. Nobody could call Boothby a pretty boy."
>
> "*Saya tidak mengerti, tuan*." [I don't understand, sir.]

[293] Holden, *Imperial Desire*, p. xi.
[294] Anjali Arondekar, 'Lingering Pleasures, Perverted Texts: Colonial Desire in Kipling's Anglo-India', in *Imperial Desire*, pp. 70–3.

> "I said that looks pretty. *Itu chantek* [That's pretty], Ibrahim."
>
> "*Terima kaseh, tuan*. [Thank you, sir]" Ibrahim went out, smirking pleasure, waggling his bottom.
>
> "You shouldn't encourage him," said Fenella. "I don't mind our being a little eccentric, but I don't like it reaching a point where people will laugh at us."
>
> "Are people laughing at us? Because we keep Ibrahim?" Crabbe drank off a tumbler of lemon squash with a double gin in it. "Are we supposed to get some sour-faced ancient Chinese who swigs the brandy while we're out?" [295]

It is seen in the extract that Victor is genuinely praising Ibrahim as a pretty boy and not because he is trying to avoid explaining to Ibrahim that he did not like that his red bang reminded him of Boothby's hair. This is despite the adjective 'pretty' being normally reserved for describing the female gender. The Malay word '*chantek*' that Victor uses to describe Ibrahim is also an indication of ascribing him to feminine beauty as '*chantek*' which means 'beautiful' or 'pretty' in Malay, has a restricted use only for the female gender. If Victor had wanted to describe Ibrahim as a handsome young man, he would describe him with the Malay words '*kacak*' or '*tampan*', which are adjectives only for the male gender. This is proof that there is gender conflation at play. Moreover, there is also as Christopher Ricks indicates in his review of Burgess's novels, a 'notable absence of disgust' at Victor's treatment of the androgynous Ibrahim and rather, a sense of encouragement from him.[296] It is Fenella however who is embarrassed that they keep Ibrahim as their servant as she tries to reason with Victor: '"You shouldn't encourage him […] People will laugh at us"', her voice resembling that of Ronny Heaslop, the city magistrate in *A Passage to India* (1924) as he reminds Adela Quested and his mother, Mrs. Moore to behave

[295] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 60.
[296] Ricks, p. 11.

accordingly to the conventions of middle-class European women in the colonies.[297] Victor's response to Fenella is also unusual in a predominantly heteronormative colonial narratives. He would rather be the subject of ridicule for keeping Ibrahim than employ a new house servant. Another instance where *Time for a Tiger* (1956) seems to be encouraging effeminacy in men is when Victor even hands out money to Ibrahim to buy his own hairclips: '"Buy some hair-clips with it […] Mem says you're pinching hers."'[298] For a novel published in 1956 where homophobia was pervasive in British and Malayan societies, this tolerance demonstrated by Victor towards his transvestite servant is ahead of its time. Victor seems to be comfortable by Ibrahim's sexual orientation and is quite confident of his own sexuality. Even by having Ibrahim constantly trying to charm Victor with his effeminacy, Victor is steadfast about not turning into a homosexual. Therefore, the portrayal of Victor's interactions with Ibrahim completely subverts not only the colonial master/colonised servant dynamics but also the hetero/homo binary opposition.

Another instance where Ibrahim is deployed to undermine masculine anxiety in colonial narratives is when he is concerned his wife Fatimah would exact revenge on him for 'wound[ing] her womanhood' by rejecting her advances [refusing to have sexual intercourse].'[299] Typically, hurting a woman's womanhood has never been highlighted in imperial fiction. As seen in Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), it often revolves around how an outwardly conduct of a British middle-class colonial woman would injure the reputation of British colonial men and consequently, humiliate the British community in the colony as a whole. This is evidently seen in how the Anglo-Indians in *A Passage to India* were all rooting for Adela Quested to

[297] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 60.
[298] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 37.
[299] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 119.

press charges against the Indian doctor, Aziz for molesting her in the Marabar caves in spite of the lack of evidence. Therefore, Burgess's strategy to deploy Ibrahim to elicit the statement that he is hurting Fatimah's womanhood is an absolute gender reversal, where the wife and the woman is given an agency over her effeminate husband. The case with Ibrahim and his wife is parallel to the relationship between the wealthy Malay 'Che Normah and her English husband, Rupert Hardman in *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), where she reasons her determination to control Rupert: 'Rupert was a white man and could be controlled.'[300] Both Ibrahim (the colonised) and Rupert (the colonial master) are relegated to the category of weak men, easily intimidated and subdued by their overbearing wives. Gender conflation is further demonstrated in Fatimah's pronouncement of '*nusus*', or more accurately spelt as '*nusyuz*' against Ibrahim: 'Fatimah, big and heavy-browed, had used the word '*nusus*' against him, one of the strongest of the Islamic terms of opprobrium, normally applicable only to a woman who refuses cohabitation.'[301] The term '*nusyuz*' is

> often referred to as a wife's disobedience towards her husband. In actual fact, the term *nusyuz* in the Qur'an can be used to mean either *nusyuz* by the wife, in Surah an-Nisa' 4: 34, or […] by the husband in Surah an-Nisa' 4: 128. However, instances of *nusyuz* given in the Islamic Family Law Act are often limited to *nusyuz* by the wife rather than to a disruption of marital harmony by either spouse. [It] refers to situations when the wife "unreasonably refuses

[300] Burgess, *The Enemy in a Blanket*, p. 50.
[301] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, pp. 115–6.

> to obey the lawful wishes or commands of her husband [inclusive of withholding sexual intercourse].[302]

The fact that Fatimah is the one declaring *nusyuz* on Ibrahim, one of the terms used to justify the reason for a Muslim man to file a divorce from his wife according to the Islamic family law indicates Burgess's deliberate inversion of gender roles between Fatimah the wife and Ibrahim the husband, who is now considered by Fatimah rather like her wife than her husband. The idea of this gender role reversal was also inspired by Burgess's curiosity of the matriarchal system practised in one of the states in Malaya, Negeri Sembilan where he states: 'Negeri Sembilan […] has a strange matriarchal system which seems able to reconcile itself with patriarchal Islam.'[303] Anthropologist Michael G. Peletz who did a field study on the Malays in Negeri Sembilan concurs with Burgess, in which he observes: '[t]he inhabitants of the Malaysian state of Negeri Sembilan have long fascinated and baffled outside observers. Although Muslims, they have matrilineal clans; houses and land to tend to be owned and inherited by women, and in times past most agricultural work was performed by women.'[304] Thus, the matriarchal practices of Negeri Sembilan is instrumental in influencing Burgess's experimentation in conflating the masculine/feminine identity in his novels and in effect, provoking the masculine anxiety in the popular colonial writings of Conrad, Maugham and Kipling.

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[302] Gavin W. Jones and Kamalini Ramdas, *(Un)tying the Knot: Ideal and Reality in Asian Marriage* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2004), p. 121.
[303] Anthony Burgess, *But Do Blondes Prefer Gentleman?: Homage to Qwert Yuiop and Other Writings* (Hamburg: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1986), p. 59.
[304] Michael Gates Peletz, *A Share of the Harvest: Kinship, Property, and Social History Among the Malays of Rembau* (London: University of California Press, 1992), p. xv.

Finally, Burgess's use of Ibrahim to thwart hyper-masculinity in colonial narratives is illustrated in a scene when Ibrahim was alone at the Crabbe household while Victor and Fenella Crabbe were out attending an aboriginal dance performance with Nabby Adams and Alladad Khan in *Time for a Tiger* (1956). This scene opens with Ibrahim preparing to leave the house while gathering some of Victor's and Fenella's belongings to take with him. Ibrahim is described to have 'ruled for a few hours the decaying Residency and sensually had his will of it.'[305] This statement is rather symbolic. Ibrahim the hermaphrodite servant, the very emblem of degeneracy or monstrosity in Jung's archetype terminology, has taken over the decrepit Residency. The initial letter for the word 'residency' is also intentionally capitalised suggesting that the Crabbe Residency is a reference to the British Residency or British colonisation of Malaya that is beginning to show its cracks—a metaphor for the crumbling British Empire.[306] It is also indicated that Ibrahim ruled the Crabbe household 'sensually', a reminiscence of the erotic *ronggeng* dance which Henry Spiller describes, evinces the sensuality of the dancer. It is observed that Ibrahim does not just simply leave the house. He leaves a trail of his epicene charm behind. This could be interpreted as an imagery of Malaya's decolonisation that is concordant with the emasculation of the British colonial race. This scene is followed immediately by Ibrahim's explicit account of the European planter with the 'fair young man from the Drains and Irrigation Department', an insinuation that the two men were in a homosexual relationship—the type of degenerate masculinity that Kipling, Conrad, Maugham and Forster would never discuss in their imperial fiction:

[305] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger,* p. 144.
[306] British Residency refers to a system where British advisers are stationed in each Federated Malay States to offer their counsel to the Malay Sultans on their affairs. Once a particular state accepts a British Resident, it becomes a British Protectorate and the Malay rulers are obliged to follow their advice. It was through this system that the British took control of Malaya's labour and resources.

> [L]ately the fair young man had been seen much in the company of a new man, a white-faced Customs officer with innocent glasses on his tiny nose, and Ibrahim surmised that the fat planter was hurt and lonely. He had told Ibrahim so and offered him the post of cook and friend in his big empty bungalow on the huge estate.[307]

The aforementioned extract is another example where Burgess uses Ibrahim as a narrative strategy to expose anxious masculinity in colonial narratives, which involves Ibrahim's voyeurism of the clandestine meetings between the British colonial civil servants and the planter. Christopher Ricks mentions that Burgess, unlike Wilson Knight in his theory of "seraphic intuition", does not cloak any notions of gender ambiguity in symbolism. Instead, he explicitly portrays them as 'harmless pleasure' in his novels.[308] This is evidence that Burgess's portrayal of a transvestite character such as Ibrahim is somewhat a subversion of heteronormative colonial fiction. However, even though Burgess disrupts the colonial/colonised power structure in his Trilogy, the depiction of Ibrahim (the male colonised subject) in feminine terms is still a recirculation of colonial tropes. Earlier on, I have argued that in spite of Burgess's inventive strategies to intercept the colonial/colonised 'positional superiority', it nonetheless betrays a pattern of latent orientalism.

3.3 'The Unglamorous East': Burgess's Portrayal of Malaya at the End of Empire as a Space of Boredom and Non-Event

> Where is this glamorous East they talk about? It's just a horrible sweating travesty of Europe. And I haven't met a soul I can talk to. All those morons in the Malay Regiment and those louts of planters, and as for the wives […]

[307] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 144.
[308] Ricks, in *Anthony Burgess*, p. 10.

> Why should we have to come out here […] It was more comfortable in London.[309]

The quotation above from one of Burgess's principal characters in the Malayan Trilogy, Fenella Crabbe, the wife of the Trilogy's protagonist Victor Crabbe, is a criticism of imperial adventure fiction that portrays the East as exotic, exciting and full of adventure such as the novels of H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), which are set in Africa and Central Asia respectively. The 1950 film adaptation of Haggard's Indiana Jones-like novel *King Solomon's Mines*, directed by Compton Bennett and Andrew Marton, for instance, even has the blurb in the trailer that reads: 'Actually filmed in the Savage Heart of Equatorial Africa' to tantalise movie goers' attention to its exotic setting. Commenting on the problem of exoticising foreign places in fiction, Burgess indicates in his essay 'The Corruption of the Exotic' (1963), that '[f]or lesser writers like [himself], the most dangerous temptation of all when writing about the exotic is to trade on the reader's ignorance and to falsify [introduce imaginary flora and fauna and tribal customs]'.[310] Like Sillitoe's paucity of exotic elements in his Malayan novels, Burgess's Trilogy confronts the Victorian adventure novels that depict the East as a site of novelty and excitement as Fenella puts it, 'the glamorous East', by constructing Malaya in his Trilogy instead as a space of boredom and stagnation.[311] Fenella's commentary upon her arrival in Malaya encapsulates this criticism of the textual tradition of the exotic East.[312] In his journal article 'Imperial Boredom'

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[309] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger,* p. 35.
[310] Burgess, 'The Corruption of the Exotic', *The Listener*, 16 September 1963, pp. 456–67 (p. 465).
[311] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger,* p. 35.
[312] Textual tradition is a term used by Robert Hampson in *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction* (2000) to denote template writing for European authors to describe the Malay Archipelago. For further details on textual tradition, please refer to note 75 of Chapter 2 under the section 'Sillitoe's Presentations of the Malayan Landscape'.

(2005), Jeffrey Auerbach likens the 'glamorous view of the empire' in best-selling adventure novels of the nineteenth century to 'imperial propaganda'.[313] He adds that the boredom colonial officials experience when they arrive in the colonial outposts is a result of 'unmet expectations about the landscape, combined with the […] bureaucratic and ceremonial nature of imperial service', very much like Fenella's dashed expectations of Malaya which she had accumulated from ethnographic monographs and imperial fiction.[314] Describing the character of Fenella Crabbe in the introduction to the Malayan Trilogy, Burgess states that she is 'not untypical of the British *memsahib*, who considered herself [culturally and in knowledge] superior to the [Malayan] natives.'[315] In his reading of the Trilogy, Matthew Whittle deduced that Burgess fashioned Fenella's character to criticise 'Malaya's British colonial community' who regard the Malayan 'natives' as 'only considered worthy of attention', if 'they live up to the notions of Eastern 'glamour' [in terms of their primitivism and strangeness] evidenced in anthropology and fiction'.[316] Whittle's assessment of Fenella is important. However, I would also like to add that in the same manner where Burgess uses the character Ibrahim to disrupt anxious masculinity in colonial narratives as I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, he also uses Fenella's superficiality to expose the strategies of Orientalist texts that rely on the portrayals of the East as mysterious, strange and primitive as opposed to the West and, in turn, shape Malaya instead as a space that is the opposite of the aesthetics of pleasure invoked by elements of exoticism – that is of boredom and where nothing significant was happening. To the rough eye, this may seem like a radical departure from Victorian adventure fiction that has the inclination to glamorise the exotic East,

[313] Jeffrey Auerbach, 'Imperial Boredom', *Common Knowledge*, 11.2 (2005), 283–305 (pp. 285–6).
[314] Auerbach, p. 300.
[315] Anthony Burgess, *The Malayan Trilogy* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. ix.
[316] Whittle, p. 50.

but when we examine the context of Malaya that Burgess's Trilogy is set in closely, we will realise that its foreground on the humdrums of its setting in the period of decolonisation, which coincides with the Cold War in Asia, reveals its anxieties with the disintegrating British Empire. I will be returning to this point shortly.

In the extracted passage from *Time for a Tiger* (1956), we see Fenella comparing hot and humid Malaya, a representation of the East, to a parody of Europe and her desire to be back in the 'comfort' of London. Along the line of her complaints, we also gather that she desires to socialise with London's affluent class, whereas in Malaya the only Europeans she could socialise with are those she considers of an inferior social background – the soldiers from the Malay Regiment, the planters and their wives.[317] Fenella's longing for London is evocative of Saikat Majumdar's 'core-periphery' study of Katharine Mansfield's works which include her short stories 'Prelude' (1918) and 'At the Bay' (1922) to name a few, where her *Pākehā* (white settler) protagonists in New Zealand, the peripheral outpost, long to be in London – the metropolitan centre of the Empire and modernity. In his book *Prose of the World* (2013), Majumdar posits that '[m]odernity in the colony […] is marked by a desire whose object can be perceived from a distance [where] [a]t this distance [,] lies the final object of colonial desire, the metropolitan centre of empire, a venue where events unfold and history happens with all its excitement.'[318] Similar to Fenella,

[317] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 35. David Cannadine writes that at the height of the British Empire, Britons abroad saw the colonised subjects and the British community in the colonies and settler dominions in the same hierarchical manner as they viewed themselves at home as a 'web of layered gradations [...] from the monarch at the top to the humblest subject at the bottom'. See David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw the Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 4. See also p. 6 where Cannadine explains the reason the British elites saw the natives in the colonies as collectively inferior was because they viewed them as the 'overseas equivalent' of the British working-class.

[318] Saikat Majumdar, *Prose of the World: Modernism and the Banality of Empire* (West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 11. Majumdar uses the term 'core-periphery' in p. 14 of the book.

Mansfield's protagonists view London as where all the spectacular events are happening and as the epicentre of modernity. In juxtaposition to London, the far removed margins of Empire are filled with 'social barrenness', the lack of excitement and culture.[319] As Majumdar indicates, in the peripheral colonial outposts/settler dominions, 'Nothing happens [.] [L]ife is empty, uneventful [and] on the margins of human [Western] history'.[320] In tandem with Majumdar's argument, Fenella too views Malaya as a space marked by emptiness and where nothing is happening. This is despite the fact that at this point when Fenella arrived in Malaya, it was undergoing monumental changes as I will discuss in further detail in Chapter 5 in Burgess's comedic treatment of Malaya's decolonisation. Where the Trilogy is set in 1954–5 Malaya, the nation at this time was preparing for a transition of power from British colonial rule to the Malayan central government. Two years prior, then High Commissioner of Malaya, General Gerald Templer (1952–4) had initiated a 'Malayanisation' programme, training and recruiting Malayan staff into the civil service to undertake government administrative work when the British leave the country in 1957, just as the character Victor Crabbe is tasked to train his Malayan deputy to replace him as Education Officer in *Beds in the East* (1959). Fenella's dismissal as she responds to the British withdrawal from Malaya as well as the feeling of 'political disempowerment' of being excluded from the colonies' process of nation building is a sign of denial and betrays what Paul Gilroy terms as 'postcolonial melancholia'.[321] My analysis of Burgess's projection of Malaya in his Trilogy as a space of boredom and non-event is an extension of Siti Nuraishah Ahmad's scope of reading the Malayan space in Burgess's *Time for a Tiger* (1956),

[319] Majumdar, p. 72. 'Social barrenness' signifies the lack of people from high society to socialise with.
[320] Majumdar, p. 3.
[321] Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2005). See also Majumdar, p. 6.

as a barren garden in the final years of British rule in Malaya to reveal the anxieties of the collapsing British Empire and postcolonial Malaya's reduced dependency on Britain.

The Deceptive Mask of Boredom

Noting the contrast Katharine Mansfield (1888–1923) makes in her 21 December 1908 diary entry between the 'barrenness' of the margins of Empire (New Zealand) and the promise of a 'full' life in the heart of Empire (London), Majumdar sets to explore what he terms as the 'hierarchical structure of colonial modernity' grounded in Immanuel Wallerstein's 'core-periphery' theory.[322] In repercussion, the periphery, far removed from the modernity of the centre and a signifier of wealth and high culture, becomes the source of boredom. In the context of the Malayan Trilogy, apart from the metropolitan centre and the colonial margins core-periphery, it could also be applied in the urban-rural core-periphery, where the more rural the state in Malaya is, the scarcer it is of entertainment and vice versa. I will demonstrate later how Burgess's fictional Muslim Malay majority and rural state of Dahaga in the Trilogy is constructed to be a space of boredom and stasis.

In relation to boredom, Majumdar notes that it is a form of negative aesthetics in literary production that has an 'oppositional relationship to literature' which he asserts, must 'engage and entertain its audience' and because they do not fulfill the requirements to engage the reader, they are hence reactionary to the purpose of literature. Boredom, Majumdar states, connotes a 'lack of excitement, novelty [and]

[322] Majumdar, pp. 1–3. The core-periphery framework is a Marxist theory which explains the uneven development of capital in the world. Immanuel Wallerstein argues that the core refers to the developed nations while the periphery is a reference to the less developed nations. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 18.

activity'.[323] On another note, Sianne Ngai in her book *Ugly Feelings* (2005) categorises boredom as a 'marginal' emotion alongside other emotions such as envy, irritation, paranoia and anxiety.[324] Most importantly, as Majumdar notes, the aesthetics of boredom is an 'ideological marker of political marginalization' from the 'micropolitical consequences of colonialism, anticolonial resistance, and postcolonial identity formation' and this is where his proposition coincides with Paul Gilroy's 'postcolonial melancholia', where he illustrates that the aesthetics of boredom has the function of deflecting the political realities of Britain's dependent territories.[325] In his reading of Mansfield's short story 'Prelude' (1918), he concludes that her seemingly 'humdrum surface' of New Zealand is 'riven by an undercurrent of violent ruptures', which conceals the tumultuous history between the *Pākēhā* and Maoris.[326] Similarly, Burgess's deployment of Malaya as a space of boredom also communicates an anxiety of exclusion, of his British expatriate characters' inability to connect to the anti-colonial resistance of the Malayan Communists as well as Malaya's independence movement and signifies their conscious detachment from the political realities of decolonisation in Malaya.

Postcolonial Melancholia

Postcolonial melancholia is a concept Paul Gilroy derived from the 1967 seminal work of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen Kollektiven Verhaltens* ('The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour').[327] In essence, Gilroy's postcolonial melancholia stems from

[323] Majumdar, p. 4.
[324] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (London: Harvard University Press, 2005).
[325] Majumdar, p. 6.
[326] Majumdar, p. 99.
[327] Please refer to Chapter 3 under the sub-heading 'Burgess's Portrayal of Malaya as the Fatigued and 'Unglamorous' East'. Gilroy indicates in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) that he was

a condition where a former colonialist nation is unable to mourn and come to terms with the loss of its former empire's prestige and is constantly looking back at the imperial past with nostalgia. His work *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) notably makes a direct reference to Britain's imperial past where the melancholic sentiments in post-war British literature are expressed in the forms of lethargy, depression and self-loathing, when writing about anti-colonial uprisings in the dependent territories and the retreat from the empire. Gilroy states: 'Once the history of the empire became a source of discomfort, shame, and perplexity, its complexities and ambiguities were readily set aside. Rather than work through those feelings, that unsettling history was diminished, denied, and then, […] actively forgotten.'[328] Gilroy demonstrates that part of the reason for the bulk of cultural amnesia in Britain's history which mostly ignores events after the Second World War in faraway colonies like Malaya, Cyprus and Kenya is because they are a reminder of the disintegrating Empire. Their significance is reduced to the 'small wars' fought for nations that were about to become independent states.[329] This inability to recuperate from the losses of imperial status and global economic power as a result of austerity measures are also partially struggles that deal with, as social psychologist Roy F. Baumeister puts it, an 'identity deficit', and in extension in the context that Gilroy defines, results in an 'increasingly brittle and empty national identity'.[330]

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inspired by the Mitscherlichs' study of the inability of Holocaust war crime offenders to deal with their guilt. See Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, p. 98.

[328] Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, p. 90.

[329] 'Small wars' is a term used by the 1940 United States Marine Corps Manual to describe unconventional and guerrilla warfare.

[330] Roy F. Baumeister, *Identity: cultural change and the struggle for self* (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 212. See also Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, p. 106.

Boredom and the Longing for the Eventful Heart of Empire Conceals Postcolonial Melancholia

To begin with, I will elucidate Burgess's strategy of using Fenella's character to veil his denunciation of Victorian adventure novels' exoticisation of the East by stripping away all exotic and enthralling aspects of Malaya. Simultaneously, I will also shed light on her reduction of Malaya to a space of cultural barrenness, revealing her character's detachment from Malaya's anti-colonial struggles. Returning to Fenella Crabbe's boredom in Malaya in *Time for a Tiger* (1956), as in the case of Mansfield with New Zealand, she juxtaposes Malaya, the colonial periphery and London, the imperial metropolis. Malaya, the colonial periphery in Fenella's words is a 'sweating travesty of Europe' as opposed to 'comfortable' London.[331] In Malaya, Fenella proclaims, there is nobody exciting to socialise with and complains to her husband Victor that she could not stand the '[s]cabby children, spitting pot-bellied shopkeepers, terrorists, burglars, scorpions', and the 'eternal shouting', deploying David Spurr's colonial rhetoric of debasement, emphasising Malaya's grotesque scenery.[332] Note that instead of making comparisons between Malaya and England as a whole, she refers to London, the heart of the empire and supposedly the centre of modernity. She does not compare Malaya to other parts of England. The northern part of England such as Manchester and Nottingham for instance, are specifically excluded from this comparison. Moreover, since Fenella is aware that returning to London is impossible due to its distance from Malaya, she sees Timah as the next best substitute that would enable Fenella to fill the void of some semblance of high culture she craves. She imagines that it is in Timah that Fenella and Victor will be able to meet 'people of her own kind' who share the same passion in arts and

[331] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 35.
[332] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 34.

literature.[333] As they do not have the privilege of a car, Fenella and Victor have to walk to town. Recounting her experience walking with sweat dripping on her face and navigating past the 'treacherous' roads of 'erratic cyclists and trishaw-men', Fenella becomes 'sick for London': 'The roads were treacherous with erratic cyclists and trishaw-men. As she made up her face, cursing the sweat that clogged the powder, she was sick for London.' In London, as she mentions time and again with Victor, there are dances, ballets and concerts to look forward to, whereas Malaya, as she puts it, leaves her with 'uncultured emptiness'. Fenella's rationalisation of the cultured London as opposed to the uncultured emptiness of Malaya is reminiscent of Majumdar's core-periphery thesis where London desired from a distance is a space that promises excitement and a 'fuller' life.[334] She then adumbrates that civilisation is only possible in a temperate climate and writes a poem to commemorate the living condition in Malaya where her poem begins with the line '"Where sweat starts, nothing starts"', stressing Malaya's oppressive heat and in turn, heightening its unattractiveness.[335] We then follow the argument between Fenella and Victor Crabbe, where Victor who is more content with the way Malaya is, attempts to reason with Fenella to put up with their stay there and for her to accept that Malaya is not London. Victor argues that Malaya's climate is 'equatorial' and there are no concerts, theatres and ballets but states that the people, drinking shops, cultural and religious diversity of the country make up for what it lacks.[336] Ignoring Victor's explanations and motivated by her desire to fulfill her cultural emptiness, Fenella insists on purchasing a car for them to go around as 'all the white men had cars'.

[333] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 58. Fenella considers herself Bohemian. See also p. 62 of the novel where Victor tells Fenella: '"I can't understand your inconsistency. At home you were Bohemian, prided yourself on it, loved being different from everybody else."'
[334] Majumdar, p. 2.
[335] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 59.
[336] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, pp. 61–2.

When Victor suggests Fenella could take the bus to go to the Film Society, Fenella fumes. She points out that she does not want people to be staring at her like a 'sideshow' and 'have garlic breathed on to her' while also complaining about the sweat and the dirt, another instance that is evocative of invoking Malaya as a negative topography of debasement.[337] In their argument, Victor points out Fenella's double standards stating that she has never complained about the buses and tubes at home to which Fenella replies that Malaya is different, insinuating that they are Europeans and cannot live like Asians.[338] Subsequently, there is also Fenella's conscious dissociation from Malaya's decolonisation process, pathological of postcolonial melancholia. As we see in *Time for a Tiger* (1956), where the local English newspaper *The Timah Gazette* headlines read 'Tapper's Eyes Gouged Out by C.T.[Communist Terrorists]s' and 'Singapore Riot Threat' lay open among Fenella's other reading collection, these conflicts which result from anti-colonial movements appear to be insignificant to her. She is however more invested in the column on the Film Society which is to take place in Timah, the city centre of the state of Lanchap.[339] In *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), Fenella once again shows her lack of concern for Malaya's national sentiments against British colonisation. On the plane while reading the local newspapers *The Timah Gazette* and *The Singapore Bungle*, Fenella 'bent angry brows over a front page, taking in *nothing* of the Singapore riots [and] the 'Clear Out British' banners above the toothy smiles and

[337] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 62.
[338] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 63.
[339] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 58. Fenella and Victor Crabbe are in Kuala Hantu, the royal town in the state of Lanchap. Kuala Hantu is in the suburbs and is a further distance from the town centre. It not clear which Singapore riot that is referred to in the novel. From 1954–5 when Burgess had first settled in Malaya, there were two significant riots in Singapore which took place in 1954 and 1955. They were the 1954 National Service riots and the 1955 Hock Lee bus riots. Both riots were sparked by anti-colonial sentiments. The 1954 National Service riot resulted from the opposition against the British colonial government's National Service Ordinance passed in 1953 which required all male British subjects aged 18–20 to sign up for National Service. Failure to sign up led to fines. In 1955, there was the Hock Lee bus riot. It was wagered by the Communists and left wing Trade Union workers against the British authorities.

brown feet.[340] As in the case of Majumdar's analysis of Mansfield's short stories, violence and conflicts that are sparked by anti-colonial resistance are muted and pushed into the background. Fenella's cursory treatment of anti-imperial sentiments in Malaya's newspapers is masked by her boredom.

Apart from Fenella's treatment of Malaya as a periphery to London's core of civilisation in Burgess's Trilogy as the source for British expatriates' boredom, the Trilogy also significantly carves the fictional state of Dahaga in *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), located in the east coast of the Peninsula Malaya where Victor is transferred, into an epitome of boredom. I will be explicating more on Dahaga in Chapter 5 where I note that Dahaga being a majority Muslim state is also a microcosm of postcolonial Malaya. The meaning of Dahaga in Malay is 'thirsty'. To put it into context, where we have looked at Fenella's longing for some form of cultural fulfillment in the Malayan backwater earlier, the state of Dahaga could be read symbolically as the thirst for entertainment. Dahaga in the novel is described as a place where nothing happens or there is hardly anything to do. In the opening of *The Enemy in the Blanket*, the narrator introduces Dahaga as a state that has no history and where time stands still:

> History? The State had no history. It had not changed in many centuries, not since the Chinese had stepped ashore and soon retreated, carrying its name back in three ideograms: DA HA GA. The British had hardly disturbed the timeless pattern. The rivers were still the main roads, though the railway train pulled in from the south once a week and an aeroplane came daily. There

[340] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 5. [Emphasis added]

> were cinemas and a few hotels, some British commercial firms in poky offices. But Dahaga regarded all these as a rash that would go, leaving the smooth timeless body unchanged.[341]

As with all fiction, the narrator begins with the account of the history of its setting to familiarise the readers. In *Time for a Tiger* (1956), the narrator introduced the history of the Malay rulers of the royal town of Kuala Hantu and recounts how the town got its name. In *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) however, as if mocking the reader, the narrator declares that the state of Dahaga, where Victor Crabbe was transferred to as having no history, accentuating on its resistance to change even with the arrival of foreign powers – the British, the Siamese and the Japanese with statements such as '[t]he British had hardly disturbed [Dahaga's] timeless pattern' and '[t]he future [of Dahaga] would be like the past'.[342] On top of depicting the state as having no sense of time, it is also described as underdeveloped. Instead of using the modern mode of transportations as in trains and airplanes, Dahaga still uses rivers as their 'main roads', giving the impression that Dahaga is far from being civilised and is still stuck in the past. Time in Dahaga also moves at a very slow pace which seems like an eternity. Another point worth mentioning is that Dahaga has a large Malay-Muslim population and therefore Islam permeates the lives of its people. The Trilogy implies that Islam is the source of tedium in Dahaga due to its strict rules against the consumption of alcoholic beverages, frequenting clubs and its strict observations of fasting. To demonstrate further the doldrums of Dahaga, the Trilogy sets up the character Rupert Hardman, a British Muslim convert to communicate his predicaments under the watch of the Muslim authorities in Dahaga and his Malay

[341] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, pp. 6–7.
[342] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 7.

wife, ‘Che Normah. Rupert’s personal affairs are controlled entirely by ‘Che Normah, a middle-aged wealthy Malay widow he marries to cover the cost of his debts. She controls his conduct and whom he befriends. For instance, she prevents him from befriending a Catholic priest, Father LaForgue, fearing that the pastor would influence him to return to the Christian faith. She also carefully guards his conduct when he is around his Malayan friends, ensuring that he does not ask ‘provocative’ questions such as ‘“What is religion?”’ and ‘“Why cannot Islam develop a more progressive outlook?”’[343] While it is ‘Che Normah’s interpretations of Islam that is parochial, Islam is made to appear Calvinistic in the Trilogy, seemingly discouraging questions. The Trilogy also portrays Islam to be reactionary to progress. In the process of ‘Che Normah’s control of Rupert, she emasculates and domesticates him, reducing him to the humdrums of quotidian life and this is coupled with constrictions on Rupert imposed by the state’s Islamic law. In a scene in the novel for instance, Rupert is fined by the moral police for not fasting during *Ramadhan*, the fasting month. As a result, he has to constantly evade ‘the sharp eyes of Islam, drinking gloomy beer’.[344] As in the case of Beryl in Mansfield’s short story ‘Prelude’ (1918), Rupert is afraid of vegetating in Malaya and so plans an elaborate escape from his Malay wife to Europe where he arranged for a flight from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to Europe when they make their journey for pilgrimage. A similar character to Fenella, Rupert also longs to be in the metropolitan core of the Empire. At the same time, colonial disempowerment is also revealed when Rupert who plans to escape from Malaya receives a letter from the dean of a Law faculty at a university in England, who informs him that ‘the time […] have come […] for the East to dominate the West’ where the two ‘able lecturers with unpronounceable Indian

[343] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 48.
[344] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 199.

names' in their departments are the 'life and soul of Faculty meetings.'[345] The letter reveals the anxieties of postwar Britain where Britons at home were wary of being replaced by more vibrant and energetic scholars from the former Commonwealth nations.

Therefore, in summary, similar to Mansfield's subdued representations of violence and conflicts between the white *Pākehā* settlers and the indigenous Maoris, Burgess's Trilogy is also found to be eluding from engaging with the burgeoning rise of anti-colonial sentiments in Malaya in the period leading up to Malaya's decolonisation. Although the character Fenella Crabbe appears to be a vehicle to criticise nineteenth century imperial adventure novels that rely on their exotic settings, Fenella's criticisms of Malaya instead as a space of cultural emptiness reveal anxieties of the declining British Empire. Another demonstration of Malaya in the Trilogy as a space of boredom and non-event is also seen in the Trilogy's narration of the fictional state of Dahaga's history, which is described to have no sense of time and is culturally backwards due to it being under Islamic law. Rupert Hardman, the character of the British lawyer who became a Muslim convert, is deployed in the Trilogy to present the apotheosis of boredom in Dahaga.

In a nutshell, this chapter set out to examine Burgess's fictional representations of Malaya in the period of extensive decolonisation in Asia. Burgess wrote the Malayan Trilogy to 'restore balance' to the lack of Malayan representation in Somerset Maugham's stories where the Malayan characters were appendages to his British colonial characters. With this aim in mind, Burgess curates a narrative where he

[345] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 193.

disrupts the colonial/colonised power dynamics. He upends these dynamics, turning colonial characters into subordinates to the Malayan characters. At times, he also lowers the position of the colonialist so that he or she becomes equal to the colonised subject. However, in spite of this inventive narrative break away from traditional colonial literature, his Malayan fiction recirculates latent orientalism by counterpoising western order against an assumed inherent chaos in eastern culture, language and governance. The texts also betray the characters' underlying desire for Malaya to return to British paternalism and reveal a distrust in Malaya's self-governance. As well as disrupting the colonial/colonised power dynamics, Burgess also set out to dismantle the anxious masculinity so common in the popular colonial literature of Kipling and Haggard. He introduces a transvestite character, Victor Crabbe's Malay servant Ibrahim, an avatar of representing a degenerate man or race reflecting masculine loss and downfall of imperial Britain. However, in spite of this inventive approach in Burgess's Malayan narratives, his use of a Malayan colonised male subject as an avatar for Britain's imperial decline reinforces the trope of feminised male colonised subjects in colonial literature. Finally, this chapter also examines the construction of Malaya as a space of boredom and stagnation, a deliberate response to 'exotic' novels of the East; upon further examination, the Trilogy's emphasis on Malaya's 'cultural emptiness' underscores anxieties about Britain's withdrawal from Malaya and its demotion in imperial status.

CHAPTER 4
Sillitoe Declares 'Semiotic Guerrilla Warfare' on the Elite Colonial Literature: Resistance Writing in the Portrayals of the Cold War in Southeast Asia and Britain's Imperial Decline

In this chapter, I examine Sillitoe's 'guerrilla' writing against the British dominant culture and the official British colonial narrative of the Malayan Emergency. I study the sub-cultural aspects of his narratives and his protagonists' formulation of their own political thoughts independent of the dictates of society, where they are critical of the British colonial government as well as Communist insurgencies. This chapter also looks at the realism in Sillitoe's portrayal of the carnage in the early years of the Malayan Emergency from 1947 to 1948 and his commitment to capture the violent atmosphere of the time. Sillitoe's realistic depiction of the Malayan Emergency in this chapter will be compared with Burgess's fictional representation of the same event in Chapter 5. Finally, this chapter asseses Sillitoe's fiction's break away from mourning the loss of Empire and mounting criticisms on Malaya's self-governance without the British policing in the background as in other decolonisation novels.

4.1 Sillitoe's Depictions of Malayan Communism: A Case of Misrepresentation?

> [Alan Sillitoe] wrote a book called *Key to the Door*, which was about his national service in Malaya and it totally misrepresented the case. I know this because I was there myself. He said what the Malays want is what the Chinese want, a Communist revolution. You see, this is what they all want, but the British are preventing it from happening. This is totally untrue. The Chinese and the Malays didn't want a communist revolution because they had too much to lose. They are all capitalists, all businessmen. The Malays are not interested in politics. In any case, they're Moslems, and Communism would presumably fight against Islam. What all the Malayan people wanted was just to go on as

> they were with the British there in the background administering the war, building roads and doing the dirty work. But Sillitoe—so ideological in that way—totally misrepresented the entire picture. You see again, I get mad at the man who was so full of humility, *so* interested in the people. He never learned the bloody language even; he never *talked* with the Malays. He never knew what was going on in the Malay's mind. It was only the wicked capitalists who did all that.[346]

The extracted paragraph is from a 1971 interview with Anthony Burgess by Thomas Churchill for a Canadian quarterly literary magazine, the *Malahat Review*. In the interview, Burgess expresses his discontent with Sillitoe's decision to have his protagonist Brian Seaton in *Key to the Door* (1961), broadcast his support for the Malayan Communists. I will be extrapolating each of the points he made for a contextual background in positioning Sillitoe's representations of Malayan Communism in all his novels set in Malaya namely *Key to the Door*, *The Open Door* (1989) and *Last Loves* (1990). First of all, Burgess reads Sillitoe's *Key to the Door* as a misrepresentation of Malayan politics, where he states that Sillitoe presents the Communist revolution to be in the interest of the Malays, the majority indigenous people of Malaya, as well as the Chinese, who make up the largest minority group in Malaya, but the British were preventing their dream of Malaya becoming a Communist state from materialising.[347] While reading the novel, I find that there is no indication in the text where Sillitoe's main character, Brian Seaton, is insinuating

[346] Thomas Churchill, 'Going on Writing till Ninety or One Hundred', in *Conversations with Burgess*, ed. by Earl G. Ingersoll and Mary C. Ingersoll (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), pp. 14–5. [Emphasis original].

[347] According to the 1947 census, the Chinese constituted of 38.4% of the Malayan population. Their percentage nearly rivalled the 49.5% of the indigenous Malays. See In-Won Hwang, *Personalized Politics: The Malaysian State Under Mahathir* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), p. 54.

that the Malays desire a Communist revolution, as much as the Chinese do. Rather, what could be evinced from Brian's hope to see that the Malayan Communists come out victorious and 'get Malaya' is a sign of non-conformity against the mainstream narrative of supporting the British colonial administration's suppression of the Communist guerrillas' attempted coup d'état of the imperial government. This is indicated by Nick Bentley in his analysis of Sillitoe's other works namely *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) and 'The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner' (1959), where he states that Sillitoe's text 'represents a 'post-Marxist' discourse that is concerned to reject the notion of the working class as a mass homogenized group with identical beliefs and aspirations, and to celebrate the anarchic and unstructured spirit of resistance against dominant society.'[348] Bentley also stresses that Sillitoe's texts 'combine a radical, marginalized discourse of a sub-cultural identity'.[349] I will explain this point later in my discussion. The second point that Burgess makes from reading Sillitoe's *Key to the Door* (1961) is that the Chinese and Malays did not want a communist revolution because 'they had too much to lose' and he substantiates this with the claim that they were 'all capitalists and businessmen.'[350] This is not entirely accurate. While he is right about the Chinese and Malays not wanting a communist revolution because it would not benefit them, not all of them were capitalists and businessmen as he suggests. This would be an overgeneralisation of a heterogeneous group of people. There were only a handful of the Chinese who were entrepreneurs, and of the Malays, while the ruling elites were landowners, the large majority were poor farmers, fishermen and

[348] Brian Seaton hopes that the Malayan Communists 'would get Malaya'. Kindly refer to Alan Sillitoe, *Key to the Door* (London: W. H. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 433. See also Bentley, p. 201.
[349] Bentley, p. 194.
[350] Churchill, 'Going on Writing till Ninety or One Hundred', in *Conversations with Burgess,* p. 14.

labourers.[351] Some were fortunate to secure decent jobs working as teachers and government administrative clerks in the urban areas but the gap between the rich and the poor was relatively high, so much so that after Malaya gained independence from the British, the government implemented an economic policy to eradicate poverty.[352]

Having observed the Malayan farmers, fishermen and labourers going about their daily lives struggling to make ends meet whilst Sillitoe was there for his National Service, it is unsurprising that Sillitoe, who comes from a similar background, projects it onto his protagonist's affinity with these people. The young and impressionable Brian Seaton enamoured by the socialist promise of eradicating economic imbalance, would presume communism to be the solution to Malaya's problems. Therefore, it is apparent why Burgess in the interview would argue that Sillitoe's decision to make his protagonist a Malayan Communist sympathiser reveals his lack of understanding of Malaya's real political situation. Additionally, when Burgess mentions Malayans, he only mentions the Chinese and Malays while

[351] As P. Ramasamy posits in his journal article 'Labour control and labour resistance in the plantations of colonial Malaya', many of the Chinese migrants in Malaya were brought over from China as indentured labourers. They remained in Malaya because they were unable to pay their debts to their contractors. The Chinese *towkays* (capitalists) on the other hand, only consist of a minority of the Chinese population in colonial Malaya. See P. Ramasamy, 'Labour control and labour resistance in the plantations of colonial Malaya', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 19:3–4 (1992), 87–105 (pp. 95–6). On the other hand, Abdul Maulud Yusof describes the situation of the Malay peasantry which emerged during the British colonisation of Malaya in his journal article. Please refer to Abdul Maulud Yusof, 'Culture Change in Malay Society: From Peasantry to Entrepreneurship', *Akademika* 29 (1986), 34–47 (p. 36).

[352] This policy is called the New Economic Policy (NEP), implemented by the Malaysian government in 1971. According to Cheah Boon Kheng, there were only a select few from affluent Malay, Indian and Chinese families in Malaya who were able to attend English medium schools and to at least be able to secure jobs as government administrative clerks for the British, whereas the majority peasant Malays, as well as the underprivileged Indian and Chinese families were unable to attend these schools. See Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941–46*, 4th edn (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), pp. 7–8.

neglecting the other ethnic groups including the Indians, aborigines, Eurasians and Europeans who also make up the minority multicultural population of Malaya.[353]

The third point that Burgess makes is that the Malays were not interested in politics. This is another inaccurate claim, which the British colonial administrators would often use to justify their presence in Malaya and continued control over Malaya's natural resources. Contrary to Burgess's claim about the Malays, they were very much involved in politics. In fact, there were three disparate political parties representing Malay nationalism during the British colonisation. There were the left-wing political parties Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM)(Malay Nationalist Party), founded by Malay teachers and journalists educated at the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC)[354] and the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PAS)[355] as well as the conservative political party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), founded by Westernised middle-class Malays and members of the royal family trained at the elite school, Malay College Kuala Kangsar.[356] The background of Malay nationalism is key to understanding the developments of Malayan Communism. While Malayan Communism followed the guidelines set by the Communist International (Comintern) to replace the British colonial government with the establishment of Malaya as a Communist state, it was a party mobilised by Chinese nationalism and were more invested in replicating a Chinese revolution in Malaya. This sense of Chinese nationalism fostered by members of the Malayan Communist Party is seen particularly in their document reviewed by the Comintern,

[353] In 1947 around the time *Key to the Door* was set, the Indians in Malaya accounted for 10% of the population followed by about less than 5% people of Indonesian, Arab, Eurasian, Australian, European and aboriginal background. Cheah, *Red Star Over Malaya*, p. 5.
[354] The Sultan Idris Teacher's Training College is based in Perak.
[355] Some members from the Conservative party UMNO and PKMM would later establish this Malay nationalist party oriented on Islam.
[356] Burgess taught at the Malay College Kuala Kangsar.

"Resolutions Adopted at the Third Congress of Malaya Party" in which the Comintern highlighted the problems of the party that needed to be rectified. The report by Comintern mentions that 'MP [MCP] was entirely built on Chinese members, responsible persons from China [and] the patriotism of Chinese toiling masses in Malaya.'[357] The objectives of the Malayan Communist Party as observed, run counter to the aspirations of the aforementioned Malay nationalist parties that wanted to establish a Federation of Malaya with a Malay sultan as the head of the state, Islam as the official religion and the Malay language as the national language spoken by all races in Malaya, except for the PKMM as they had ties with the Malayan Communist Party and wanted to abolish the Malay monarchy.[358] Ramlah Adam who examined the PKMM-Communist link, notes that the confiscated documents from both parties prove that PKMM was the brainchild of the Communist Party. She details how the Malayan Communist Party administered the appointment of the Malay Nationalist Party PKMM's committee members. Those holding the top, managerial levels according to Adam were members of the Communist Party of Malay descent such as Mokhtaruddin Lasso (President), Arshad Ashaari (Treasurer), Rashid Maidin and Abdullah C.D. (Working Committees), while the renowned personalities of PKMM such as Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Ahmad Boestaman, Dahari Ali and Aishah Ghani only held less prominent positions as the Vice President, Secretary, Youth Leader and Women's Leader respectively. Adam also points out similarities between PKMM's manifesto and that of the Malayan Communist Party, with an added goal to unite independent Malaya with Indonesia to form 'Greater

[357] As cited in Fujio Hara, 'The Malayan Communist Party as Recorded in the Comintern Files', in *ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute Working Papers*, 1 (2016), 2–136 <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/WP2016-01.pdf> [accessed 7 May 2018], p. 41.

[358] The Malay Sultan as the head of state or '*Yang di-Pertuan Agong*' (He Who Was Made Lord) has a similar function as the Queen of England as the head of state.

Indonesia'.[359] This was so that it would accelerate the Chinese Communist Party's plan to expand their influence to the rest of Southeast Asia. Cheah Boon Kheng in his book *From PKI to the Comintern* (1992), reveals that the Malayan Communist Party did have early links with the Indonesian Communist Party, which in turn had direct contact with the Chinese Communist Party.[360] This is supported by Odd Arne Westad, scholar of China's politics and history, who points out in *Restless Empire* (2013) that the Indonesian Communist Party had received funds and support from the Chinese Communist Party to expand their support base among the socialist Malays in Malaya.[361] This background of divergent Malay nationalism in Malaya at the time of the Emergency with one party colluding with the Malayan and Indonesian Communists, shows that it was far more complex than Burgess paints it to be.

The fourth point that Burgess makes about the Malays who are predominantly Muslim being suspicious of Communism is true. This is due to a widespread belief among the Malays that the brand of Communism that the Malayan Communists were propagating promotes atheism.[362] This idea was borrowed from Indonesian novelist, philosopher, political activist and Muslim scholar Hamka (1909–1981), whose books such as *Pembela Agama* ('Religious Defender', 1929), *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'abah* ('Under the Protection of the Ka'abah', 1937) and *Pelajaran Agama Islam* ('Lessons from Islam', 1956) were widely read by the Malay intelligentsia in

[359] Ramlah Adam, 'Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM) dan Parti Komunis Malaya, 1945–1950: Satu Perbincangan Mengenai Kegiatan Politiknya', *SEJARAH: Journal of the Department of History*, 5.5 (2017), 93–116 <https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/SEJARAH/article/view/9071>[accessed 26 April 2018], (pp. 96–7).
[360] Cheah Boon Kheng, *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924–1941: The Apprenticeship of the Malayan Communist Party* (New York: SEAP, 1992), pp. 6–9.
[361] Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and the World Since 1750* (London: Vintage, 2013), p. 422.
[362] The Malayan Communists were influenced by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Malaya.[363] It explains part of the several reasons why Communism in Malaya failed to garner support from the Malays. The next point Burgess makes regarding the desire of all the Malayan people 'to go on as they were with the British there in the background administering the war, building roads and doing the dirty work' betrays a British paternalistic attitude towards the Malayans, which assumes that they would make ineffective administrators and will be contrasted with Sillitoe's portrayal of Malayan Communism to see whether his protagonists in *Key to the Door* (1961), *The Open Door* (1989) and *Last Loves* (1990) also project a similar tendency or otherwise. Finally, the next point that Burgess makes is that Sillitoe misrepresented the groundwork of the Malayan Emergency because due to his lack of effort to learn the Malay language, the national language spoken by the Malayan people and attempt to understand what was going on in the mind of the indigenous Malays about the future direction of how their country should be governed and what they really want for a postcolonial Malaya, and then accusing Sillitoe of only seeing the Emergency as a problem of the 'wicked capitalists'.[364] With regards to Burgess's comments about Sillitoe not learning the Malay language, it is also true that Sillitoe had not managed to learn the language while he was with the Voluntary Reserve for the Royal Air Force for eighteen months from 1947–1948, to enable him to read their literature or converse with the people, like Burgess did. Sillitoe explains in his autobiography *Life Without Armour* (1995) that this was due to the fact that the Malay language classes offered by the Education Office, clashed with his time for duty at the Air Traffic Control.[365] Despite that, his biographer Richard Bradford

[363] Rosnani Hashim, 'Hamka: Intellectual and Social Transformation of the Malay World', in *Reclaiming the Conversation: Islamic Intellectual Tradition in the Malay Archipelago*, ed. Rosnani Hashim (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2010), pp. 186–205 (p. 189).
[364] Churchill, 'Going on Writing till Ninety or One Hundred', in *Conversations with Burgess*, p. 15.
[365] Alan Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour: An Autobiography* (London: HarpersCollins*Publishers*, 1995), p. 122.

mentions that he was among the minority who showed interest in the language and with no prior knowledge of foreign language learning, attempted to 'memorize [Malay] statements verbatim'.[366] This is a stark contrast to Burgess who had a background in Linguistics, enabling him to master foreign languages fairly easily, while Sillitoe on the other hand struggled as he did not have any formal training in language learning. Sillitoe unlike Burgess, did not have the privilege to further his education to the university level. As Bradford points out in Sillitoe's biography, his lack of access to books to study due to his poor family background, restricted his opportunity to be admitted into Nottingham's grammar school, which he failed twice in his entrance exams.[367] However, despite Sillitoe's short stint serving in Malaya and his inability to master the language, I will demonstrate later on how his fiction, as Matthew Whittle points out, has an internationalist outlook and how this notion is applied to Sillitoe's treatment of the Malayan Communists.[368] This point will be tied to the reading of Sillitoe's narratives as the refusal to conform to the British colonial dominant culture.

A Brief Background of the Malayan Communists

> 'It was time the British quit, stop exploiting Malaya's resources and people to pay off her debts and maintain her Empire status.'
>
> - Chin Peng, *Alias Chin Peng* (2003), p. 9.[369]

Before moving onto the analysis of Sillitoe's Malayan novels, I would like to briefly detail the background of the Malayan Communists for contextualisation. The

[366] Richard Bradford, *The Life of a Long-Distance Writer: The Biography of Alan Sillitoe* (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2008), p. 68.
[367] Bradford, p. 32–3.
[368] Matthew Whittle, *Post-War British Literature and the "End of Empire"* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 59.
[369] Chin Peng, *Alias Chin Peng: My Side of History* (Singapore: Media Masters Pte. Ltd., 2003), p. 9.

quotation above contains the words of the Secretary-General of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), Chin Peng, in his autobiography *Alias Chin Peng* (2003). The Malayan Communists had once formed an alliance with the British Special Forces in their guerrilla campaign to overthrow the Japanese military administration of Malaya from 1941–5. They were then named the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army or the MPAJA. The relationship between the British and the Malayan Communists quickly turned sour as soon as the British forces returned and reinstalled their colonial government in Malaya after the Japanese withdrawal in 1945. From an ally, they directed their guerrilla warfare towards the British and re-named their armed forces, the Malayan People's Anti-British Army (MPABA), with an aim of expelling the British from Malaya.

In his autobiography, Chin Peng maintained that the goals of the Malayan Communist Party were to defend the rights of the Malayan people, drive away the colonialists from the country and to erect Malaya as a Communist state. On the onset, the Communists were of the belief that Communism would appeal to the mass of Malayan peasants of various ethnic groups. As Michael F. Hopkins notes, in various parts of the world, Communism was turned to as 'the only available economic solution'. It champions the downtrodden working class and aims to 'remove the social and economic inequities' from society.[370] In fact, their goal of alleviating social injustices and economic inequalities is what initially attracted Sillitoe to the Communist ideal that would lead to his subsequent visit to the Soviet Union as documented in his travel book *Road to Volgograd* (1964).[371] Apart from that, there was the attraction that Communism was the solution for colonised people

[370] Michael F. Hopkins, *The Cold War (History Files)* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2011), p. 13.
[371] Sillitoe to Bradford, cited in Bradford, p. 193.

in Asia, Africa and Latin America and was firmly aligned with anti-colonial movements, and the Communists presumed that this was what the Malayan people wanted and worked towards achieving this goal, and set to recruit people of Malaya from various ethnic backgrounds to join their party, including the Malay natives and the Chinese and Indian immigrants. However, a confiscated Malayan Communist Party newspaper by the British Intelligence entitled *Light of Dawn Combat News*, states the contrary to what Chin Peng asserts as building a country for the Malayan people based on equal grounds. The paper states that the Communist party is ‘‘set up on the principle of democratic centralism….Members, the masses and lower levels must unconditionally obey the orders of the higher levels…no matter whether they understand them or whether they have an opinion of their own.’’[372] The excerpt from the newspaper demonstrates that there was a hierarchical system of the ruling class at the top of the pyramid and the peasant masses at the bottom, indicated in the plan of the proposed Communist government, where the Malayan working-class and peasant masses would still be controlled, and their activities heavily regulated by the authorities, in a manner that is concurrent to the situation in North Korea and the People’s Republic of China.

On another note, the Malayan Communists’ resort to guerrilla warfare was planned as far back as 1929, even before they officially adopted the name the Malayan Communist Party and were still a branch of the Chinese Communist Party, based in Southeast Asia. This has been highlighted by Fujio Hara, who examined documents from the Malayan Communist Party recorded in the now declassified Comintern archives in Moscow. As Hara asserts, the party which was then known as the

[372] Cited in Vernon Bartlett, *Report from Malaya* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1954; repr. London: Andre Deustch Limited, 1955), p. 124.

Nanyang (Southeast Asian) Communist Party, were given specific instructions by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in their resolution entitled "The Character and Driving Force of Malay [Revolution]" which outlined that the Malayan Communist Party agreed to 'establish Malay Federation of Republics, […] eradicate feudal remnants [Malay sultans], […] secure the prospect of development of capital' and that the first task for the Malayan revolution is first and foremost to 'drive out [the British imperialists]' followed by an eradication of the 'feudal remnants' as their next task. The Chinese Communist Party also instructed the Malayan Communist Party to use 'armed resurrection' albeit with no indication of resorting to terrorism.[373] Hara asserts that the directive to use extremist tactics must have been suggested later under the Comintern's patronage of the Malayan Communist Party. What really drove the Malayan Communist Party to go underground and use guerrilla tactics against the European planters, the Malayan, Commonwealth and British police and soldiers, and European and Malayan civilians, was the British colonial administration's decision to reverse their implementation of the 1946 Malayan Union, which agreed to unify the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore) with the rest of Peninsular Malaya under a single government, and reinstate the autonomy of the Malay Sultans, which were previously limited under the Malayan Union.[374] In addition to that, with the Malay sultan's status as head of state restored, there was the fear among the non-Malay immigrants, especially the Chinese as they were the largest minority group in Malaya, that they would not be receiving privileges as Malayan citizens. On the contrary, when Malaya was under the British Protectorate, any persons be it the Malays or non-Malays were

[373] Hara, pp. 18–9.
[374] The British colonial government of Malaya reversed the 1946 Malayan Union plan after the Malay sultans, Malay political parties UMNO and PAS as well as the Malay people rallied in protest of the automatic grant of citizenship to non-Malay immigrants legislated in the Malayan Union.

automatically British subjects. Vernon Bartlett, British parliamentarian (1938–50) and journalist states in *Report from Malaya* (1954) that immigrants may become subjects of the Malay sultans in other parts of the Federation only through registration.[375] As indicated in the Malayan Communist Party's plans in the Moscow archived documents to overthrow both the British imperial rule as well as the feudal Malay system (which stretched as far back as 1929), the reversal of the Malayan Union by the British colonial government further strengthened the position of the sultans. However, if the Malayan Union were allowed to resume, the Sultans' autonomy would be weakened and in turn, would enable the Communists in Malaya pave way for a successful revolutionary campaign of eliminating traces of traditional Malay feudalism and confiscating estates, plantations and landed properties belonging to the Malay sultans, capitalist Chinese and Europeans to be transferred to the immigrant and native 'toiling peasants and agricultural labourers'.[376] Another reason which led to the guerrilla campaign was that it restricted their control of the Trade Union movement in Malaya and outright banned the Malayan Communist Party, rendering the party illegal.[377] The primary goal of jungle warfare as explained by Chin Peng, became a concentrated effort to eliminate European strikebreakers who used various methods including hiring Secret Society thugs to break up a strike.[378] However, from dealing with European strikebreakers, they shifted focus towards attacking police stations and intimidating primarily Chinese Malayans who were Kuomintang loyalists, European planters and poor villagers.

[375] Bartlett, pp. 18– 9.
[376] Hara, p. 73.
[377] Chin Peng, p. 204.
[378] Chin Peng, p. 214.

The Anarchists and the 'Semiotic Guerrilla Warfare': the Making of Sillitoe's Protagonists and Narratives

'I allus like to 'elp the losin' side.'
-Arthur Seaton, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), p. 40.[379]

Arthur Seaton's words in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) perfectly encapsulate the trait of Sillitoe's characters, and are key to understanding his protagonists' treatment of the Malayan Communists in his three novels *The Key to the Door* (1961), *The Open Door* (1989) and *Last Loves* (1990). Sillitoe's biographer Richard Bradford writes, '[h]is characters, his narrative trajectories, sometimes his syntax, appear *ungovernable*, obtusely indifferent to our standard expectations.'[380] This description by Bradford of his narrative style and characters are indicative of how they refuse to conform to a system. To borrow the words of Jacques Derrida, they signal a 'turning back on the literary institution', which Bentley argues, has traditionally been 'a bourgeois art form'.[381] As Jeremy Hawthorn notes in the preface to *The British Working-Class Novel* (1984), the novel according to him, '*does* have an intimate relationship with the middle class, both in terms of historical emergence and also of its continuing sociology: its readership and conditions of production'.[382] Sillitoe's novels seek to challenge this notion and assert themselves as narratives written from within the previously underrepresented working-class background with ordinary characters such as factory workers, or coal miners, as Sillitoe puts it, that when they read them, they would easily 'recognize themselves' rather than read their

[379] Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (London: W. H. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1958; repr. London: Grafton Books, 1988), p. 40.
[380] Bradford, p. 13. Emphasis added.
[381] Bentley, p. 196. Jacques Derrida uses the expression 'turning back on the literary institution' in an April 1989 interview. See Jacques Derrida, "This Strange Institution Called Literature", in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 41.
[382] Hawthorn, p. vii. [Emphasis original].

caricatured versions.[383] Bentley states that Sillitoe's texts react against the dominant, middle-class British culture by rescuing his working-class protagonists from the 'oblivion of non-representation' and presenting them in 'sub-cultural terms', in hooligan fashion.[384] In narrative style as Dick Hebdige posits, they overturn the structure of the bourgeois novel through 'semiotic guerrilla warfare', a term he borrowed from Umberto Eco in his 1967 lecture, 'Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare'.[385] Eco uses the term 'semiological guerrilla warfare' to describe the jamming or a hijacking of information conveyed by mainstream, state-controlled media with an alternative medium of communication.[386] Hebdige then interprets Eco's term as a bricolage that 'appropriate[s] another range of commodities by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which served to erase or subvert their original straight meanings'. He gives an example of the 'conventional insignia of the business world' such as the suit, collar and tie, traditionally symbols of 'efficiency, ambition, compliance with authority' and subverting their meaning into ''empty' fetishes' for instance, and 'objects to be desired'.[387] In light of Eco's and Hebdige's definitions of the 'semiotic guerrilla warfare', Bentley examines Sillitoe's depictions of the working-class life as a refusal 'to recognize a culture [of] victimhood' as seen for instance in the works of William Blake in 'The Chimney Sweeper' (1789) and Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1839), creating a more than a single typecast representation of the working-class, and adopts the mantra by Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958): 'Don't let the bastards grind you down', showing a fierce confrontation with authority while also metaphorically

[383] Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, p. 6.
[384] Bentley, p. 198.
[385] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979; repr., London: Routledge, 2013), p. 108.
[386] Umberto Eco, 'Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare', in *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Harcourt, Inc., 1986), pp. 135–44 (p. 142).
[387] Hebdige, pp. 104–5.

representing resistance to conform to the conventional structure of the novel.[388] This confrontation with the dominant culture in Sillitoe's texts is highlighted further by Matthew Whittle's analysis of *Key to the Door* (1961), which he points out criticises British colonialism as 'fallacious and divisive' and 'only serve the interests of Britain's political elite'.[389] In employing Bentley's framework of interrogating Sillitoe's fiction as a subcultural reading of the dominant British culture, Whittle argues that the novel is critical of British imperial superiority projected through popular colonial literature. To counter this, Whittle asserts that Sillitoe inculcates 'internationalist and humanist qualities' in its protagonist Brian Seaton towards the colonised Malayan people. Simultaneously, whereas Sillitoe's rebellious characters are concerned, it is also important to understand the inspiration behind them – Sillitoe himself. When interviewing Sillitoe's friends and colleagues in Malaya (namely Peter Spruce, Bill Brown, Ron Gladstone and Ronald Schlachter), Bradford notices that Sillitoe evinces a trait of nonconformity.[390] This is for instance noted by Ronald Schlachter, his fellow conscript at the Air Traffic Control in Malaya, who indicates that Sillitoe was always reporting for duty in his civilian clothes despite the fact that they had to wear a uniform to work. Schlachter recalls of Sillitoe's affront against regimentations and authority in the following statement:

> He would be sitting around with colonial civil servants and their wives and nobody knew who he was. Well they thought he was a passenger, but when they boarded the plane he slipped out and prepared it to take-off. Typical

[388] Bradford, p. 35. The quote is from Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, p. 44.
[389] Whittle, p. 58.
[390] Bradford, p. 67. The term 'nonconformity' is historically connected to Protestant dissenters of the English church, who were punished accordingly to the Act of Uniformity 1662 if they refused to conduct rites prescribed in the Common Book of Prayers. Sillitoe's protagonists' refusal to conform to the dominant cultural group is akin to the dissension of the Anglican Church by nonconformist Protestants.

> Alan. […] I asked him why he wasn't wearing his uniform—he just did it because he wanted to.[391]

This effrontery in the face of authority is reflected in the recurrent theme of 'them' versus 'us' in his novels. 'Them' being a reference to those who dictate the lives of the 'us', with 'us' being a representation of the working-class and the poor.[392] It criticises the class-based system, in favour of a classless society. The 'them', as Sillitoe indicates, also includes Clement Atlee's Labour government who made National Service compulsory for young British men aged 17–21, to undergo eighteen months of compulsory military service to help defend the Empire.[393] Sillitoe projects this in his characters' consciousness as a form of enslavement by the government. The frustrations of joining up to fight in a war in the colonies against one's will is summarily described by Colin Smith, the main character of Sillitoe's short story, 'The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner' (1959) where he states, 'Government wars aren't my wars; they got nowt to do with me, because my own war's all that I'll ever be bothered about.'[394] My analysis of *Key to the Door* (1961) in the subsequent part of this chapter explores more on this point on the issue of young British men being sent abroad to fight in a war whereby they were clueless about the region's political developments. On the other hand, if they do not join up for National Service, Sillitoe states that the young men who stayed behind would be conscripted

[391] Ronald Schlachter, cited in Bradford, p. 68. Schlachter also visited Malaysia with Sillitoe in 1989. Their travel became the basis for his novel *Last Loves* (1990).
[392] Alan Sillitoe, *Mountains and Caverns* (London: W.H. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1963; repr. London: W.H. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1975), p. 77.
[393] Under the Labour government, Clement Atlee would introduce 18 months compulsory military service for young men aged 17–21. Atlee argued that conscription would 'help 'democratise' the country'. Tom Hickman, *The Call-Up: A History of National Service* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2004), p. xiii.
[394] Alan Sillitoe, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (London: W. H. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1959; repr. London: Harper Perennial, 2007), pp. 17.

to work in the coalmines as 'Bevin Boys'.[395] Sillitoe recalls dreading the name Ernest Bevin (1881–1951), the Labour politician and trade union leader who designed the programme for young British men who were not chosen for their military service to be sent to the coalmines:

> My only anxiety was that I might not be able to get into the air force, or any military service at all, because young men's names could be picked out of a hat, compelling them to work in the coalmines as 'Bevin Boys'. Such a fate, if it came up for me, was the only one which could turn me into a deserter. We dreaded, but most loathed, the name of Ernest Bevin.[396]

The absolute control over the lives of working-class British men by the ruling class, leaving these young men with no choice of going to the coalmines if they stayed behind or be conscripted to fight in the colonial wars abroad, led Sillitoe to write about the ferocious struggle for individualism that refuses to conform to any kind of system, which is also a trait of all his protagonists. Sillitoe repeatedly emphasises having one's own mind and not letting it be influenced by the dictates of society. This is seen in his fierce defence of individualism in his semi-autobiography *Raw Material* (1972): 'No writer should agree to the simplicities and deceptions of the society in which he lives, and if he is true to himself he must fight against bourgeois culture, communist or otherwise.'[397] This strong resistance to conformity brings us to Sillitoe's brand of left-wing political leaning which would be of importance to the

[395] 'Bevin Boys' is a term used for the men aged 18–25 who did not go for military service and had to work in the coalmines. The programme was created by Labour politician Ernest Bevin.
[396] Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour*, p. 76.
[397] Alan Sillitoe, *Raw Material* (London: W.H. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1972), p. 184.

discussion of Malayan Communism in his novels. Another friend of Sillitoe, Helder Macedo describes Sillitoe's political view as

> left wing but not in the conventional sense. He was critical of everything: the Soviet Union, Britain, the US […] He has always had a streak of *anarchy* about him. He is a *ferocious opponent of systems*, systems of any kind…If he has an abiding principle it is that *people should not be forced, coerced, even encouraged to conform*…even if it is deemed to be for their own good. This is why he was *ambivalent* about socialism and communism. He loved the orthodox spirit of both but he knew that they could quite easily become the orthodox. That, he hated.[398]

Macedo's statements on Sillitoe highlights several points that Sillitoe and his characters would share. He mentions that Sillitoe is not left wing in the conventional sense, as he was critical of both the conservatives and socialists, as well as the democratic and the communist states. Most importantly, he was a strong opponent of systems that force an individual to conform, which explains the ambivalent attitude he has towards socialism and communism. Likening himself to the character Brian Seaton in *Key to the Door* (1961), Sillitoe states ''[l]ike Brian I was disenchanted with Labour but I had no illusions about the claims of communism to be a remedy for the ills and injustices of human condition [although] I admit […] that as a threat to the smugness of the establishment, there were attractions'', as he elaborates on the thrill of the probability of being on the government watch-list for colluding with the Soviets for his pro-Soviet activities.[399] Critics of Sillitoe's work however, seem to

[398] Helder Macedo, cited in Bradford, p. 193. Emphasis added.
[399] Sillitoe to Bradford, cited in Bradford, p. 193.

miss its ambivalence towards socialism and communism. For instance the political overtures in *Key to the Door* (1961) led Thomas Churchill, Burgess's interviewer, to glaze over the substratal resistance against the constraints of society in the novel and led him to describe Sillitoe as a 'violent anti-English' writer.[400] Matthew Whittle has also similarly raised the issue of Brian Seaton's unpatriotic sentiment in his analysis of the novel in his book *Post-War British Literature and the "End of Empire"* (2016).[401] Burgess's reading of Sillitoe's *Key to the Door* as pro-Malayan Communism or communism in general, also neglects the ambivalent attitude Sillitoe's protagonists or Sillitoe himself have for communism in his other Malayan novels, as in *The Open Door* (1989) and *Last Loves* (1990), as well as in his other works of fiction and non-fiction which supposedly captures the revolutionary spirit in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), *Road to Volgograd* (1964), *The Death of William Posters* (1965), *A Tree on Fire* (1967), *Travels to Nihilon* (1971) and *The Flame of Life* (1974).[402] The final instalment of the Frank Dawley Trilogy *The Flame of Life* for instance questions revolutionary ideals and exposes its flaws.[403] On the other hand, as Nick Bentley observes of Sillitoe's protagonist in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Arthur Seaton, that while Arthur does make it known to reject the middle-class capitalists and is seemingly sympathetic towards communists and socialists, there are also times where he rejects both groups outright in favour of

[400] Thomas Churchill, 'Going on Writing till Ninety or One Hundred', in *Conversations with Burgess*, p. 14.
[401] Whittle, p. 58.
[402] David Smith considers Sillitoe's texts as socialist literature. See David Smith, *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1978), pp. 151–2. In spite of it, there are also underlying criticisms of the Soviet and British Labour governments, especially *Travels in Nihilon* which is a parody of Sillitoe's previous travels to the Soviet Union. *The Open Door* and *Last Loves* on the other hand present his main characters' disillusionment with Malayan Communism.
[403] In a lengthy letter addressed to Frank Dawley, the main character of *The Flame of Life*, he is told that revolution 'without a sense of God' is not worth it and that its end result is 'death and an exchange of property'. See Alan Sillitoe, *The Flame of Life* (London: W.H. Allen, 1974; repr., London: Wyndam Publications, Ltd., 1976), p. 280.

'anarchic individualism'.[404] Therefore, when examining Sillitoe's protagonists Brian Seaton in *Key to the Door* (1961) and *The Open Door* (1989), and George Rhoads and Bernard Missenden in *Last Loves* (1990), it is pertinent to bear in mind the anarchist strand in them, as in their strong resistance against the conformity to a particular institution or system, be it the British class system, or loyalty to a singular political ideology that the majority people of their class are ascribed to.

Manoeuvring Malayan Communism as a Site of 'Semiotic Guerrilla Warfare'

> '[The Malayan Communists] try to jam our WT channels with a transmitter.'
> - Brian Seaton, *Key to the Door* (1961), p. 383.[405]

In a manner demonstrative of Umberto Eco's definition of 'semiological guerrilla' attack on the mainstream media channels, the extract from Brian Seaton's conversation with his Chinese Malayan girlfriend Mimi, illustrates the Malayan Communists' hijacking of radio frequencies to communicate with their other guerrilla units in their jungle network and the *min yuen* (the civilian branch of the Malayan Communists), with a transmitter. In a similar fashion, metaphorically speaking, Sillitoe's narrative techniques and protagonists, as illustrated by Bentley and Whittle, would use conventional structures of the novel as the vehicle to communicate a sub-cultural voice of the British working-class in colonial literature that was previously reserved for the colonial elites. Zawiah Yahya and Matthew Whittle are among the few critics to note Sillitoe's representation of colonialism in Malaya as an extension of class oppression in Britain by the ruling elites in *Key to the Door* (1961). Yahya's reading of the novel describes the social and political

[404] Bentley, p. 201.
[405] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 383.

connections Brian Seaton make between the British colonisation of Malaya and the subjugation of the British working-class by both the Labour and Conservative governments as 'political education' or political awareness.[406] On the other hand, Whittle interrogates this notion further with Bentley's model of close reading Sillitoe's texts as an exercise of 'turning back on' the bourgeois institution of colonial literature.[407] While Whittle's analysis is confined to Sillitoe's protagonist's sympathy extended to the Malayan Communists in *Key to the Door*, Nick Bentley (2007) and Ronald Paul (1982)[408] note the political ambivalence of Sillitoe's protagonists in his work, which signals a disavowal for conformity and a struggle for individualism. Bentley indicates that while Sillitoe's main characters are seen to be 'reject[ing] mainstream politics outright', at the same time, they also 'reject the main form of organized radical discourse against the dominant power group [such as official communism and Marxism].'[409] He associates these renunciations of both collective political actions as a sign of the British working-class' embitterment with austerity measures, imposed by the Labour government that they voted in, in 1945, to recover Britain's economic losses in the aftermath of the Second World, and the impending Cold War.[410] On the other hand, Ronald Paul reads the political ambiguity of Sillitoe's protagonists as his method of capturing the evolution of their political thoughts. For instance, in Sillitoe's earlier novels, his protagonists tend to incline towards the socialist left. In his later novels, however, we would notice a marked

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[406] Zawiah Yahya, *Resisting Colonialist Discourse* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2003), p. 77.
[407] Whittle, p. 58. 'Turning back on literary institution' is the expression used by Jacques Derrida. Please see note 35 of this chapter.
[408] Ronald Paul, 'Chapter Four. Alan Sillitoe's 'Key to the Door' in *"Fire in Our Hearts": A Study of the Portrayal of Youth in a Selection of Post-War British Working-Class Fiction* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburbensis, 1982), pp. 122–210.
[409] Bentley, p. 201.
[410] Bentley, p. 201. See also Robert Hewison, *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War 1945–60* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 20. He explains the austerity measures taken by the Labour government in the interim of the Second World War and Cold War.

shift in his protagonists' political stance, where they brandish a more conservative view. The initial display of sympathy towards the Communists and overt anti-colonial sentiments in his earlier novels gradually fade. As these characters grow older, they become more critical of the Soviets and uncritical of colonial legacies. Paul writes in his analysis of Brian Seaton's character in *Key to the Door* (1961) that '[b]ecause of his class background, Brian has acquired through a slow process of accumulative living examples of underprivilege [sic] and exploitation the rudiments of a sense of political orientation and solidarity, which, in the course of his stay in Malaya, is brought to the fore and allowed to mature.'[411] Paul demonstrates how Brian's political consciousness is shaped by his class background and societal upbringing. Being from a working-class background, Brian is indoctrinated from a very young age by his family and community that he is to vote for the Labour party in the General Elections and that to vote the Conservative, is a treachery to their class. This is seen for instance where from young, Brian is programmed to only accept Labour to show his solidarity with his working-class community. His father for example is demonstrated to be 'Labour, red Labour' and so was everyone he knew. Conservative, on the other hand, is 'an official word to be distrusted [and] hated.' [412] It is only when Brian goes to Malaya as a conscript that he is able to review his Leftist political affiliation. This is after he fraternises with his fellow conscripts from other social class backgrounds. His time in Malaya with the Royal Air Force where everybody of different classes are treated equally, broadens Brian's political perspective, specifically on how he views Communism in Malaya and compares it with Communism at home, in Britain. In relation to the discussions presented by Bentley and Paul, I will be examining Sillitoe's protagonists Brian

[411] Paul, p. 148.
[412] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 157.

Seaton in *Key to the Door* (1961) and *The Open Door* (1989), as well as George Rhoads and Bernard Missenden in *Last Loves* (1990), in light of Bentley's and Paul's proposition of Sillitoe's central characters' political ambiguity as indicative of their 'semiotic guerrilla warfare' against the dominant culture's suppression of a side-lined and radical individual voice, and also a signifier of their evolving formulations of political thoughts, independent of the societal and political indoctrination by the community they were raised in.

I will begin by firstly interrogating the protagonist of *Key to the Door* and *The Open Door*, Brian Seaton. The words of Arthur Seaton, Brian's younger brother in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) 'I allus like to 'elp the losin' side', are significant in understanding Brian's support for the Malayan Communists in *Key to the Door*, where in the war between the communists and the British colonial authorities, he takes the side of the Malayan Communists, whom he perceives as the underdog that hardly anyone would root to win.[413] This sense of camaraderie Brian shares with the Malayan Communists could be traced to his societal upbringing. Growing up in the industrial slums in Nottingham where people lived below the bread line, Brian was surrounded by communist and socialist ideologies from an early age. His father was on the dole before the Second World War, his grandfather Merton was a blacksmith and he lived in a neighbourhood of factory workers.[414] He was first exposed to communism in childhood through his father's friend, Abb Fowler who is depicted to be carrying a copy of the *Daily Worker*, the American Communist Party's newspaper, which featured news about the wars in Abyssinia and Spain. The Spanish Civil War between the Republicans and General Franco's

[413] Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, p. 40.
[414] Brian's house faces a lace factory. Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 13, p. 23, and p. 37.

Nationalist alliance, often touted as the battle between the Communist-aligned democratically elected government and fascism, attracted British Communist sympathisers to volunteer as International Brigades to help fight on the side of the Republicans. A young Brian Seaton, still grappling with the concept of Communism, would listen to Abb Fowler criticising the government:

> Every Thursday for months [Fowler] thought of volunteering to fight in Spain, but never did. "I'm a communist, 'Arold," he would say, "and I don't mind gettin' shot at, if you want to know, but not in Spain. It's the bleeders [ruling class] in this country *I* want to stand up against a wall."[415]

Brian was even trained to resent the Conservatives, by almost everyone in the working-class community like his cousin Bert who tells him, that the police are a 'part of the gov'ment' and that they're all Conservatives. Brian was even attempting to understand the meaning of the word 'Labour', a party the working-class people identify with: 'Labour, Brian repeated, […T]he word had a stern ring about it, like the hard labour they gave you in court. Perhaps this was soft labour since everybody voted for it. Or like Manual Labour.' Even so, Brian adopts a cynical reasoning for the word, refusing to accept it blindly, without understanding it fully, like the people around him. Brian further rationalises that '[e]ven being Labour like [his] father and street and suburb, you risked being battered to the pavement', asking himself what the point of it is, following the crowd.[416]

[415] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 129.
[416] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, pp. 156–7.

As Brian gets older, and as a means of showing his loyalty to his community, he begins to take interest in communism. Therefore, his knowledge of communism is limited to the ambit of communism in Europe, particularly in Britain, Spain, and the Soviet Union. However, when he was assigned to Malaya as a wireless operator for the Royal Air Force Voluntary Reserve, to help give bearings for fighter planes to drop bombs on the Malayan Communists in the jungle, it gave him a jolt and made him question the British authorities and their reason for the need to fight the communists who, Brian believes, are his 'pals', or his Communist comrades.[417] This is indicative of the conscripts' confusion about their assignment to participate in a war in far-flung parts of the world and in this case, in Malaya, about 8,000 miles from England, with their limited knowledge of the political developments and historical background of the colony. Without any precursors, Communist sympathisers like Brian attempt to understand the Malayan Emergency by making connections with the familiar knowledge they have at home and in the Western front for a point of reference. This is seen in a scene at the NAAFI canteen when the conscripts are given a briefing about Malaya's state of Emergency by the civilian Education Officer. When the officer announced to the mess that due to the Malayan Communists' acquisition of guns from European planters, an Emergency law was motioned to punish individuals with illegal possession of firearms, it reminds Brian of the 1938 Firearms Act passed in Germany, which made it '"criminal for the Jerries to have guns."'[418] Another instance of relating the preconceived knowledge of the events at home to the situation in Malaya is illustrated in a scene when awkward questions are being posed to the officer about the rationale of taking on the Malayan

[417] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 373.
[418] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 379. Sillitoe wrote in the novel that the Firearms Act was legislated in 1939 when it was in actual fact legislated in 1938. This must have been a minor mistake on Sillitoe's part.

Communists as it would be 'wrong' to presume 'all communists were evil' as some of the conscripts point out that their MPs in the British parliament are communists. The officer had to explain to the group there is a 'difference between communists who are elected into power (as in England) and those who try to take a country over by violence against the wishes of the majority (as in Malaya)', as they seem to be unconvinced with the need to put down the Malayan Communist revolt.[419] As Ronald Paul suggests in his examination of Sillitoe's *Key to the Door* (1961), Brian's interest in the cause of the Malayan Communists in driving out the British colonial government from Malaya is fuelled by his Malayan Chinese girlfriend, Mimi, who could have some ties with the Malayan Communists through her former boyfriend, as Mimi has been very optimistic about them winning the war. She informs Brian that they '"don't want much help at the moment'" and that '"[n]early everybody's on their [the Communists'] side in Malaya,'".[420] Paul states that it is through Mimi that Brian 'adopt[s] a more initiated and sympathetic view of the outbreaks of resistance against Malaya's colonial subjection to British rule – even though his own home-grown distrust of the representatives of 'them' [the British authorities] makes him perhaps a more than willing convert.'[421] Apart from that, Brian is also seen to be resistant to the *pensée unique*, or conformity to one single thought. This is reflected in Brian's reply to Mimi's assumption that Brian is against the Malayan Communists because '[a]ll the rest of the British are.' Brian demonstrates how much he does not like to conform to the notion that all of the British people were against the Communist guerrillas. He refuses to be dictated to by the British government about patriotism and fighting the communists because it is patriotic as he tells Mimi, he's

[419] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 380.
[420] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 383.
[421] Paul, p. 146.

'got a mind of [his] own', and could formulate his own political consciousness.[422] He also reveals his frustrations to Mimi that he was 'dragged into the air force' against his will and was forced to fight in a war with the communists that he does not want and tells her rather obstinately, that the British colonial government 'can fight their wars themselves'.[423] Therefore, his support for the Communist guerrilla warfare against the British colonial administration could also be read as an extension of his personal struggles against the enslavement to the government authorities at home that stifle individual freedom, leaving young British working-men especially from nothing to choose between being drafted to work in the coalmines and to be sent to fight in a war in the colonies.

In the meantime, as Paul asserts in his analysis of *Key to the Door* (1961) that Brian's time spent in Malaya has allowed him to develop political maturity, Brian's affiliation with communism is confronted by the explanations made by Brian's middle-class, conservative best friend in the National Service, Baker, that the Malayan Communists were the ones causing trouble in the country and terrorising the civilians. Baker resumes by telling Brian that the Malayan Communists who were predominantly ethnic Chinese 'were a small minority who wanted to get rid of the British and set up their own dictatorship' and reasons that 'if anyone should rule Malaya it should be the Malays' as they were 'already a long way to getting self-government.' He also adds that if Brian believes in democracy, he has got to help the colonial authorities 'put down' the Communist terrorists.[424] Brian would reflect on this conversation with Baker, the word 'democracy' being a foreign concept to him, just as 'Labour' had been in his childhood. This episode with Baker signals the first

[422] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 237.
[423] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 383.
[424] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 375.

time Brian would have to reassess his stance in supporting the Malayan Communists. He begins to read the local newspapers to be informed of Malaya's current state of the Emergency. However, this change of heart towards the Malayan Communists does not happen instantly. Brian would remain adamant in his allegiance towards his Malayan comrades. This is proven in a scene where he encounters one of the communists while they were on a jungle patrol locating a crashed plane. The communist had a *kriss* in his hand, ready to kill him, and instead of shooting him, Brian lets him go. He lets him go because as he reasons, he was a 'comrade' and a fellow 'man', although the encounter made him slightly bitter with the fact that the Communist wanted to kill him.[425] Regardless, Brian is still supportive of them as seen towards the end of *Key to the Door* (1961) where he hoped the Communists would 'get Malaya' and sees them as 'working-men' like him, albeit gradually becoming more distant towards their cause. This is because his friend Baker was shot in an ambush by the Communists in the jungle patrol. Brian feared he may have been killed by the Communist he let go in the jungle and starts to question his decision. Brian notes 'Malaya was a battlefield whose values had no part of reality, wasn't life to him anymore'. He adds that the British government is to blame for dragging and bundling them up 'like unthinking sackbags to do guard-duty in worn-out parts of the British Empire' and that '[m]aybe the government is weary and don't know what it's doing.'[426] Once again, there is the recurrent theme of preserving individual freedom from the death of conformity, as Brian puts it, from becoming 'unthinking sackbags'.

The flickers of Brian's disenchantment with the cause of the Malayan Communists at the end of *Key to the Door* (1961), is a harbinger of his disillusionment with

[425] A *kriss* or keris, is a traditional Malay dagger. Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, pp. 415–7.
[426] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 433.

communism and socialism in *The Open Door* (1989), the sequel to *Key to the Door* of the Seaton Trilogy, and is explored even further. Whereas Brian's political views had more overt socialist strains in *Key to the Door*, in *The Open Door*, after returning to Britain from Malaya and being exposed to the brand of guerrilla communism expounded by the Malayan Communists, he became cynical of their ideologies. This change of perceptions resulted from three main reasons namely his diagnosis with tuberculosis after undergoing a demobilisation medical test, the disillusionment with the Labour government that was voted in, to Brian's perception, did not live up to their promise of bettering the conditions of the people in the country, especially the working-class people, and the death of his best friend, Baker in a jungle ambush by the Malayan Communists. When Brian returned to his birthplace, Nottingham in 1949, the Second World War had been over for nearly four years and the government was still rationing food supplies. The frustrations about the way the Labour government handled austerity are encapsulated in the dialogues between Brian and his nurse Nora from the RAF sanatorium:

> ''You have to eat where you can. Things won't get better till we throw out this horrid government. Everyone's fed up to the teeth with austerity.'
>
> [Brian] couldn't disagree, but reminded her that the people had voted Labour in.
>
> 'And they'll vote them out again. You see.'[427]

Sillitoe's other novel *The Death of William Posters* (1965) highlighted some of the problems with Austerity. Factory workers, Frank Dawley the protagonist of the novel

[427] Alan Sillitoe, *The Open Door* (London: Grafton Books, 1989), p. 163.

indicates, 'didn't like working in oil and noise, and then going home at night to a plate of sawdust sausages and cardboard beans.'[428] Having just returned from the war fighting the Communists in Malaya to Austerity Britain, Brian feels detached by the ideals of Communism and Socialism that he had previously championed. This is evident in his reactions to the two avid Communist supporters, Chuck and Percy, in his neighbourhood, who were trying to sell him *The Daily Worker* and *Soviet Literature*. While going through the Soviet reading materials from the two Communists, the memories of his conversation with his colleague in Malaya, Len Knotman about the Malayan Communists having no respect for the individual suddenly came flooding into his head:

> Brian had followed the Russian campaign every bit of the way, back and forth, until the Battle for Berlin ended the war. Communism, talked about at the youth club, seemed a fair solution to inequalities, but Len Knotman pointed out in Malaya that communism had no respect for the individual. 'You and me would be stuck up against the wall and shot in no time if there was a revolution.' Nor did there seem much sense trying to apply communism to the lives of people in Radford [Nottingham], who had other problems, couldn't be bothered, hadn't a clue what the issues were—though Chuck and Percy tried to convert them with the quiet passion of Sunday school teachers.[429]

As indicated in the extract, while Brian has no doubt about Communism's solution to the problems of inequalities, he is reminded of Len Knotman's message regarding

[428] Alan Sillitoe, *The Death of William Posters* (London: W.H. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1965; repr. London: A Star Book, 1979; p. 37.
[429] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 194.

Communism in Malaya—that it is autocratic and does not appreciate individual differences. He also saw that the downside to a Communist state, is that its citizens are expected to conform to a single way of thought, lifestyle and regimentations. I have mentioned earlier in my brief introduction to Malayan Communism pertaining to their newspaper that was confiscated by the British intelligence, where it states that '[m]embers, the masses and lower levels must unconditionally obey the orders of the higher levels…no matter whether they understand them or whether they have an opinion of their own.'[430] He also did not see how communism could be effectively applied to the people of Radford, Nottingham, who, as Brian points out, have their own sets of problems to worry about instead of subscribing to the ideals of communism. It is seen that after returning from Malaya, his political affiliation has transformed from believing that communism was the 'best system in the world' prior to Malaya, to being lukewarm about it.[431] When Brian reads the propaganda stories of the working-class people in the magazine he bought from Chuck and Percy, which are evidently censored by the Soviet government, and Stalin's speeches, Brian began to dissect them critically:

> A story set in a factory was written by someone who could never have worked in one, because there was no complaining about rates and wages, and he couldn't fathom a firm in which they weren't eternally chewed over. Talk about the glory of the Communist Party, and the wonderful system they lived under, and of life in the future, was all very well, but what were the types of machine they slaved at, what did they scoff in the canteen, were they on piece work or a bonus system? What were their houses like, their clothes, their

[430] *Light of Dawn Combat News*, as cited in Bartlett, p. 124.
[431] Prior to the 1945 General Elections, Brian used to argue with the members of the youth club that communism was 'the best system in the world.' Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 42.

> hobbies? Did they get blindoe at the weekend and, if so, what on? Did they fight after getting drunk? And what about falling in love? Even a story from the war didn't say where it had taken place so that he could look for it on the map. As for Stalin's speeches – phrases sliding in one ear to do a header out of the other, as if wearing lifebelts to save their lives – they were child's play compared to the closegrained [sic] sentences of *The Critique of Pure Reason*.[432]

It is seen in the extract that Brian noticed something amiss in the narratives of the working-class people in the Soviet Union. There are missing details about their individual stories and emotions. They paint the Soviet government to be perfect—a worker's paradise. All of the stories seem to make the people in them appear detached to Brian. He informs Chuck and Percy in their second meeting that their stories do not seem real.[433] As for Stalin's speeches, he thought they were 'child's play.'[434] He even offended Chuck and Percy when he tells them his review of Stalin's speeches that they are 'dull as ditchwater.' Chuck and Percy reacted by telling Brian that he 'was fighting in an Imperialist war, and that's got nowt to do with working class lads like [them]', suggesting to Brian that he has lost touch with his working-class roots when he joined up for National Service abroad. This comment angers Brian who refuses to be pigeonholed as 'working-class'. Instead, he prefers to be of 'no class at all'.[435] As is it observed in *Key to the Door* (1961), Brian refuses to conform to the dominant ideology that the Malayan Communists were the enemy of the British Empire and that their rebellion needed to be put down. To prove

[432] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 195.
[433] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 226.
[434] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 195.
[435] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 226.

his spirit of camaraderie with the Communists, he even lets go one of the Communist guerrillas he encountered while patrolling the jungle. Similarly, this pattern of refusing to conform is also seen in the manner in which Brian is against as Bentley puts it, 'organized radical discourse against the dominant power group' in *The Open Door* (1989).[436] In this case, the organized radical discourse is Communism in Britain. Brian rejects Communism's denial of individual freedom and the categorisation of the 'working-class'. His disillusionment with Malayan Communism which in turn led to his disillusionment with communism in general, is observed to be similar to George Orwell's painful discovery in his experience fighting in the Spanish Civil War with the P.O.U.M. (The Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), as he is dispelled by the ideals of communism, when he witnessed the political scuffles between the Leftist allies – the Trotskyites and the Stalinists, keen on taking each other out rather than Franco's Nationalist party.[437] Although Sillitoe's protagonist, Brian Seaton, is of a different class background to Orwell, where Brian like Sillitoe, is from the working-class background and Orwell from the middle-class, and as Anthony West puts it, Orwell being the 'typical of the bottom-seen-from-the-top school of writing', both were idealistic about communism before their departure from Britain.[438] Both however changed their perception of communism when they get to experience it in countries where communism was rife. While Brian initially identifies the Malayan Communists as his comrades and refused to fight them, he realised that the Communists in Malaya did not feel the same way and as long as they saw he was wearing a British uniform, he was their enemy and they had to eliminate him. Similarly with Orwell, he saw that even the Communists

[436] Bentley, p. 201.
[437] Michael Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorized Biography* (New York: HarpersCollinsPublishers, 1991, p. 252).
[438] Anthony West, 'On the Inside Looking In', *The New Yorker*, 5 September 1959, pp. 99–100 (p. 99).

in Spain were divided and were fighting each other instead of the common enemy, Franco's Nationalists. The two incidents forced Brian and Orwell to reassess their political affiliation for communism.

We have seen the gradual transformation of Brian Seaton's political leanings from being a Communist sympathiser in *Key to the Door* (1961) to being disillusioned by it in *The Open Door* (1989). Finally, I will examine Sillitoe's protagonists George Rhoads and Bernard Missenden, in *Last Loves* (1990). George Rhoads is described to have come from a working-class background while Bernard Missenden is as indicated, a Tory.[439] Unlike Brian Seaton in *Key to the Door* who identifies the Malayan Communists as his 'comrades' or 'pals', George and Bernard in *Last Loves* call them 'bandits' and 'terrorists', the terms used by the British colonials in Malaya to describe the Malayan Communists, effectively othering them. They also adopted the official colonial British government's report of the Communists of 'terrorizing innocent people into giving them support', as opposed to Brian who refused to concur with the official report that they were terrorising the Malayan and European civilians.[440] However, there are still residues of Sillitoe's trademark socialist anarchic strains in both George and Bernard, making them the most politically ambiguous characters among all the three protagonists in Sillitoe's novels I have compared, including Brian Seaton. In the conversations between George and Bernard on the Communist 'them' versus them as the representation of the 'us', Bernard remarks: 'Don't know why we had to kill the poor bastards. […] There's always good and bad on both sides.'[441] This comment made by Bernard is reminiscent of the character Frank Dawley, in *The Flame of Life* (1974), who joined an insurgent group in

[439] Alan Sillitoe, *Last Loves* (London: Grafton Books, 1990), p. 38.
[440] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 92.
[441] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 161.

Algeria to help them defeat the French colonial government and after returning to Nottingham, he realises that revolutionary and civil wars have losers on both sides and that the 'end result is death and an exchange of property.'[442] He also realised that the party that benefits from wars are always the one 'at the top', while the masses 'receive nothing.'[443] This is very true in the case of the Communist revolution in Malaya, where the obvious victors would not be the Malayan peasant masses but the top leaders of the Malayan Communist Party. While the Communist Party's leaders re-distribute the lands, properties and estates they confiscated from the Malay Sultans, European and Chinese capitalists among themselves, the Malayan people would still remain poor.

Furthermore, the character George Rhoads is depicted by Sillitoe to appear like an elderly Brian Seaton. When examined closely, both characters seem to be parallel to each other. Both of them are from the working-class background and were both Malayan Communist sympathisers in their youth. As seen in George's recollection of memories of the Emergency in the 1960s, George is reminded of the questions posed to him by university students in England, and he replies to them 'for the benefit of earnest Marxists', that he used to sit in the Army Orderly Room, 'hoping the bandits [Malayan Communists] might win.'[444] This is very similar to Brian Seaton in *Key to the Door* (1961), where he had several times, hoped that the Malayan Communists would win the war in Malaya with the British forces as well and expel them from the country.[445] In another instance, when George reminisces their time in Malaya fighting the Communists in the jungle, he states that he remembers 'feeling nothing,

[442] Sillitoe, *The Flame of Life*, p. 280.
[443] Sillitoe, *The Flame of Life*, p. 278.
[444] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 162.
[445] See note 348 of this chapter.

not caring or even thinking about making contact [with the Communists], or being killed.'[446] Brian was also similarly uncaring of his encounters with the Malayan Communists in *Key to the Door* (1961), refusing to shoot them or giving the wrong coordinates to the bomber planes so they would miss firing them in the jungle, seeing that they were his 'pals' rather than enemies.[447] The political ambivalence of both George and Bernard in a novel that sets out in the beginning with a colonialist tone is then thwarted to reveal a continuation of the anarchist strain that are typical of Sillitoe's novels, a semiotic guerrilla warfare against the conformation to a dominant culture. George's and Bernard's refusal to conform is summarily described by their fellow backpacker Gloria, who also acts as an observer of the two characters and a representation of the dominant, conservative voice. She exclaims to George and Bernard: 'Fancy getting sentimental and guilty just because you mopped up a few benighted terrorists! What's the world coming to!'[448] In this instance, Gloria rebukes George and Bernard for expressing a view that runs counter to the British colonial official narrative that brands the Malayan Communists as 'terrorists'. Gloria also uses the British colonial term for the Communists ('terrorists'). In retrospect, George's and Bernard's extension of their sympathy to the Malayan Communists in *Last Loves* is one of the many instances in Sillitoe's narratives where they confront the dominant British culture through a sub-cultural representation. This is demonstrated in his protagonists' fierce struggle to preserve individualism and resist conforming to a particular line of thought, system, political ideology, and the very idea of patriotism. Sillitoe's protagonists take the initiative to formulate their own

[446] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 154.
[447] At his controls hut, Brian shouted: "Don't fire, comrades. Its me—Brian. I used to listen to your pals spouting outside the Raleigh only a couple of years back, and I used to buy all their pamphlets and ruin my eyes reading 'em." See Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 373. In another instance, he informs his girlfriend Mimi that he was told to get bearings of the Communists but he purposely "'didn't get a very accurate one. Far from it," Please also refer to Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 383.
[448] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 163.

political thoughts and question the official narrative of the British colonial government vis-à-vis its war with the Malayan Communists. The section that follows will look at Sillitoe's strategies in capturing the violent atmosphere of the Malayan Emergency.

4.2 Translating the 'Death Event' of the Malayan Emergency into Writing: Sillitoe's Strategies of Documenting the Carnage in Fiction

> 'Because war is a world-unmaking event, a reality-deconstructing and defamiliarizing activity, one of the challenges of war writing is how to make its inherent epistemological disorientation, its sense of experienced "unreality", real.'
>
> - Margot Norris, *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (2000), p. 24.[449]

Margot Norris notes in her book *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (2000) as indicated in the quotation above, that one of the challenges of translating war into writing is to depict the shocking and violent scale of the atrocities it caused, while making its 'inherent epistemological disorientation' accessible to the readers. In response to depicting the war in art and literature, German philosopher Theodor Adorno, famously remarked that '[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.'[450] Adorno points out the pressing issue of how the horrors of the Holocaust, involving a mass genocide of the Jewish people by the German Nazis in the Second World War could be adequately represented. In another instance, there was also the unspeakable horrors of the Allied Forces' dropping atomic bombs on the inhabitants of Hiroshima

[449] Margot Norris, *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (London: The University Press of Virginia, 2000), p. 24.
[450] Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1983), p. 34.

and Nagasaki, which as Norris indicates, 'threatened to sever art's connective expression to war altogether.'[451] This event is captured by J.G. Ballard in his novel *The Empire of the Sun* (1984), set in Shanghai, China in the Second World War during the Japanese Occupation (1937–45). Ballard depicts the colossal impact of the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in *The Empire of the Sun*, which could also be seen from Shanghai due to their close distance as the glowing light emanating from a metaphorical sun, hence the title of the novel: 'The sun fell toward the Shanghai hills, and the flooded paddy fields became a liquid chessboard of illuminated squares.'[452] This illuminating light that the narrator observes became associated with death. Edith Wyschogrod terms this man-made mass death as the 'death event', a situation where the '*means* of annihilation' resulted from a 'systematic rational calculation' and scale is measured in 'compression of time in which destruction is delivered'. She gives the examples of the nuclear war attack to demonstrate this monumental destruction which results in mass death and other strategies that also entail death on a vast scale including forced removal of individuals from their lands (as in the case of the 1948 *nakba* ('Day of Catastrophe') for the Palestinians, the 1916 and 1917 massacres of Armenians and the ongoing massacres of Rohingyans in Myanmmar), famine induced by the state (as in the case of the 1921–2 Povolzhye famine in Russia), biological and chemical weapons (as in the use of Sarin gas on Syrian civilians by Bashar al-Assad's regime), and gas chambers (used by the Nazis on the Jews in death camps).[453]

[451] Norris, p. 2.
[452] J.G. Ballard, *Empire of the Sun* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1984; repr. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005), p. 199.
[453] Edith Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes: Hegel, Heidegger and Man-Made Mass Death* (London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. x.

While the Malayan Emergency which began at the onset of the Cold War in 1948 and is the setting of Sillitoe's novels such as *Key to the Door* (1961), *The Open Door* (1989) and *Last Loves* (1990), may not be on as big of a scale as Hiroshima and the Holocaust, it was a full-on war, despite its name that was purposely designed to enable British planters to claim insurance on their damaged properties and estates.[454] For Malaysian survivors of the war who suffered personal loss due to the actions caused by the Communists, the six decade old wound has clearly not been healed and they remain traumatised by their memories of the conflict. The Emergency saw a death toll of about 5,000 people that included civilians, police and soldiers by the end of first wave of the campaign in 1960. The number also included those who went missing and were presumed dead.[455] At the time when the insurgency was going on, there was civil unrest and heavy military presence and control. Noel Barber documents what he describes as the overnight transformation of Malaya from a peaceful land into a war zone when the Emergency was declared on 16 June 1948 in his book *The War of the Running Dogs* (2004):

> Almost overnight Malaya was transformed into a country at war as thousands of miles of barbed wire criss-crossed the land like a voracious new jungle creeper with tentacles no one could check. The first helicopters hovered overhead, road blocks cluttered the main highways, police posts were

[454] 'The conflict was called an "emergency" because London insurance companies would not cover for losses incurred by an armed insurgency. See Noel Barber, 'Author's Note', in *The War of the Running Dogs: How Malaya Defeated the Communist Guerrillas 1948 – 60* (London: Cassell, 2004), p. 131.

[455] John Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency: An Analysis of the Malayan Emergency, 1948–1954* (Oxford: Westview Press, Inc., 1992), p. 202.

> reinforced, soldiers jumped out of army trucks bearing regimental arms on khaki backgrounds.[456]

The abrupt change of Malaya's landscape into a martial controlled state following the declaration of the Emergency is also documented in Sillitoe's *Key to the Door* (1961), where Brian's friend Baker remarks of the roadblocks while they were on their way for a search party of a crashed plane in the jungle: 'They stopped at the occasional roadblock to make a hasty declaration of their mission: "This must be a heavy bandit country," Baker said. "All we need is [a Communist] ambush at the next turning and the only boat we'll be on is Noah's Ark going to heaven."'[457] It is seen from the excerpt that Sillitoe not only captures Malaya under military rule in the novel, it also evinces the state of duress and the looming fear of death at the time when the Communists were actively ambushing patrol cars. Simultaneously, it thrusts us the readers into the world of chaos and panic, characteristic of the atmosphere during the time of the Malayan Emergency. This particular aspect of Sillitoe's treatment of the Malayan Emergency in *Key to the Door* is what I would like to investigate further. It is a stark contrast to Burgess's comical depictions of the Communist insurgency in his Malayan Trilogy, which I will be exploring in Chapter 5. This source of fear of being ambushed and killed that is indicated in *Key to the Door*, stems for instance from the atrocities and murder sprees committed by the Malayan Communists as reported in the newspapers and by eyewitnesses and survivors. There is in particular the well-known reports that led to the declaration of Malaya as a state of Emergency where three European planters and two Chinese Kuomintang supporters were murdered by what the local newspaper, the *Straits*

[456] Barber, p. 49.
[457] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, pp. 405– 6.

Times, described as 'Chinese gangsters'.[458] Another instance of the Communists' terrorism as Noel Barber states in particular was an incident in the southern state of Peninsular Malaya, Johore, where five Communists attempted to extort payments from a Chinese rubber tapper. The report details that when he refused to hand his payments to them, they punished him by tying him to a tree and hacking his limbs off while forcing his wife and daughter to watch in horror.[459] Another incident that punctuated the terror during the early years of the Malayan Emergency was the well-known case in an isolated village in the central state of Pahang, where the Communists cut off the village's telephone wires to prevent them from calling for help, then fired repeatedly at the village's police station before setting it on fire. It was reported that they proceeded to catch the first villager who ventured into the streets, tied him to the telephone pole and shot him at close range.[460] This incident is recorded in Sillitoe's *Key to the Door* where Brian Seaton reads a newspaper report of the Communist terrorism in the *Straits Times* which describes forty Communists storming into an isolated hamlet near the jungle fringe, cutting their telephone wires and attacking their police station.[461] Other incidents that invoked fear of the Communists as Barber indicates, were their various methods of intimidation used on the civilians who refused to comply with their demands. They included the Communists' attacks and raids on villages and buses while they confiscated national registration cards from the Malayan civilians in retaliation of the British introduced policy of National Registration, which was aimed towards preventing the Communists from going incognito among the civilians. Other incidents included the Communists' attacks on cinema goers, the incident where they torched a family to

[458] 'Five Estate Murders in One Day', *The Straits Times*, 17 June 1948, p. 1.
[459] Barber, pp. 28–9.
[460] Barber, p. 50.
[461] Alan Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 406.

death in their home in Johore Bharu for refusing to surrender their identity cards and their interminable derailment of trains, causing a lot of deaths and injuries.[462] In his explanation of the methods of intimidation used by the Communists to terrorise the Malayan people, Barber insinuates that 'there seemed no pattern – except […] to make sure that the people of Malaya realized from the start that this was a war of terror none could escape'.[463]

Many writers, including Sillitoe, have attempted to replicate the fear of imminent death and the carnage of the Malayan Emergency in their fiction. A good example is demonstrated in Tan Twang Eng's *The Garden of the Evening Mists* (2012) which internalises the primal fear of the European planters, their Asian family members and assistants in their final moments when they were rounded up by the Communist Terrorists and were forced to kneel on the ground as the Communists proceeded to shoot them.[464] Another example is postulated in Han Suyin's *And The Rain My Drink* (1956) where it depicts the distress created by the People Inside, which refers to the *Min Yuen*, the Communist intelligence masquerading as civilians. Suyin portrays the uneasiness of Meng, one of the rubber tappers the Communists collect subscriptions from, as constantly fearing discovery by the People Inside for reporting the activities of the Communists to the police, which subsequently led him to being tortured in the most horrific manner – tied to a rubber tree and hacked to death.[465] Even Leslie Thomas, the author of *Virgin Soldiers* (1966) who did his National Service in Singapore during the Emergency, captured the climate of violence when the Communists were rioting in his novel, that is almost evocative of Chilean poet Pablo

[462] Barber, pp. 90–1.
[463] Barber, p. 28.
[464] Tan Twan Eng, *The Garden of Evening Mists* (London: Canongate Books, 2013), pp. 300–1.
[465] Han Suyin, *And The Rain My Drink* (Singapore: Monsoon Books Pte. Ltd., 2013), pp. 56–7.

Neruda's depictions of the bloodbath in the 1936 Spanish Civil War in his poem '*Explico Algunas Cosas*' ('I Explain a Few Things'): 'Cars burned, Europeans were killed, and the streets were full of savagery. On the first evening the sun went down behind piled smoke from a city whose charred pavements ran with blood and mobs.'[466] As with Tan, Han Suyin and Thomas, Sillitoe's *Key to the Door* (1961) similarly captures the imminent fear in the minds of the people during the Malayan Emergency, as if it was written as it was being experienced. Comparable to the novels written by Sillitoe's contemporaries Han Suyin and Leslie Thomas, the novel embodies raw emotions when confronted with the extent of violence committed by the Communists. This is because despite the book being published in 1961, Sillitoe started writing drafts for the novel in 1948, when his memories of the Emergency were still fresh. The novel as Sillitoe indicated in his autobiography, took thirteen years to complete from the year he was confined to the RAF hospital for tuberculosis in 1948.[467] This is due to the reason that his manuscripts of the novel took years of stringent revision and editing to achieve the standard acceptable to publishers. Sillitoe had also struggled to get any of his novels published with publishers such as Heinemann, Burgess's publisher for his Malayan Trilogy and MacGibbon and Kee who have attempted to get him to alter some parts of his novels to cater to their readers.[468] For ten years, the publishers he posted his manuscript to were reluctant to get him published. Sillitoe opines that his work was rejected because 'it didn't fit into

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[466] Leslie Thomas, *The Virgin Soldiers* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1966; repr. London: Arrow Books, 2005), p. 167. Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) was a Chilean poet, diplomat and politician. He became engulfed in the Spanish Civil War during his post as a diplomat in Barcelona. His poem '*Explico Algunas Cosas*' ('I Explain A Few Things') laments the bloodbath caused by the war, similar to Thomas: '*Venid a ver la sangre por la calles*' ('Come and see the blood on the streets'). See Pablo Neruda, *I Explain A Few Things: Selected Poems*, ed. by Ilan Stavans (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), pp. 32–3.

[467] Alan Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour: An Autobiography* (London: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 1995), p. 257.

[468] Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour*, pp. 208–38 follows his process of writing, the rejections he faced by publishers and their attempts at making him alter some parts of his novel in order to be published.

the preconceived notions that people had about the so-called working class.' He reasons that his book was 'too realistic, and didn't support their theories' while at the same time he was distressed with publishers 'meddl[ing]' with his work and attempting to alter it to suit the taste of readers of the publishers whom he described as 'half conscious [sic] Marxist sympathizers who could not take to [his] book'.[469] The novel *Key to the Door* (1961) is one example where Sillitoe demonstrates his efforts in fictionalising the Malayan Emergency by reproducing as closely the atmosphere of terror resulting from the Communist menace in Malaya and as realistically as possible. At the same time, it also captures his own political thoughts in the beginning of the Emergency from 1947 to 1948 about the Malayan Communists, which critics such as Anthony Burgess and Irving Howe did not seem to take kindly. Burgess remarked that Sillitoe's representation of the Malayan Communists were naïve and showcases his lack of knowledge of the political situation in Malaya while Howe stated that Sillitoe's decision to have Brian Seaton not to shoot the Communist ambushing him in the climax of the novel as 'ill-considered.'[470] However, there is also the aspect of verbal economy in his writing where he portrays blasé descriptions of the colonial government's measures of containing the Communist attacks and his protagonist, Brian Seaton's stoic manner of reporting death events.[471] In his reading of *Key to the Door* (1961), Matthew Whittle notes that the language Sillitoe uses in the novel is void of exoticism and grandiloquent expressions that are typical of the writings of Rudyard Kipling and

[469] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 238. There were in fact acerbic remarks made on *Key to the Door* by Irving Howe in 'In Fear of Thinking', *The New Republic*, 28 May 1962, pp. 25–6 (p. 25) where he writes: 'Once Sillitoe reaches the second half of *Key to the Door* and must confront certain new issues of 20th Century politics, he is in grave trouble. For now the idea governing his presentation is sentimental and ill-considered.'

[470] See Thomas Churchill, 'Going on Writing till Ninety or One Hundred', in *Conversations with Burgess*, ed. by Earl G. Ingersoll and Mary C. Ingersoll (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), pp. 14–5. See also Howe, p. 25.

[471] I borrowed the term 'verbal economy' from Margot Norris in her analysis of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), 'Verbal Economy and Lying'. See Norris, pp. 65–70.

R.M. Ballantyne.[472] This is seen for instance in the following extract from the novel where Brian describes an example of Communist terrorism in a state in Johor Bharu: 'Forty miles north of Singapore, he had read [in the *Straits Times* newspaper], ten [Communists] wearing jungle-green and armed with Stens dragged two brothers from a house, shot one dead and left the other so terrified he didn't get the coppers for a couple of days.'[473] This laconic style of writing is likely to do with Sillitoe's military background which mirrors a report for a Commanding Officer. Other works from war veterans which are similar in style to Sillitoe's are those by Tim O'Brien (1946 –), the American novelist and Vietnam War veteran as well as F. Spencer Chapman (1907–71), the former British Army Officer and Second World War veteran. O'Brien's short story 'The Things They Carried' (1990) is an example of prose that ignores the 'conventional embellishment' of the likes of Kipling and Ballantyne, in favour of concise details or 'practical writings'.[474] He addresses the items his protagonist's platoon carried in the Vietnamese jungle rather straightforwardly without relying on verbose expressions:

> The things they carried were largely determined by necessity. Among the necessities or near-necessities were P-38 can openers, pocket knives, heat tabs, wristwatches, dog tags, mosquito repellent, […] lighters, matches, […] C rations, and two or three canteens of water. Together, these items weighed

[472] Whittle, p. 60.
[473] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 406.
[474] 'Conventional embellishment' is a term used by Japanese modernist writer, Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972), to refer to the verbose 'artistic writings' (*geijutsuteki bunshō*) as opposed to the more clear and concise 'practical writings' (*jitsuyōteki bunshō*). For further information, kindly refer to Tomi Suzuki's explications of Kawabata's *Shin bunshō tokuhan* (A New Guide to Literary Language) published in 1950 in Tomi Suzuki, 'Kawabata's views of language and the postwar construction of a literary genealogy, *Japan Forum*, 30.1 (2018), 85–104 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2017.1307255> [accessed 8 July 2018] (p. 96).

> between 12 and 18 pounds, depending upon a man's habits or rate of metabolism.[475]

Concomitantly, Chapman's memoir *The Jungle is Neutral* (1949) adopts a similar economical narrative style, bearing a resemblance to the impersonal military report: 'Now, a river with thick jungle coming right up to its banks, is an impossible line to hold, and the 11th Division was about to withdraw to the open tin-mining country round Kampar where its artillery, which was superior to that of the Japanese, would have more scope.'[476] It is observed from the extract of Chapman's memoir that the language he employs appears to be an assessment of his division's location and their devising of strategies to counter-attack their enemy lines. As it is illustrated, both O'Brien and Chapman wrote about the wars in Vietnam and Malaya in a similar detached manner as Sillitoe, owing to their military training. I will be interrogating this aspect of Sillitoe's narrative style in my analysis of *Key to the Door* (1961) as his protagonist, Brian Seaton reports the death events of the Malayan Emergency and the draconian laws imposed by the colonial government to contain the attacks from the Communists, as well as Sillitoe's treatment of the conflict in the novel.

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[475] Tim O'Brien, 'The Things They Carried', in *The Things They Carried* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1990; repr. Boston: Mariner Books, 2009), p. 2.

[476] F. Spencer Chapman, *The Jungle is Neutral* (London: The Reprint Society Ltd., 1949; repr. London: Chatto and Windus Ltd., 1950), pp. 29–30. Kampar is a tin-mining district in the state of Perak, located in the West coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

‘Widespread Outbreaks of Lawlessness’[477]: Sillitoe’s Treatment of the Malayan Emergency in *Key to the Door*

> Anybody hiding in the grass could shoot me while I shake the drops off: the thought turned sweat cold on his back, though he didn’t hurry to get inside. And just imagine, he [the Communist] don’t know I’m really a friend who’d go into the jungle and help him if he came up and asked me to. All I’d feel is a hot thump at the back of my neck and the next second I’d be dead, listening to the old man [Brian’s father] say: I told you so.[478]

The passage excerpted from *Key to the Door* (1961) reveals the paranoia Brian Seaton the protagonist has of being killed by Communist guerrillas hiding among the elephant grass while he traipses outside his signals hut in the early hours of the morning. He fears that because his views are obscured by the grass, he would easily become the target of Communist snipers, noting that they move and attack very swiftly before he could even engage them in a conversation. The excerpt also demonstrates that the isolated nature of Brian’s hut, especially one that is located close to the jungle, is the main target of the Communists, hence the pervading fear of being sniped at. Barber describes in *The War of the Running Dogs* (2004) that the ‘worst sufferers in those early days [of the Malayan Emergency] were not only isolated police stations, but the planters, by the very nature of their *isolation*.’[479]

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[477] This term ‘widespread outbreaks of lawlessness’ is used by the civilian Education officer who came to give a briefing about the Malayan Communist insurgency to the British personnel serving in the Navy, Army and Air Force in Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 379. It was the exact phrase employed by then Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, Malcolm MacDonald in a 6th June 1948 radio broadcast following the murders of three British planters in the state of Perak. Kindly refer to Department of Information Federation of Malaya, *Communist Terrorism in Malaya: The Emergency with a chronology of important events June 1948–1952* (Kuala Lumpur: Khee Meng Press, 1952), p. 44.

[478] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 373. Brian’s father, Harold Seaton is opposed to Brian being drafted to the military.

[479] Barber, p. 51. [Emphasis added].

Isolated huts, squatters' villages, police posts and estates as described in the booklet *Communist Terrorism in Malaya* issued by the British colonial government in 1952, were 'ideal for guerrilla raids' where 'complete security […] could never be afforded' despite the government's deployments of security patrols around these places. Moreover, the dense landscape of the Malayan jungle surrounding these areas in isolated posts provide as effective hideouts for the Communists.[480] The looming death resulting from sudden attacks by Communist snipers, projected in the novel through the lens of Brian Seaton, is one of the instances of Sillitoe's treatment of the Malayan Emergency in his writing. In a 1979 interview with John Halperin for the *Modern Fiction Studies*, when asked about whether he intended to revise his published works, Sillitoe states that he wanted to let his fiction 'stand as they were written at the time.' This is so it does not give the 'wrong impression as to what [he was] doing that particular year.'[481] Therefore, as indicated in his response to Halperin, it is insinuated that Sillitoe was invested in capturing the zeitgeist of the period. For instance, when he was writing about the troubles that broke out in the build up to the declaration of the Malayan Emergency from 1947 to 1948, he wanted to punctiliously portray the events and atmosphere that define Malaya of that time period. This is illustrated earlier in his depiction of Brian breaking into a cold sweat and being aware that he is exposed to perpetual threats of death. This point will be tied to my interrogation of whether Sillitoe makes any attempts at downplaying the threats of Malayan Communism, which made up a part of the anti-colonial movements in Malaya in *Key to the Door* (1961), especially during the years leading up to decolonisation. In relation to this, I will be examining three primary aspects of Sillitoe's overall treatment of the Malayan Emergency in the novel namely the

[480] Department of Information Federation of Malaya, *Communist Terrorism in Malaya*, p. 20.
[481] John Halperin, 'Interview with Alan Sillitoe', *Modern Fiction Studies* (1979), 25.2, 175–89 (p. 176).

presentiment of impending danger conveyed through some of the novel's characters, the sense of imminent fear of death from the Communist menace and the documentations of the measures taken by the colonial government of Malaya in combating the threats of the Communists.

Prior to the declaration of the State of Emergency in 1948, Malaya was already beleaguered by civil unrest, strikes and violence. Even the mere presence of Europeans on the streets could instigate riots due to the intense anti-colonial sentiments among the Malayan people. All of these events were dated as far back as 1946 and were inscribed by the Second World War veteran James Fenton (1922 –) who served in Burma. In his letter dated 1 February 1946, when he was in Malaya for his military leave, he wrote, suggesting the troubles that were boiling up in Malaya:

> I did not get to the dance on Wednesday, mentioned in my last letter, that day the whole of Malaya was *topsy turvy*, engaged in strike action for whatever reason I do not know. No busses [sic] running, picture houses and dance halls closed, and very few shops open. It was presumed unsafe to allow us [the British expatriates] into the town; our presence may irritate the mood of local people causing trouble in the streets. We were advised [by the British colonial authorities] to stay at the centre.[482]

Similar to Fenton, Sillitoe's *Key to the Door* (1961) hints at the troubles leading up to the official declaration of the Emergency by the colonial government through the

[482] James Fenton, *The Forgotten Army: A Burma Soldier's Story in Letters, Photographs, and Sketches* (Gloucestershire: Fonthill, 2012), p. 68. [Emphasis original].

warning of escalating violence and increased hostility towards the British soldiers, planters and civil servants in Malaya by Brian's Malayan girlfriend, Mimi. This is reflected in the passage from the novel where when Brian informs Mimi of his plans to stay on in Malaya and get a job as a rubber planter, Mimi cautions Brian of the danger to British nationals. She also throws him a concerned look when she realises of Brian's naivety about the gravity of the situation:

> "If you become a rubber planter you'd be in big danger." Neither spoke. […] He laughed. "You sound like a gypsy giving me a warning. There's no danger in being in Malaya."
>
> The bed creaked as she faced him more fully, her coal-like eyes shining with concern: "You think you're living in a peaceful country then?"[483]

It is seen from the conversation between Brian and Mimi that when Mimi observes Brian to be taking her warning lightly when he exclaims that there is no danger in Malaya, Mimi starts to become really concerned about his apparent lack of awareness of the violence that is about to be unleashed by the Communists before adding: '"But you don't know what I mean. There's going to be a lot of fighting in Malaya because people don't like the British being here. There'll be a war"', she explains to him, referring to the anti-colonial insurgence in Malaya, specifically that of the uprising of the Malayan Communists. Brian begins to relate what Mimi is telling him to the reports in the newspaper about the murders on rubber estates and the previous conversation he had over the phone with a telephone corporal who

[483] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 234.

informs him of the necessity of the ON ACTIVE SERVICE status indicated on Brian's mails despite, as Brian reasons, the Second World War had been over for almost two years at that point in 1947. The corporal makes a reference to the inevitable Communist violence: '"There'll be a bloody bust-up one day"', he states as he reveals that the Communists who were formerly anti-Japanese in the Second World War were becoming anti-British.[484] The conversation between Brian and Mimi recalls the point I have made in the earlier section of this chapter where British conscripts were sent to fight in wars in faraway colonies that they could not quite grasp, especially the political situation of that country that led to the conflict. Brian's incomprehension of the politics in Malaya, coupled with his loyalty for the working-class people, and by extension to the Malayan Communists, further complicates the internalisation of his role in the Malayan Emergency of whether to fight on the side of the British colonial government or the Malayan Communists. This is because of his identified affiliation with the Malayan Communists whom he recognises as his comrades. He saw initially that they were fighting for a common cause of improving the lives of the working people, indentured labourers and peasants in Malaya and inclined towards giving them support as he saw in the beginning, that like him in Britain, they were most likely subject to unjust treatments and exclusions by the feudal Malay rulers and the British colonial administrators as he was by the ruling class in England. On the other hand, he is aware that he is in a war with the Communists for the British Empire and wears a British uniform. He realises that because of the British uniform, the Communists take him as their enemy despite him professing to be on their side. On the surface, when reading the passage on the conversation between Brian and Mimi, it appears as if Brian is dismissing the threats

[484] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 236.

of the Malayan Communists and taking them lightly. However, Sillitoe's inclusion of the character Mimi in *Key to the Door* (1961) is essential in playing the role of educating Brian of the political situation in Malaya. It is demonstrated that just as Brian gradually learns about the concepts of 'Labour' from a young age from his working-class community, and 'democracy' from his Conservative best friend Baker, he tries to understand from Mimi why his Malayan Communist 'pals' are adamant about fighting him when he is on their side. It is through Sillitoe's deployment of the character Mimi, the voice of a local Malayan resident, that Brian is able to relate the severity of the Communist threats in Malaya and make sense of the reports he read about the murders in the estates in the newspaper and the 'bloody bust-up' that the corporal expressed his concerns about.

In a subsequent scene in the novel which follows Brian's and his fellow mountaineers' descent from Gunong Barat, Sillitoe shifts the narrative from the percolating threats of war by Communist insurgents to depicting the event where Malaya is plunged into a state of Emergency. This is shown when Brian who earlier on perceived that there was no danger in Malaya, begins to realise the gravity of the situation that he suddenly finds himself in. The revelation of the war is followed immediately by silence, of Brian trying to comprehend the sergeant's announcement that they are at war with the Communists in Malaya as in the ensuing passage:

> Packs were swung like corpses on to the waiting lorry, helped by a sergeant who had come up for a ride, the same who had got Baker in trouble outside the Admin hut last week. "There's a war on," he told them. "It started while you were away. We thought you might have got caught up on it."

> "What sort of a war?"
>
> "The communists are at it, trying to throw us out of the country and take over. They've killed a lot of people already."
>
> The lorry drove south along the main road, through villages and rubber plantations, the sea a perfect blue sheet to the right, sky equally blue and empty overhead. A breeze cooled them and took away the heavy smell of soil and sweat. No one spoke. Brian leaned back with eyes closed, wondering at the sergeant's words about a war with the communists in Malaya.[485]

The passage explores the confusion in Brian's mind, when he is informed by the sergeant who was clearly distressed by Brian's and his colleagues' disappearance in the jungle that the war with the Malayan Communists just broke out as soon as he and his hiking team set to climb Gunong Barat. He also adds that the Communists had murdered many people while they were away and thought that they might have been ambushed and killed, while emphasising the Communists' determination to drive the British out of the country. The passage ends with Brian pondering on the sergeant's words that he is a part of the war with the Communists in Malaya. In a later scene where Brian is in the NAAFI canteen listening to the briefing from the Education officer about the Communist insurgency in Malaya, Brian is once again reminded of the confusion that he is engulfed in the conflict: 'A so-called 'State of Emergency' brought in martial law, and he noted with some confusion the fact that he was part of it.'[486] The episode where Brian is met by the distraught sergeant who informs him and his colleagues of the war is inspired by Sillitoe's Kedah Peak trip detailed in his autobiography, *Life Without Armour* (1995). He states that the Kedah

[485] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 353.
[486] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 378.

Peak trip was ‘spun-dried to produce outlandish shadows of fictional characters’ and explains that in the six days of them being away with their radio communication set off, making them unable to be recalled, within that time frame, the Malayan Communists were ‘killing whoever they could of the British, service personnel or otherwise’ to ‘terrorize them out of the country so that they could set up a Marxist government.’ Sillitoe adds recalling that in the early days of the Malayan Emergency, it was ‘assumed to be swarming with competent and ruthless guerrillas waiting in well-prepared ambush positions for just such noddy-boy action men [conscripts] as [them]’.[487] As conscripts were inexperienced in jungle war training, Sillitoe notes that they were easy targets of Communist attacks. This inspiration from the Kedah Peak trip is one of the instances where Sillitoe draws the zeitgeist of the early period of the Malayan Emergency in his novel.

As the novel progresses, Sillitoe establishes a hovering dread of death, particularly in Brian Seaton’s mind, as a result of reading reports about frequent ambushes by the Communists and British personnel targeted by snipers. Sillitoe also portrays Brian to be at times resigned to death, as being in the military frontline, he has accepted the notion that he is fated to face death. There are several instances in *Key to the Door* (1961) where Brian appears to be resigned to death. In the ensuing extract, Brian is depicted to feel uneasy with the fact that the rifle he was equipped with had been taken back to the armoury to prevent the Communists from stealing weapons from the British forces and stockpiling their arms. This puts him in a vulnerable position in case the Communists do come and attack his hut and that he would not have any weapons to defend himself. At that moment, he knew instantly that his life is in jeopardy:

[487] Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour*, p. 125.

> It wasn't possible any more to take an occasional potshot at shadows with the rifle, for together with fifty pounds of ammo it had been recalled to the armoury so that if bandits attacked the hut (still the farthest outpost of camp and airstrip) they couldn't capture the wherewithal to knock-off a few planters or swaddies. They'll kill *me*, but as long as they don't get the rifle, that's all that matters.[488]

The passage captures the air of resignation that Brian has towards death, while preparing to sacrifice his disarmament in order for the Communists not to loot them and kill more people. In reference to the episode where weapons were withdrawn to the armoury in *Key to the Door* (1961), Sillitoe writes of a similar incident that happened in the second month of the Emergency: 'All guns were withdrawn from outstations and sent back to the armoury, on the assumption that if the hut was raided by the Malayan People's Anti-British Army [another name for the Malayan Communists] – no less – they would acquire first-class weapons and ammunition with little or no difficulty.'[489] Sillitoe's commentary about the withdrawal of arms from peripheral outposts in response to the Communist raids on firearms and ammunition, stems from the colonial government's efforts in clamping down the Communists' retaliation to the imposed Emergency regulations which became effective on 1 July 1948. It ruled that 'possession of unlicensed firearms' and individuals found to be assisting the Communists were 'punishable by death.'[490] Former Special Branch officer Leon Comber (1921–), hints on the underlying reasons for this chaotic measure by the colonial government of withdrawing arms

[488] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 372. [Emphasis original]
[489] Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour*, p. 133.
[490] *Communist Terrorism in Malaya*, p. 45.

from certain outposts in countering the Malayan Communist revolt in his book *Malaya's Secret Police 1945–60* (2008).[491] Comber states that among the reasons was that the Malayan Security Service (MSS) who were responsible in supplying information of the Communist activities to the British Military Administration of Malaya were criticised for not giving them advanced warning. This was part of the reasons why the authorities were as Comber puts it, 'caught off-balance' by the surge of armed attacks from the Communists.[492] Comber indicates that in the early days of the Emergency, the intelligence agency was suffering from a shortage of staff who could translate the bulk of documents in Chinese confiscated from the Communists for their perusal. Apart from that, another factor for the weakness of the intelligence was that the Director of the Malayan Security Service, Lieutenant-Colonel John Dalley put too much focus on the Malay and Indonesian subversive groups while neglecting the activities of the Malayan Communists. Comber suggests, Dalley had more than likely entrusted the task of collecting information from the Communists onto his informer Lai Teck, who became the first Secretary-General of the Malayan Communist Party. Their investigations could have been hampered when Lai Teck was caught by the other Communist party members for spying on them and absconded with the party funds in 1947.[493] Therefore, as indicated by Comber, it was the weak intelligence that contributed to the initial uncoordinated response to the Communist guerrillas between the authorities, police and the military.

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[491] Leon Comber was appointed to serve in the Special Branch from 1946 to 1956 because of his ability to converse in Cantonese. He was forced to resign from the Special Branch after his then wife Han Suyin's controversial publication of the novel *And the Rain My Drink* (1956) which was perceived to have a pro-Communist undertone and an anti-British stance. The Malayan Security Service was terminated on 23 August 1948 and was replaced by the Special Branch.

[492] Leon Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police 1945–60: The role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency* (Victoria: Monash University Press, 2008), pp. 38–9.

[493] Comber, pp. 41–2. See also Anthony Short, 'Failure of Intelligence?' in *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya 1948–1960* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1975), pp. 77–90.

The looming air of death is once more demonstrated in the subsequent scene where Brian imagines that the Communists were firing at his hut regardless of whether he is equipped with a rifle or whether he is not and that he would not have the time to run outside to inform them that he is their comrade who is on their side: 'Rifle or not, the first burst of bullets would rip through the hut and write LONG LIVE STALIN on my bony chest. I wouldn't even have time to rush outside with my hands up and shout: "Don't fire, comrades. It's me—Brian.'[494] The pervading fear of death where Brian imagines being shot by the Communists led him to set a decoy 'to sponge up bullets'. Brian details his grand scheme should his hut be attacked by the Communists as in the following quotation:

> Long-range annihilation, a decoy to sponge up bullets. Around the hut was a tin-henge circle, a radius of petrol cans threaded by a piece of invisible string, so that anyone creeping in the darkness would send a resonant warning clatter against stony ground. Should this happen Brian saw himself switching off lights and dashing into the elephant grass, gripping a rusty bayonet, where he'd stick it out while the hut was ransacked for ammunition or maybe spare wireless parts—though he found it hard to imagine himself not being shot at and killed before witnessing this dramatic scene of plunder.[495]

Brian's set up of tin cans decoy is drawn from Sillitoe's 'outpost system of tin cans' that were connected on wires to alert him of prowlers around his hut. Sillitoe states that D/F or wireless operators were 'vulnerable to terrorist bullets skimming through the night'. This is because of the location of their wireless hut which was far

[494] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 373.
[495] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 374.

removed from the Air Force runway and the military headquarters, making them vulnerable to sudden raids and attacks by the Communists. Sillitoe adds that one of the things he was worried about was that 'armed and silent men' would surprise him while he was busy working on the radio and that this sense of wariness is extended through his characterisation of Brian.[496] Despite Brian's elaborate plans in the event of confronting the attacks of the Communists, he remains pessimistic of staying alive and keeps imagining that he would be shot and killed. In another instance where Brian was making the fire to boil his kettle, he fears the illumination of the fire would allow the Communists reconnoitring by his hut to notice him and plays in his head the visualisations of a 'stream of bullets aimed at his stick-like figure' obliterating his 'present tiredness' and 'sleepless eyes'.[497] The fear of coming face to face with the Communists persisted throughout the novel. In a later scene where Brian resigned to the thought of meeting his death the night an officer and a sergeant knocked on his door to check on him, he thought that he was going to be captured by the Communists. Sillitoe portrays the deepest fear that is going through Brian's mind:

> His heart bumped and trembled. My number's up, though they didn't shoot first so maybe I can argue, give a few air force secrets away. He looked for something he might use as a weapon. "Who's that?" he called again.
>
> He picked up the hammer and swung open the door. Light blinded him and he saw nothing. Then he made out an officer and a sergeant, and slid his hammer back to the table.[498]

[496] Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour*, p. 132.
[497] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 374.
[498] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 376.

Sillitoe manages to capture the emotions going through Brian's mind in the face of death, as well as his survival instinct. Brian's heart 'bumped and thumped' at the loud knock on the door, having initial thoughts that the Communists have got him and that his 'number's up'.[499] Another author who has represented the state of the mind in the face of death in fiction in a Malayan Emergency setting is Tan Twang Eng. He depicts what goes through the mind of a planter, his family and assistants when they were captured by the Communists and were forced to kneel before the Communists proceeded to shoot some of them. The protagonist Teoh Yun Ling is portrayed to be hypersensitive to her surrounding scents when faced with a life-threatening predicament: 'the smell of gunpowder corroded the air; mixed with another stench.'[500] Sillitoe's representation of Brian's emotions in death encounters is followed by the depictions of his survival instinct. This is indicated in Brian's impulse to grab a hammer to be used as a weapon and giving away a few Air Force secrets should he be captured and tortured for information by the Communists.

It is observed in the reading of *Key to the Door* (1961) that Sillitoe portrays the setting of the Malayan Emergency without underscoring the threats of the Malayan Communists. He manages to create an atmosphere of persistent threats of danger and death throughout the entire parts of the novel where it is set against the backdrop of the conflict. This is seen especially in the explorations of Brian Seaton's state of the mind from the moment Mimi informs him of the brewing Communist violence and anti-British sentiments to discovering that he is embroiled in the conflict and finally to his overhanging sense of death of being caught in an ambush and sniped at while being on duty. The final point that I would like to address is Sillitoe's clinical

[499] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 376.
[500] Tan, p. 300.

representations of the measures taken by the Malayan colonial administration in countering the attacks by the Communists in the early phase of the Emergency in the novel. Sillitoe's descriptions of the measures taken by the government against the Communist armed insurgents are reminiscent of Barber's references to the Malayan landscape as it transforms into a war zone with barbed wires, road blocks and increased presence of guards armed with rifles. Sillitoe also describes the bungalows turned into miniature fortresses in an excerpt from a briefing on the Communist rebellion from the Education officer:

> British subjects in Malaya are now living under hard and dangerous conditions. Their bungalows—as most of you may well know—are turned into miniature fortresses, outposts on the edge of the jungle, guarded day and night, surrounded with barbed wire and sandbags. The planters carry on their work armed with rifles and sub-machine guns, and these men and their families are showing the usual British obduracy in such difficult circumstances […][501]

The excerpted passage portrays the landscape of Malaya in the state of Emergency. Bungalows are converted into fortresses with barbed wire fences and sandbags. Guards are placed on the grounds of the estates and rubber plantations, making their rounds day and night. The planters on the estates are also armed with rifles and machine guns. On looking out at the plains of Malaya, Brian witnessed a 'manager's bungalow […] fortified with sandbags and barbed-wire' and saw 'a Malayan controlled the approaches' of visitors and vehicles with a machine-gun.[502] Similarly,

[501] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 379.
[502] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 404.

at Brian's camp, to make up for their disarmament for withdrawing their weapons, Malayan Home Guards were 'doubled and armed with rifles' to protect them from Communist intruders. Brian observed: 'Barbed-wire fences were repaired and patrolled, and roadblocks between ferry and airstrip manned by Malayan and planter volunteers toting clubs and shotguns.' On top of that, Brian also saw mechanics electrifying the fences and 'rig[ging] the fire extinguishers with sulphuric acid'.[503] *Key to the Door* (1961) also documents Orderly officers making rounds to check on each of their staff in the outposts, ensure that their telephones are functioning as well as to boost their morale. This is seen when a sergeant pays a visit to Brian's hut to make sure that he is supplied with enough rations to last for his duty and ensure that his telephone is in order for him to make emergency calls to the control tower. He also extends his sympathy for Brian when he learns that his rifle has been withdrawn to the armoury to prevent the Communists from raiding it.[504] All in all, Sillitoe not only foregrounds the threats of the Communist guerrillas in his Malayan Emergency setting of *Key to the Door*, he also depicts the landscape of Malaya strewn with barbed wires, security patrols with machine guns and army trucks as normalised images of a country at war.

4.3 Sillitoe's Semiotic Guerrilla Warfare on Mainstream Decolonisation Literature

> True, out of a sense of idealism, and to help the *downtrodden* of the world after a lifetime of believing that the *international socialist brotherhood of man* could cure the evils and inefficiencies of *capitalist-imperialism*, [Frank Dawley] had agreed to join Shelley Jones in driving a lorry of guns to the

[503] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, pp. 374–5.
[504] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 377.

> frontier beyond Tafilalet [Morocco] – a practical action that could never be confused with any dream.[505]

In my probing of Sillitoe's fiction and central characters on 'The Anarchists and 'Semiotic Guerrilla Warfare'' earlier in this chapter, I have pointed out that Sillitoe's fiction challenges the British dominant culture of the official colonial narratives with sub-cultural voices. His protagonists consistently project the anarchist vein in them that resists conforming to the dominant culture.[506] In this section, I calibrate this notion of Sillitoe's semiotic guerrilla warfare in his depictions of Malaya's decolonisation process in comparison to that of Burgess, whose fiction is written from the perspective of a civil servant which Sillitoe's lead characters, typically from a working class background, tend to reject. In Burgess's Malayan Trilogy, the portrayals of Malaya's road to independence are heavily concentrated on the British efforts in preparing the process of the transfer of power to the Malayan elites, where it involves the task assigned to the British civil servants by the colonial government in training and supervising their Malayan deputies with managerial work. In spite of Burgess's attempt at turning colonial literature on its head as seen in *The Beds in the East* (1959) for instance, in the role reversal of the Colonial Education Officer, Victor Crabbe, and his Malay deputy officer, with the latter giving his superior advice to toe in line with the Malayan authorities, there are little to no explorations of the Malayan people's struggles for self-determination in his novels. Furthermore, Malayan nationalist movements are cursorily treated as seen in Victor Crabbe's discounting of Malaya's fight for independence from British colonisation in *Time for*

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[505] Alan Sillitoe, *The Flame of Life* (London: W.H. Allen, 1974; repr. London: Wyndham Publications Ltd., 1976), pp. 114–5. Emphasis added.

[506] Kindly refer to p. 135 of this chapter 'The Anarchists and the 'Semiotic Guerrilla Warfare': The Making of Sillitoe's Protagonists and Narratives'.

a Tiger (1956). An example where Burgess's main character Victor Crabbe in the novel does this is where when his Malay language tutor Inche Kamaruddin cautions him that there will be a rebellion at their school because the Malayan students are 'becoming politically-minded' and are talking about the 'white oppressors', which is a clear indication of a burgeoning nationalist movement. However instead of acknowledging its existence, Victor dismisses the gravity of his claims by commenting that they only happen 'in school stories.'[507] Simultaneously, even with the Malayan Emergency set as the backdrop to the Trilogy, the narrator, the main characters as well as the minor characters in Burgess's Malayan novels do not take the threats of the anti-colonial Communist rebellion seriously. At the same time, they also portray the Malayan Communists in an outlandish manner. Burgess's *Time for a Tiger* for instance plays up to the stereotypes of the Chinese members of the Malayan Communists with descriptions such as 'ambushing grinning yellow men' and having funny names such as 'Lotus Blossom, Dawn Lily or Elephant Tiger'[508] I will be exploring this comical treatment of the Malayan Emergency in Burgess's Malayan Trilogy in Chapter 5. Instead, I observe that Burgess's novels place more emphasis on the British contributions in uniting the Malayan people and crediting them solely in the smooth transition of power to the Malayan government.[509] This kind of narrative mirrors the general sentiment among the British officials at the time that may want to divert negative opinion of British colonisation. A case in point is reflected in the book *Malaya: Communist or Free?* (1954) written by Victor Purcell, who held the post as wartime Director General of Information (1921–46) and had

[507] See Anthony Burgess, *Time for a Tiger* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1956), p. 86.
[508] See Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 33.
[509] Amidst what Victor Crabbe describes as Malaya's Tower of Babel and racial disharmony, he emerges as a unifying force of all the races of Malaya. In his speech to the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious group of Malayan people, he states: "I express my pleasure at the sight of representatives of all the races of South-East Asia mixing freely and in obvious harmony in the house of a wicked Englishman." Burgess, *The Beds in the East*, p. 87.

written extensively on the Malayan Communists and the Chinese migrants in Malaya. In the preface to the book, Purcell writes: 'What I wrote, said, and broadcast in many countries was supported by a belief in the British intention and ability to help Malaya towards nationhood and self-government.' On his comment on the much opposed 1946 Malayan Union, the constitutional blueprint for Malaya, he states: '[T]he establishment of the Malayan Union after the war was a convincing proof of British sincerity'.[510] Note the positive tones in Purcell's descriptions of the British intention in Malaya's decolonisation process. He suggests that it was in the best interest of the British government to assist Malaya towards self-governance and that their drafting of the Malayan Union which they presumed was for the betterment of the Malayan people was an indication of 'British sincerity'. Another instance could be seen in the speech excerpted from the British Parliament Hansard dated 9 March 1955 by Alan Lennox-Boyd, British Conservative politician who was the Secretary of State for the Colonies (1954–9) and who was also responsible for ensuring the peaceful transition of power to colonies such as Malaya, Sudan, Iraq, Ghana and Cyprus. In the same vein as Purcell, Lennox-Boyd reinstates the British sincerity as well as their 'democratic approaches' in the process of decolonisation where he addressed: '[H]aving regard to the good will of the Malayan people, and as showing the sincerity of *our democratic approaches*, the forthcoming elections in Malaya and Singapore should be sufficient evidence.'[511]

However, none of them are actually forthcoming about the real reason behind the British government's noble façade in going out of their way to help Malaya achieve independence. Alex Sutton reveals in his article 'British Imperialism and the Political

[510] Victor Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1954), p. 5.
[511] 'Malaya and Singapore: Student (Communist Activities)', *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 5th series, vol. 538 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1955), p. 432. [Emphasis added].

Economy of Malayan Independence' (2016) that the chief reason for Britain's agreement to granting Malaya independence and to aid Malaya in the process is because of its 'dollar-earning capacity' and its contribution to the sterling area.[512] This point is corroborated by Allister Hinds in 'Sterling and Decolonization in the British Empire' (1999) who states that Malaya was the 'most valuable of Britain's dollar-earning colonies' especially in tin and rubber and adds that due to this, it was 'impossible for Britain to concede power, especially to the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) without a fight.'[513] In fact, Oliver Lyttelton, the colonial secretary (1951–4) as well as businessman would not have issued a statement such as the Malayan problem being 'the most urgent and obdurate in the Colonial Territories', and that he had to visit the country as soon as he could when he heard of the Communist rebellion if Britain did not have a stake in Malaya's economy.[514] Not only that, as Gerold Krozewski asserts, Malaya among Britain's overseas territories was helping to finance Britain to pay off the negotiated American loan in 1945 after Clement Atlee's led Labour party won the elections, further signifying Malaya as an important asset to Britain and to the sterling pool.[515] To better demonstrate Britain's role in Malaya's decolonisation, Allister Hinds succinctly puts it when he indicates the British state interference in Malaya's political developments as well its post-colonial future direction in the dissolution of the Empire that Britain 'could not afford concessions to nationalist forces which would compromise its control over its dependencies. Therefore, the movement towards self-government and independence

[512] Alex Sutton, 'British Imperialism and the Political Economy of Malayan Independence', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 44.3 (2016), 470–91 (p. 472). The sterling area is a reference to countries that use pound sterling as their currency or peg their currencies to the pound sterling.
[513] Allister Hinds, 'Sterling and Decolonization in the British Empire, 1945–1958', *Social and Economic Studies*, 48.4 (1999), 97–116 (p. 107).
[514] Denise Folliot, 'Malaya' in *Documents on International Affairs 1952* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 506. Lyttelton especially was the chairman of the London Tin Corporation.
[515] Gerold Krozewski, 'Sterling, the 'minor' territories, and the end of formal empire, 1939–1958', *Economic History Review*, XLVI.2 (1993), 239–265 (p. 246).

had to be gradual, and political power had to be transferred to forces loyal to Britain.'[516] It was for this reason that the British government decided to facilitate the Alliance Party consisting of UMNO, MCA and MIC into power and collaborate with them as they were willing to cooperate with the British even after attaining 'full self-government'. The 1956 Constitutional Congress between the Malayan delegates from the Alliance Party and the British officials reveal the financial agreement struck between two parties. They both agreed that Malaya's membership in the Sterling Area was to their 'common advantage' and that it was Malaya's 'intention to remain in [the Sterling Area] after attaining full self-government.'[517]

Whereas it is evident that some traces of British paternalism are prevalent in Burgess's narratives of Malaya's decolonisation, Sillitoe's fiction on the other hand branches out to reveal his protagonists' solidarity with the national liberation movements in deposing European colonialists namely the British and the French from Malaya and Algeria, to the extent that his novels are labelled unpatriotic and anti-British by a section of critics.[518] Rather than making Malaya's struggles for self-determination appear one-dimensional in the mere sense of the emancipation of the colonised people from the yoke of British colonisation, Sillitoe's novels *Key to the Door* (1961) and *The Open Door* (1989) explore the multiple narratives of Malaya's struggles for independence, namely by tapping into the region's Communist rebellion in connections to the surge of international anti-imperialist movements and proletarian revolutions. The quotation is excerpted from Sillitoe's

[516] Allister Hinds, 'Sterling and Decolonization in the British Empire', p. 105.
[517] UMNO, MCA and MIC are abbreviations for United Malay National Organisation, Malayan Chinese Alliance and the Malayan Indian Congress. They were the first Malayan government coalition party to rule Malaya from 1957 until May 2018. See Annex A, 'Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Conference January–February 1956', CAB 129/79/47, *The National Archives*, p. 262.
[518] See Whittle, p. 58. See also Thomas Churchill, 'Going on Writing till Ninety or One Hundred', in *Conversations with Burgess*, p. 14.

novel *The Flame of Life* (1974), the final instalment of the Frank Dawley Trilogy, which centres on the main character Frank Dawley, a British working class man who sets out on a quest to fulfil his revolutionary fervour in Spain, Morocco and Algeria by taking up arms against Spanish generals and European colonialists. The excerpt essentially captures Sillitoe's protagonists' view of the colonised peoples in Third World countries described as the 'downtrodden of the world' in the same breath as the working class people, who are similarly regarded in the category of the downtrodden and sees this condition as a collective responsibility of the 'international socialist brotherhood' to free them from being further exploited by 'capitalist-imperialism'.[519] This quotation notably includes the term 'capitalism-imperialism', inspired by Lenin's association of imperialism with capitalism in his book *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916). It denotes imperialism being a form of capitalism and to that effect, the colonised subjects like the proletarians, are enslaved by this system. Although not mentioned explicitly, Sillitoe's acquaintance with the writings of Vladimir Lenin is recorded in his travel book *Road to Volgograd* (1964) where he states: '[Lenin's] writings have been collected into forty volumes, but in them there is no reference to his private life.' It is insinuated that through his reading of Lenin's collections of work that he came across the term and used it in his Frank Dawley novel.[520] I will be examining this point further in my analysis of Sillitoe's decolonisation novels which are set in Malaya and Algeria. The reason being that I included his Algerian novels in my analysis is because they complement his Malayan novels' treatment of decolonisation and that to solely focus on his Malayan novels would ignore the

[519] Alan Sillitoe, *The Flame of Life* (London: W.H. Allen, 1974; repr. London: Wyndham Publications Ltd., 1976), p. 114.
[520] See Alan Sillitoe, *Road to Volgograd* (London: W.H. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1964; repr. London: Pan Books Ltd., 1966), p. 125.

nuance of Sillitoe's protagonists' commentary on the issue. On top of that, there is an immense interim period between the years his first Malayan novel *Key to the Door* (1961) and the sequel *The Open Door* (1989) were published, resulting in such a huge ideological shift in Brian Seaton, the protagonist in both books. His Algerian Trilogy *The Death of William Posters* (1965), *A Tree on Fire* (1967) and *The Flame of Life* (1974) fills in this gap by following closely Brian Seaton's like-minded character, Frank Dawley's intellectual awakening and provides a better insight into Sillitoe's central characters' gradual evolution from a communist sympathiser to a fierce critic of communism as well as colonialism.

A Brief Background of the Frank Dawley Trilogy and its Contextualisation

The Frank Dawley Trilogy consisting of *The Death of William Posters* (1965), *A Tree on Fire* (1967) and *The Flame of Life* (1974) centres on the adventures of a British working man who makes a decision to leave his job at a factory and his family in England in pursuit of self-discovery. He then travels to Spain, Morocco and Algeria and ends up fighting alongside the nationalist group in Algeria – the National Liberation Front or the FLN to help them achieve independence from the French colonial government. Similar to Sillitoe's Malayan novels which look into the explosive events of the Malayan Emergency prior to the nation's decolonisation, the Frank Dawley Trilogy is written within the context of the decolonisation war in Algeria between France and the FLN, which lasted from 1954 until 1962, and ending with the victory of the Algerians and its independence from France. The conflict also intermittently led to a breakout of civil war between the Muslim Algerians who were anti-French on one side and those who were French

auxiliaries who served in the Indo-Chinese war for the French army forces and the French police, as well as the French settlers, the *pied noirs* on the other.

The first instalment of the Trilogy, *The Death of William Posters* begins with the central character, Frank Dawley hitchhiking rides from strangers across the English countryside. Inspired by the poster which calls for the death sentence of Bill (William) Posters, a working class man like himself and his heroic tales in a foreign country, Dawley sets out on a journey of self-discovery, leaving his wife and children behind. The novel never exposes Bill Posters' crime but it is insinuated that he became an enemy of the state for joining up an insurgent group abroad. It is a foreshadowing of Frank Dawley taking part in the national liberation movement in Algeria. While in Spain, Frank meets Shelley Jones, an American who is an ardent believer in revolutionary ideals and who has been involved in the guerrilla wars in Morocco and Algeria. He invites Frank to participate in the liberation war in Algeria. This book was published in 1965, four years after his Malayan novel *Key to the Door* was published. The sequel to the novel, *A Tree on Fire* (1967) introduces us to the Handley family. Albert Handley is the head of the household and is a friend of Frank. He is an artist who paints abstract landscapes of the devastations of war. His brother John Handley, like Sillitoe, served in Malaya in the signals division of the army in the Second World War. During the war, he was captured by the Japanese and was interned at the prisoner of war camp in Changi, Singapore. In Algeria, Frank sees the realities of war and colonialism. He witnesses malnourished Algerian children living in makeshift tents. He also observes widespread poverty among the Algerian people. Meanwhile the Algerians in the FLN appreciate Shelley and Frank's help but inform them that they will not get any position in the provisional Algerian government when

they attain independence from the French. It leads Frank to question the ultimate end of revolutions and his purpose being in Algeria. When John Handley sets out on a journey looking for Frank in Algeria, the conditions of the war there takes a toll on his mental health, driving him to commit suicide. The novel also culminates in the death of Shelley while in combat with French forces. The novel was published two years shortly after the first instalment. It is followed by the publication of the final instalment of the Frank Dawley series in 1974, *The Flame of Life*, about a seven year gap after the second book was published. Sillitoe explains in the author's note to the 1976 Wyndham Publications Limited edition that the delay in the publication of the novel was due to his commitments writing two anthologies of short stories, two screenplays, a volume of poems and three novels.[521] Similar with *A Tree on Fire*, *The Flame of Life* still revolves around the Handley family where their immediate and extended family members are known as 'the community'. In the final book, Frank Dawley has returned from Algeria to join the Handley household. The Handley community experiments with their desired form of government before they could apply it to the British society. As the novel states, the community looks to be a 'test of adaptability – as befitted theoreticians of guerrilla warfare and addicts of the Handley way of life.'[522] The community aims to stage a social revolution in England through guerrilla warfare, inspired by Communist movements in China and Russia. The novel ends with the Handley family reassessing their stance on the revolution as they read the letter from John Handley regarding the ugliness of civil wars and colonialism. Frank then publishes a book about his experiences in Algeria and gives lectures about them in universities.

[521] Alan Sillitoe, 'Author's Notes', *The Flame of Life* (London, Wyndham Publications Ltd, 1976), p. 5.
[522] Sillitoe, *The Flame of Life*, p. 61.

Finally, in light of the Trilogy's contextualisation, it should be noted that despite Sillitoe's vivid descriptions of the Algerian desert landscape and politics, he never personally set foot in the country. Therefore, a lot of the local details in the Trilogy were drawn from Sillitoe's residence in another former French colony Tangier, Morocco, where he stayed intermittently from 1960 until 1962. Sillitoe's biographer, Richard Bradford posits in *The Life of a Long-Distance Writer* (2008) that the inspiration for the Frank Dawley novels sprang from his time in Tangier and his visit to the Soviet Union. It also emerged as Bradford indicates, from the tensions resulting from Sillitoe's 'contradictory political beliefs' at the time.[523] Another aspect of the Trilogy is the account of foreign fighters such as Frank Dawley and Shelley Jones combatting with French colonialists alongside the FLN in Algeria. This account is purely Sillitoe's fictional invention as there is no evidence that it actually occurred. This brings to the point that it is more likely that Sillitoe modelled the foreign fighters in the FLN on the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War (1936–9).

Algeria's Bloody Road to Independence

The fact that Sillitoe made a decision to write a Trilogy set in the backdrop of the Algerian war of independence (1954–62) is significant in signalling the gradual dismantling of European empires. Algeria as pointed out by John P. Entellis, was referred to as the "Mecca of the revolutionaries".[524] It became the main inspiration for anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa in the 1960s and the 1970s. In the article 'Rethinking the Cold War and Decolonization: The Grand Strategy of the Algeria War of Independence' (2001), Matthew Connelly enumerates how the

[523] Richard Bradford, *The Life of a Long-Distance Writer: The Biography of Alan Sillitoe* (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2008), p. 194.
[524] John P. Entellis, *Algeria: The Revolution Institutionalized* (Kent: Croom Helm Ltd., 1986; repr. Oxon: Routledge, 2016), p. 189.

Algerian provisional government strategically 'harness[ed] the Cold War' to amplify international support and put pressure on the French colonial government of Algeria in order to grant them independence.[525] In the article, Connelly explains the Algerian provisional government's capitalisation on the rivalry between the world superpowers – the Sino-Soviet alliance as opposed to the United States and their allies, where they have numerous times lobbied for the support of the Chinese and Soviets to back their national liberation struggles against the French. In 1965, three years since the collapse of French colonial rule in Algeria, Sillitoe published the first installation of the Frank Dawley Trilogy – *The Death of William Posters*. The novel centres on Frank Dawley's involvement with the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) during the 1954–62 Algerian war of independence against the French settlers, which also coincides with the period leading up to Malaya's independence in 1957. In 1954, soon after the French were driven from Indochina, the FLN began its campaign to expel the French settlers and achieve independence, so began a wave of terror and violence that would only end in 1962 when the FLN was finally victorious. Unlike British colonial rule in Malaya, the Algerians had to contend with a large number of French settlers, the *pied noirs* who had absolutely taken control of Algeria politically and economically while barring the Algerian Muslims from voting in the elections. Massacres took place on both sides during Algeria's struggle for independence. Groups of *pied noirs* and pro-French Harki-Algerians were attacked by the FLN and the French military responded in kind by torturing Algerian civilians.[526]

[525] Matthew Connelly, 'Rethinking the Cold War and Decolonization: The Grand Strategy of the Algerian War for Independence', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33.2 (2001), 221–45.
[526] The casualties in the aftermath of the Algerian war of independence amassed to 'hundreds and thousands of Algerians [who were] killed', the deaths of 20,000 French soldiers and 'almost one million' *pied noirs* fled Algeria. See Duncan Hill, 'Algerian War of Independence 1954–1962' in

Resisting British 'Middle-Brow' Decolonisation Literature

> 'A writer should not surrender to the sail-trimming of editorial readers who want to guide him or her towards middle-brow best-sellers or, as in these days, the kind of book they think likely to win a literary prize.'[527]
>
> - Alan Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour* (1995), p. 239.

Sillitoe's scathing remarks on book editors in the quotation above shows his refusal to produce the kind of writing catered to 'middle-brow' audiences and to have the unadulterated voice in them redacted by the 'sail-trimmings' of editors. It is also this belligerent attitude against appeasing bourgeois readers that Sillitoe similarly undertook in his approach of writing decolonisation fiction, which we will observe, are characteristically unapologetic of the loss of the British Empire. Whereas we saw earlier in Chapter 3 where Burgess writes of Malaya's decolonisation and the dwindling Empire with undertones of dejection, in a manner Paul Gilroy describes as resisting 'postcolonial melancholia', Sillitoe's novels however had his protagonists unabashedly showing their support for the anti-imperialist resistance groups in Malaya as well as Algeria.

To begin with, I would like to draw attention to Sillitoe's derivation of the coin word 'capitalist-imperialism' from Lenin's seminal 1917 publication *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* in his Algerian novel, *The Flame of Life* (1974). In the context of Lenin's usage of the term 'capitalist imperialism', he writes: '[C]apitalism

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Chronicle of War: 1914 to the Present Day (Hertfordshire: Transatlantic Press, 2009), pp. 184–5 (p. 185).

[527] Alan Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour*, p. 239.

only became *capitalist imperialism* at a definite and very high stage of its development, when certain of its fundamental attributes began to be transformed into their opposites.'[528] He states that imperialism is the 'monopoly stage' of capitalism because it is the opposite of what it sets out to be, which was to ensure free competition in international trade, and hence causing asymmetrical economic developments in the metropolitan centre of the Empire and the peripheral territories—a situation Leon Trotsky terms 'uneven development.'[529] Malaysian historian Mohamed Ali Haniffa for instance points out in his article 'Darah dan Airmata Bekor' ('Blood and Tears of Bekor', 2016) that the economic activities of the Malay community in the rural areas under British rule was left far behind the Chinese and Indian communities in the urban areas and rubber estates, leading to unequal distribution of wealth among the Malayans.[530] Another Malaysian historian Khoo Kay Kim also points out that the economic and technological developments in Malaya at the time of British administration were mostly concentrated on the west coast areas of Peninsula Malaya, such as Perak and Selangor where natural resources were abundant, while simultaneously leaving the east coast states of Terengganu, Kelantan and Pahang underdeveloped.[531] Sillitoe's protagonists, who like Sillitoe are either a conscript or a factory worker, are cognizant of such imbalanced economic progress in colonies such as Malaya and Algeria created by imperial policies. As we will observe in *Key to the Door* (1961), *The Death of William Posters* (1965), *The Tree on Fire* (1967) and *The Flame of Life* (1974), they are replete with instances of

[528] Vladimir I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Petrograd: Zhizn i Znaniye, 1917; repr. London: Penguin Books, 2010), p. 58. [Emphasis added].
[529] Lenin, p. 58. See Leon Trotsky, 'Results and Prospects', in *'The Permanent Revolution' and 'Results and Prospects'* (Washington: Red Letter Press, 2010), pp. 162–3.
[530] Mohamed Ali Haniffa, 'Darah dan Airmata Bekor: Mengimbau Kembali Peristiwa 6 Mac 1946' ('Blood and Tears of Bekor: Remembering the Event of 6 March 1946'), *SEJARAH: Journal of the Department of History*, 25.1 (2016), 66–80 (pp. 65–6). Bekor is also written as Bikaw in British official documents of Malaya.
[531] Khoo, 'The Malay Society', p. 180.

the central characters corralling an international co-operation between the metropolitan workers and the colonised people, both identified as the disadvantaged groups in the global capitalist-imperialist system. In the words of Frank Dawley in *The Flame of Life*, an 'international socialist brotherhood of man' could 'cure the evils and inefficiencies of capitalist-imperialism'.[532] Frank's proclamation resonates with the solutions to the problems of the capital proposed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.[533]

One of the noticeable things about Sillitoe's Malayan novels *The Key to the Door* (1961) and *The Open Door* (1989) is that they contain sporadic depictions of nationalist movements against British imperialism, giving the impression that Sillitoe's fiction tends to mute the urgencies of decolonisation. This has been addressed by Zawiah Yahya in *Resisting Colonialist Discouse* (2003) where she states: 'This […] political education [awareness], fills [Brian Seaton] with great resentment against the British political and social system, but this is about all the awareness of colonialism as a political ideology there is in the novel. The country called Malaya is incidental.'[534] However, Sillitoe's Frank Dawley Trilogy proves the contrary, which is why they should be read as an accompaniment to his Malayan novels, in that the criticisms against colonialism in them are more pronounced. Additionally, they also portray a sense of camaraderie between the British working class and the colonial subjects. *The Tree on Fire* (1967) for a start is teeming with anti-colonial sentiments. In the novel, when Sillitoe's protagonist Frank Dawley

[532] For the context of the quotation, see Sillitoe, *The Flame of Life*, p. 114.
[533] See Erica Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms: A Post-Communist View from Marx and Engels* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965; repr. London: Verso, 2018). Benner notes that although Marx and Engels 'offered no similar programme [like the Irish question] for […] non-European colonies, [they] did note some general features of colonialism which militated against the emergence of supportive alliances between metropolitan workers and colonized peoples' (pp. 186–7).
[534] Zawiah Yahya, *Resisting Colonialist Discourse* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia , 2003), p. 77.

begins questioning his purpose being in Algeria to join the ranks of the FLN, one of the reasons he thinks of is that he 'wanted to fight [for the Algerians] so that those considered the exploited and downtrodden could stand up to the so-called master races of Europe.'[535] The statement is clearly a criticism not only of French colonisation of Algeria but all European colonial powers including the British, Dutch and Belgians. Simultaneously, it also shows a message of empowerment and a spirit of brotherhood for the 'exploited and downtrodden', evidently referring to the colonised people of Algeria and other colonised nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In the subsequent novel, *The Flame of Life* (1974), Frank continues to show the spirit of camaraderie with the colonised people of the Third World when he comments '[u]nderprivileged people in underdeveloped countries are fighting for the opportunity to pull themselves up.'[536] The statement indicates Frank's recognition of the underprivileged colonised people's struggle to improve their lives, in the same manner the metropolitan working class people are. Frank is not the only protagonist in the Frank Dawley Trilogy that is critical of imperialism. Another main character that similarly has disparaging remarks on colonialism as Frank is John Handley, an army veteran who served in Malaya in the Second World War. In *A Tree on Fire* (1967) when John Handley experiences first-hand the devastations and brutalities caused by the French massacres of Algerian people, John notes:

> The country he was born in had, in the final throes of imperial rottenness, sent him to Malaya to fight for the retention of greedy mercantile piracy that he had no heart for and could never believe in. He had seen men starved and tortured to death – human, pathetic, mercy-pleading men – for wicked

[535] Alan Sillitoe, *A Tree on Fire* (London: Macmillan & Company, 1967; repr. London: Grafton Books, 1986), p. 184.
[536] Sillitoe, *The Flame of Life*, p. 152.

> principles, a policy of grab-all and keep-all by the free use of men's backs and blood.[537]

John's recollections of Malaya during the Second World War at the time when he was sent there to stave the Japanese off of one of Britain's prized colonial possessions, is reminiscent of the capitalist aspect of imperialism that Lenin highlighted in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917). John describes the British Empire's mobilisation of troops in Malaya to reclaim it as their territory a 'retention of greedy mercantile piracy' which he saw both the Japanese and the British guilty of. There is also an underlying tone suggesting capitalist-imperialist's exploitation of the colonised people as indentured labourers to work in their plantations and soldiers posted to defend the empire in the colonies as a kind of slavery, which he encapsulates as 'a policy of grab-all and keep-all by the free use of men's backs and blood.'[538] John's disparaging of colonialism and its link with capitalism continues in *The Flame of Life* (1974) where he states in his suicide letter addressed to Frank and the Handley family: 'The "involvements" in Africa and Asia are terrible for those deliberate victims stricken by these "defenders" from technologically superior nations.'[539] The statement is especially critical of the French colonisation of Africa and Asia that uses their 'technologically superior' artillery to subdue their subjects from rebelling against their rule. At the same time, John is also critical of the British government's involvement in these imperial wars abroad. He states: 'Each bomb has my name on it, but if I am dead it won't have, because my name will no longer exist.'[540]

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[537] Sillitoe, *A Tree on Fire*, p. 354.
[538] Sillitoe, *A Tree on Fire*, p. 354.
[539] Sillitoe, *The Flame of Life*, p. 278.
[540] Sillitoe, *The Flame of Life*, p. 280.

As I have argued earlier in the reading of Sillitoe's fiction, despite the scant treatment of decolonisation in his Malayan novels, there is indeed more substantial critique of colonialism in his Frank Dawley Trilogy. On top of that, there is also recognition for an alliance between the colonised people in the peripheral territories and the metropolitan working class. However, when examining the nationalist movements in Malaya particularly in his novel *Key to the Door* (1961), there is considerable silence on Malay nationalism which was as anti-imperialist as the Malayan Communists. In fact, Malayan Communism is given more coverage in the book than Malay nationalism. This was in fact pointed out by Burgess in his interview with Thomas Churchill where he states: 'You see […], I get mad at the man [Sillitoe] who was so full of humility, *so* interested in the people. He never learned the bloody language even; he never even *talked* with the Malays. He never knew what was going in the Malay's mind.'[541] In the article 'Malay Society', Khoo Kay Kim notes that prior to 1874, there was already a growth of Malay intelligentsia and Malay nationalism in the least developed east coast states of Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan. They were, as Khoo indicates, Malays of non-elite background mostly educated in Malay religious schools, private schools and government Malay schools and were responsible for leading the anti-colonial movements among the Malay society in Peninsula Malaya. Khoo explains:

> The British government was quick to pounce on Malay leaders whom they considered 'deviants'. Hence, although the Arabic and the Malay intelligentsia began their *perjuangan* [struggle] earlier than did the Malay

[541] Thomas Churchill, 'Going on Writing Till Ninety or One Hundred', p. 16. [Emphasis original].

> bureaucrats, their success was comparably negligible because they had always to tread with caution owing to the suppressive measures of the government. […] Consequently, the non-English educated were distrusted especially those with strong religious feelings because their thinking […] did not harmonise with the British pattern of thought and action; their sympathies tended to veer towards the Middle East or Indonesia. On the contrary, the British felt they knew the Malay bureaucrats, many of whom they had groomed in the Malay College Kuala Kangsar; others had been carefully selected from among members of the royalty to assist in the administration of the country and were therefore not likely to go off in a tangent.[542]

The passage from Khoo's article is telling of the control the British colonial administration had on 'deviant' Malay leaders, whom they considered extremists and whose activities and influences in the media had to be suppressed. It also indicates the reason why when Malay nationalism is concerned; it is most often associated with the leadership by Malay bureaucrats, who were English educated. Therefore, Sillitoe who was not familiar with Malay politics and had no access to their literature was of the belief that Malay nationalism was a movement only led by elite Malays – a class his protagonists are anathema to. It should also be noted that while these radical Malay groups were banned from forming their political parties, the Malayan Communist Party who were allies of the British government in the Second World War were at one time a legal political party.[543] Therefore, when anti-colonial movements were concerned, it would seem as if the Malayan Communist Party were

[542] Khoo Kay Kim, 'Malay Society', pp. 197–8.
[543] The Malayan Communist Party was a legal political party from the 1930s under the British colonial administration until 1948 when they were then banned. See *Dialogues with Chin Peng: New Light on the Malayan Communist Party*, ed. by C.C. Chin and Karl Hack (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005), p. 284.

at the forefront when in actuality, this was because they were one of the few political parties in Malaya that were allowed to operate legally by the British government. On the other hand, the non-elite Malay nationalist movements frustrated by the British authorities' clampdowns of their political activities had to find other avenues to get their grievances heard. When the Malayan Union was declared in 1946 which inexorably reduced the political power of the Malay monarchy, they managed to find a common ground with the Malay bureaucrats in protecting the status of Islam in the country and restoring the power of the Malay sultans. This was what led to the alliance made between the non-elite and elite Malay nationalists in the move towards attaining independence from the British. However as it is observed, Sillitoe's *Key to the Door* (1961) which is heavily concentrated on the Malayan Communists never really explores the context of Malay nationalism. The closest reference to it albeit limited is expressed by Baker, Brian's friend where he indicates:

> [I]f anyone should rule Malaya, it should be the Malays. They were already a long way to getting self-government anyway, though of course the Chinese would have to have a hand in it because they outnumbered other races in the peninsula and were the brain of the country.[544]

It is seen from the excerpt that although Baker does have some points, it reveals his lack of knowledge in Malaya's history and politics. While Baker mentions that the Malays should rule Malaya and that they were a 'long way to getting self-government', he does not explain that the reason for it was because they are the indigenous people and the majority population of Malaya and have fought to remove

[544] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 375.

colonisers from their lands since 1511.[545] Moreover, there is also an inaccuracy in his statistical gestation of the Chinese population outnumbering other races in Peninsula Malaya. The 1947 census states that the Chinese, the largest minority group in Malaya accounted for 38.4% compared to the Malays consisting of 49.5% of the total population.[546] Furthermore, to indicate that the Chinese are the 'brain' of the country is also undermining the contributions of the other Malayans from different ethnic groups that made the country prosperous together.

To put it into perspective, as we have seen earlier in Sillitoe's decolonisation novels, his protagonists do extend their sympathy towards the colonised people and show support for their liberation movements against their colonisers. However, at the same time, in spite of Sillitoe's writing against the grain of mainstream decolonisation literature, his fictional characters reveal a lack of awareness in the dynamics of Malaya's political history and when they do discuss it, it somehow falls short. Having said that, I would like to bring attention to my final point which is while Sillitoe's decolonisation novels are set to be anti-colonial and anti-bourgeois in the beginning, they end by dismantling even the socialist-communist construct. Sillitoe's Frank Dawley Trilogy for instance interrogates the viability of a Communist revolution as the route to take for a third world nation looking to attain independence. This theme also recurs in his Malayan novel *Last Loves* (1990), where the protagonist, George Rhoads, questions the terrorisation methods used by the Malayan Communists on British government servants and planters, as well as Malayan civilians to get into power. An excerpt from the novel depicts George's

[545] 1511 marks the year when the Malay Empire of Malacca fell to the Portuguese, followed by its conquest by the Dutch in 1641, 1786 by the British, 1941 by the Japanese and 1945 by the British again.
[546] Hwang, p. 54.

thoughts as he and his friend Bernard are being ambushed by the Communists in the jungle: 'George swearing hot cinders till Bernard got up and they fired like the rest but from better cover at the bandits [the Malayan Communists] trying to break out of the forest so as to terrorize innocent people into giving them support.'[547] The Frank Dawley novels may concentrate on the Algerian liberation movement's struggles in eliminating French colonialists through guerrilla warfare. However, when inspected closely, it becomes clearer that Sillitoe draws inspiration for the Algerian FLN guerrilla tactics from the Malayan Communists and that they really are a thinly veiled criticism of the Communists' use of military strategems in coercing Malayan civilians to accept Communist rule over Malaya. This is because as I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, Sillitoe never personally went to Algeria.[548] The closest point of reference to Algeria for his work would have been Morocco, where he briefly resided from 1960 to 1962.[549] The bulk of details on the FLN's devise of guerrilla strategies on the French forces in the Trilogy are mostly drawn from the Malayan Communists, which Sillitoe was more familiar with having done his national service in Malaya (1947–8). This is evident in the novel *A Tree on Fire* (1967) where one of the characters, Shelley Jones, an American revolutionary fighter who joins the FLN with Frank Dawley, treats 'Mao Tse Tung [Zedong]'s treatise on protracted warfare' or *On Guerrilla Warfare* (1937) like a bible.[550] It is not

[547] Sillitoe, *Last Loves*, p. 29.

[548] Please refer to pp. 190–3 of this chapter under the sub-heading 'A Brief Background of the Frank Dawley Trilogy and its Contextualisation.' Frank Dawley's involvement with the FLN in Algeria is coincidentally similar to Frantz Fanon's association with the FLN's political activities and his support for the Algerian war of independence from France. I have scoured through Alan Sillitoe's autobiography, biography, interviews and essays to find out whether he had read Fanon's work and found no evidence to support this.

[549] Sillitoe, his wife Ruth Fainlight and his son David lived in Tangier, Morocco intermittently from 1960 to 1962 as indicated on the www.paulbowles.org website. Paul Bowles (1910–1999) is an American travel writer and composer. He and his wife Jane were friends to the Sillitoes during their stay in Tangier. See 'Alan Sillitoe, Ruth Fainlight, Jane and Paul Bowles', <http://www.paulbowles.org/sillitoefainlightbowles.html> [accessed 27 May 2019]

[550] Sillitoe, *A Tree on Fire*, p. 165.

coincidental that Chin Peng, the secretary-general of the Malayan Communist Party, was similarly inspired by the book as indicated in his autobiography *Alias Chin Peng* (2003): 'Our guerrilla army would follow Mao [Zedong]'s blueprint for revolutionary warfare to the letter.'[551] The novel also criticises revolutions through guerrilla warfare. In one of the scenes of the novel, Frank Dawley reads the newspapers about the Algerian 'moudjahid'(mujahideen) which bears similarities to the chaos the Malayan Communists committed on the Malayan civilians:

> 'The *Moudjahid* is the one who cuts telegraph-wires, derails a train, burns down the house of the colonialist farmer. Every peaceful means to free ourselves from colonialism has been tried, and all that is left is to take up arms in order to recover liberty and independence […] The *Moudjahid* in uniform operates in the mountains and wilderness. The *Moussebelines* – those without uniform – operate in the towns and villages, accomplish their missions in the streets, in cafes, cinemas, on the roads, in public gardens. They hunt down informers and torturers. They destroy police stations and guard-posts.'[552]

The descriptions of the Algerian *Moudjahid* and *Moussebelines* in *A Tree on Fire* (1967) one should note, have uncanny resemblances to the military wing of the Malayan Communists – the MRLA (Malayan Races Liberation Army) and the *Min Yuen*, the Communist civilian movement who act as intelligence gatherers and suppliers for the Communists in the jungle. Like the *Moudjahid* in the novel, the armed forces of the Malayan Communists wore uniforms and like the *Moussebelines*,

[551] Chin Peng, p. 238.
[552] Sillitoe, *A Tree on Fire*, pp. 304–5.

the *Min Yuen* do not wear uniforms and operate in towns and villages, posing as school teachers, clerks and shopkeepers, acting as informants for the guerrilla army. The acts of the *moudjahid* cutting telegraph wires and derailing trains are parallel to the events of the Malayan Emergency in *Key to the Door* (1961) especially when Brian reads a newspaper report in the *Straits Times* about communists in their jungle green khakis and armed with Sten guns, ambushing a village in Mentakab, and cutting off a village's telephone wires in Mentakab.[553] The derailing of trains is also mentioned in the same novel where a sergeant informs Brian that the train Brian was supposed to get on was 'machine-gunned' by the Malayan communists.[554] While the Malayan Communists did not burn down a colonialist farmer's house, there were incidents in 1946 where villagers' houses were torched for refusing to accept Communist rule of Malaya.[555] Furthermore, while the sentence '[e]very peaceful means to free ourselves from colonialism has been tried, and all that is left is to take up arms in order to recover liberty and independence' is a reference to ambushes launched by the FLN on the French colonial forces, it could also be read as a veiled criticism of the Malayan Communists' use of arms on innocent Malayan civilians. As Len Knotman, Brian Seaton's colleague in the Air Force Signals division points out in *The Open Door* (1989) that the Malayan Communists have no respect for the individual.[556] John Handley addresses the problem of revolution that has no peaceful end in *The Flame of Life* (1974), clearly a critique of the violent route the Malayan Communists in their claim to liberate Malaya from the British Empire. He states: '[A revolution] must begin in peace and end in peace. A revolution that does not lead to

[553] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 406.
[554] Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, p. 443.
[555] See Mohamed Ali Haniffa, 'Darah dan Airmata Bekor (Blood and Tears of Bekor)', p. 74.
[556] Sillitoe, *The Open Door*, p. 194.

real equality and real freedom is counter-revolutionary.'[557] As I have pointed out earlier, even as Sillitoe's decolonisation novels set forth to condemn colonialism and the imperial ruling elites, they also criticise the Communists' violent revolutionary methods to attain independence in third world nations. Sillitoe's central characters display political maturation in assessing not only the injustices and damages that occur from the effects of colonialism, but also from Cold War Sino-Soviet interference in the politics of emerging independent nations.

In retrospect, Sillitoe's Malayan fiction is considered 'resistance writing'. It resists conforming to both the dominant British definition of patriotism and the official colonial narrative: that the Malayan Communists were terrorists, enemies to both the British and Malayans. His narratives and protagonists push back at these official stories in a culturally subversive way. They reject conforming to a particular institution, system, and political ideology. His central characters in the novels formulate their own political thoughts independent of the dictates of society. His novels also do not hold back in showing support for anti-colonial insurgencies in the peripheral colonies. This is in contrast to Burgess's Malayan Trilogy where the realities of Malayan's decolonisation and Britain's imperial decline are orchestrated with undertones of dejection. Sillitoe's novels also portray a sense of camaraderie between the British working class and Britain's colonial subjects. Sillitoe's decolonisation novels, especially the later ones, are not only critical of colonialism and the imperial ruling elites but also of socialism.

[557] Sillitoe, *The Flame of Life*, p. 281.

CHAPTER 5
Burgess's Comical Treatment of the Malayan Emergency and Decolonisation

This chapter focuses on Burgess's writing of the Malayan Emergency and decolonisation process in comparison to Sillitoe's treatment of the events in his fiction. In this chapter, I assess Burgess's comedic approach to the two events in the Malayan Trilogy. It looks at the functions of comedy in his narratives that serve to palliate the violent realities of the Malayan Emergency and compensate for a British imbalance in adapting to change in trying to come to terms with British withdrawal from Malaya and its decline in imperial status.

5.1 The Curious Case of Burgess's Comedic Treatment of the Malayan Emergency

> [Burgess's Malayan] novels are full of good-natured bungling and slapstick routines. What is curiously absent in the three novels is any serious treatment of the anti-British insurgency that was raging in [Malaya] in the 1950s. The Malayan Trilogy does register the existence of the ongoing [Communist] guerrilla war, but only obliquely and never without comedy.[558]

In Chapter 4, I noted that Sillitoe does not shy away from capturing the violent atmosphere of the Malayan Emergency in his fiction. In the chapter, I posited that Sillitoe treats the Communist rebellion with a degree of seriousness in his novels, meticulously reconstructing the zeitgeist of 1947–8 Malaya as a country at war, with images of barbed wire stretched across the landscape, heavy military presence,

[558] Chiu Man-Yin, 'Violence and Comedy: The Malayan Emergency in the Malaysian Novels of Lloyd Fernando and Anthony Burgess's, *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies*, 2.1–2 (2013), 87–91 (p. 90).

roadblocks, and terrain scattered with plantation managers' bungalows that were converted into miniature fortresses. The novel *Key to the Door* (1961) particularly captures the presentiment of death through his protagonist Brian Seaton who, as we have seen in the novel, fears that he would be sniped at by the Malayan Communists while on duty, or captured in a sudden ambush while on a jungle patrol. Like Sillitoe's Malayan Emergency texts, Burgess's Trilogy namely *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) and *Beds in the East* (1959) are also set against the same backdrop of the turbulent period of Malayan history, albeit at a later phase of the conflict in 1954–5, where the threats from the Malayan Communists on civilians and the security forces were not as severe as its early breakouts. To recapitulate, as I have pointed out earlier in the introduction, there were three significant events at the time of Burgess's residence in Malaya from 1954 to 1955. The first event was the Malayanisation programme initiated by then High Commissioner, General Templer, which involved training and appointing Malayan civil servants in place of British civil servants who were returning to Britain in the years leading up to Malaya's independence. The second event was the first Malayan General Elections in 1955 which resulted in the victory of the Alliance Party, Malaya's Conservative party made up of politicians educated in British schools. Finally, the third event which is referred to in Burgess's Malayan Trilogy is the 1955 Baling Talks—a negotiation deal between the provisional Malayan government and leaders of the Malayan Communist Party, which failed to reach an agreement. In examining Burgess's treatment of the Malayan Emergency in his novels, it is therefore necessary to discuss them in the context of these three events that I have mentioned. As Chiu Man-Yin highlights in the quotation from his journal article 'Violence and Comedy: The Malayan Emergency in the Malaysian Novels of Lloyd

Fernando and Anthony Burgess' (2013), while Burgess's Malayan novels register the existence of the Malayan Communists' attempted coup d'état against the British colonial government, it is curiously given a comical treatment. Simultaneously, Chiu also indicates the jarring absence of the novels' 'serious treatment' of the Malayan Emergency that make up one of the many episodes of anti-colonial movements in Malaya.[559]

In a 1971 interview with Thomas Churchill for *The Malahat Review*, Burgess remarks on his unintentional oscillation into comedy when producing novels of a weighty subject ranging from those addressing theology (*Devil of a State*, 1961); to world events such as the Cold War (*Tremor of Intent*, 1966; and *Honey for the Bears*, 1963) and decolonisation (*The Malayan Trilogy*, 1956–9); to the dystopian future (*The Wanting Seed*, 1962), calling himself a 'natural clown' in writing. He states: 'I've never deliberately set down to write a funny novel, but if I think of working on a plot seriously, comedy breaks in. I exploit coincidence and exaggeration […] as if a clown wanted to play Hamlet. I'm a natural clown, […] in writing.'[560] The statement from Burgess contains some key elements to understanding his comedic overtures in his work, in principal his exploitation of coincidence and exaggeration, in addition to comparing the narrative voice to that of a clown. His novels are inundated with comedy of circumstances or as Hilary P. Dannenburg terms it, 'poetics of coincidence' – a literary device which depicts the intersection of characters from different time and space within the same fictional world.[561] An instance where Burgess does this is seen in *Time for a Tiger* (1956). In the novel, he sets up the plot

[559] Chiu, 'Violence and Comedy', p. 90.
[560] Churchill, 'Going on Writing', in *Conversations with Anthony Burgess*, p. 6.
[561] I borrow the term 'poetics of coincidence' from Hilary P. Dannenburg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction* (Nebraska: The University of Nebraska, 2008), p. 89.

to bring together the four main characters Victor Crabbe, Fenella Crabbe, Alladad Khan and Nabby Adams, who otherwise would not have crossed paths, in a stylised providence of fate. The coincidence of their union is brought about at the time when Fenella coaxes her husband Victor who has a fear of driving into purchasing a car that comes with a chauffeur. At the same time, Nabby the alcoholic police officer receives an offer to buy a '52 Abelard from a planter, who is losing money in a gamble at the club he attends with his Indian colleague, Alladad. Alladad on the other hand, who is love-struck by Fenella, is willing to be the driver for the Crabbes without expecting any payment.[562] Hence, in the fictional world of Kuala Hantu in *Time for a Tiger*, the ridiculous circumstance where the paths of Victor, Fenella, Alladad and Nabby converge, is comical. Burgess does not only employ poetics of coincidence for comedic effect in his narratives. He also uses exaggerations, and this corresponds to the clown's narrative voice. In Chapter 3, I argued that Burgess's minor character Ibrahim in *Time for a Tiger* (1956) plays a bigger role than simply as the servant and cook to the protagonist of the Malayan Trilogy, Victor Crabbe. Ibrahim, as I assert in the chapter, is inspired by the hermaphrodite clown character Semar, who provides comic relief and functions as a mediator between the divine world and the underworld in traditional Malay and Javanese epic shadow puppet plays.[563] In the Malay shadow puppet theatre, Semar goes by the name Pak Dogol.[564] However, for the purpose of clarification, I will be using the name Semar from this point onwards. Semar has exaggerated physical traits, speech and mannerisms, fitting for his role of injecting humour in an epic, serious play. He has long distended limbs,

[562] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, pp. 74–5.
[563] Please refer to p. 92 of Chapter 3 under the subheading 'Ibrahim and the Jungian Archetype of Hermaphroditism'.
[564] For further information on the significance of Semar also known as Pak Dogol in traditional Malay shadow plays, see Beth Osnes, *The Shadow Puppet Theatre of Malaysia: A Study of Wayang Kulit with Performance Scripts and Puppet Designs* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers (2010), p. 17. Osnes states that Semar and Pak Dogol are used in healing rituals.

protruding belly and rear, and has a high-pitched and distorted voice. Semar shares some similarities with the fool in Shakespeare's plays who seemingly appears unintelligent but actually exudes wisdom.[565] The connection between Burgess's clownish narrator in his Malayan Trilogy and Semar is further cemented in his interview with John Cullinan for the 1972 *The Paris Review* where he reveals: 'I've six years in the East but not greatly drawn to Eastern myths, except that of the endless Javanese shadow play, which is like [James Joyce's] *Finnegans Wake*.'[566] Of Semar, Burgess's final instalment of the Malayan Trilogy, *Beds in the East* (1959) describes him as having a 'priest-like' function: 'the comic intermediaries between the supernatural and sublunary worlds – the manipulation of which was his priest-like office.'[567] In light of Burgess's revelling in the Malay/Javanese shadow theatre, I propose reading his treatment of the Malayan Emergency in his novels akin to the appearance of Semar, invoking comic relief to defuse the violent realities of the insurgency.

'*Comédie humaine*'[568]: Burgess and the Comic Novels

> The primary task of the novel [is] to explain […] history [.] When Balzac undertook the *Comédie humaine* [sic] his aim was not merely to entertain, […] but to show […a]n interpretation of history [.] I am […] writ[ing] a novel which deals with the first century after the death of Christ. This will […] shock a lot of people. It is a comic novel. […] If one reads the acts of the

[565] An example is the fool in Shakespeare's *King Lear* (c.1608).
[566] John Cullinan, 'Dealing with the Hinterland of Consciousness', in *Conversations with Burgess*, p. 70.
[567] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, pp. 163–4.
[568] *La Comédie humaine* (1799–1850), translated as 'The Human Comedy' is Honoré de Balzac's collection of short stories and novels about the French society during the periods of the Bourbon Restoration (1815–30) and the July monarchy (1830–48).

> apostles [like] St. Luke [and] St. Paul, [they are] solemn characters, and the persecutions of the Christians are terrible. But look at it from another angle, you find it's rather comic. It's a comic study of human beings trying to adapt themselves to a *change*. [...I]t shows men trying to cope with problems and not succeeding very well […] like Charlie Chaplin.[569]

As Chiu points out, it is indeed a curious case that Burgess treats the Malayan Emergency in his fiction with humour. However, when examining his response to Pierre Joannon in a 1984 interview for the German-based journal *Fabula* in the quotation, and especially on how he views the funny side of the Roman persecution of Christians, his strategy of palliating catastrophic events with a touch of comedy may not be unusual after all. In popular culture, it is evocative of the *Blackadder II* episode 'Head' (1986) which takes a jab at the violent persecution of Catholics during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603). The episode looks at the queen's appointment of Lord Blackadder, played by Rowan Atkinson, to be the Head Executioner as well as a rather grim position she created – 'Minister for Religious Genocide'. Burgess's discourse on the comic novel is an acknowledgment of Joannon's commentary on the emergence of French historical literature in the market that attempts at humanising history. In the interview I excerpted, Burgess asserts that the fundamental purpose of the novel is to interpret history, drawing Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* ('The Human Comedy', 1799–1850) as a point of reference. The fact that Burgess cites *La Comédie humaine* to make comparisons with his own work, which would be titled *The Kingdom of the Wicked* and published a year later after the interview in 1985, is significant. Most of Balzac's short stories and novels

[569] Pierre Joannon, 'The Sense of an Audience', in *Conversations with Burgess*, p. 141. [Emphasis added]

which are set in the periods of the French Bourbon revolution (1814–30) and the July monarchy (1830–48), have a similar outcome where their central characters each have a grand scheme to accomplish but end up failing miserably. Some examples are '*Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*' ('The Unknown Masterpiece', 1831) about an artist who fails to complete the painting of his model due to his preoccupation with the detailing of her feet and '*Une ténébreuse affaire*' ('A Murky Business', 1841) about an unsuccessful plot to remove Napoleon from power. Inspired by Balzac's comedy of human deficiencies in realizing their lofty goals, Burgess notes that *The Kingdom of the Wicked* which takes place after the crucifixion of Christ, is a 'comic' novel and that it presents men as 'trying to cope with problems and not succeeding very well'.[570] He also indicates that the comedy is derived from human struggles of adapting to change. This statement is particularly important in discussing Burgess's comic novels in a climate of violence because the later phase of the Malayan Emergency in 1954–7 which Burgess's novels are set in signifies an upheaval in Malaya's politics as well as Britain's. It was a period where the British colonial administration of Malaya was in the process of transferring their power to the provisional Malayan government. Other British dependencies like Cyprus, Jamaica and Kenya were to follow suit soon after, each gaining their independence from the British Empire in 1960, 1962 and 1963 respectively. Moreover, at the time when Burgess published the Malayan Trilogy, there was the incident of the 1956 Suez crisis, an attempt for Israel, Britain and France to invade the Suez Canal to regain control of it. The Suez Crisis however, turned into a huge international debacle for Britain when the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Nations forced Britain to withdraw at the risk of American financial aid being cut. This episode

[570] Pierre Joannon, 'The Sense of an Audience', in *Conversations with Burgess*, p. 141.

marked the United States' ascendency to becoming a leading world superpower replacing Britain.[571] These changes especially in the accelerated process of decolonisation were proven unbearable for colonial officers like Burgess to cope and are underscored by the anxieties faced by the protagonist of his Malayan Trilogy – Victor Crabbe, who arrived in Malaya just when it was in its final years of British colonisation.

Coping Mechanism: Expunging Postcolonial Melancholia with Laughter

> We stand badly in need of novels…which show an understanding of the ideological hijack which has taken place so recently in this country [England], which can see its consequences in human terms and show that the appropriate response lies not merely in sorrow and anger, but in *mad, incredulous laughter*.[572]

In Chapter 3, I argue that the deferential response to change in the period leading up to decolonisation in Burgess's portrayal of Malaya in *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) and *Beds in the East* (1959) especially in their treatment of Malaya as a space of fatigue and non-event, is a sign of resistance to postcolonial melancholia, a concept Paul Gilroy derived from the 1967 seminal work of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen Kollektiven Verhaltens* ('The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective

[571] See p. 1077 of George C. Peden, 'Suez and Britain's Decline as a World Power', *The Historical Journal*, 55.4 (2012), 1073–1096, regarding British dependence on American financial aid after the Second World War and in repercussion, caused the decline of its imperial status.
[572] Jonathan Coe, *What a Carve Up!* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 277. [Emphasis added].

Behaviour').[573] In essence, Gilroy's postcolonial melancholia stems from a condition where a former colonialist nation is unable to mourn and come to terms with the loss of its former empire's prestige. His work *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) notably makes a direct reference to Britain's imperial past where the melancholic sentiments in post-war British literature are expressed in the forms of lethargy, depression and self-loathing, when writing about anti-colonial uprisings in the dependent territories and the retreat from the empire. He lists the work of Peter Ackroyd's *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination* (2002) and Roger Scruton's *England: An Elegy* (2000) as some examples that display conditions of postcolonial melancholia although most examples he draws from are non-fiction.[574] Gilroy states: 'Once the history of the empire became a source of discomfort, shame, and perplexity, its complexities and ambiguities were readily set aside. Rather than work through those feelings, that unsettling history was diminished, denied, and then, […] actively forgotten.'[575] Gilroy demonstrates that part of the reason for the bulk of cultural amnesia in Britain's history which mostly ignores events after the Second World War in faraway colonies like Malaya, Cyprus and Kenya is because they are a reminder of the disintegrating Empire. Their significance is reduced to the 'small wars' fought for nations that were about to become independent states.[576] This inability to recuperate from the losses of imperial status and global economic power as a result of austerity measures are also partially struggles that deal with, as social psychologist Roy F. Baumeister puts it, an 'identity deficit', and in extension in the

[573] Please refer to Chapter 3 under the sub-heading 'Burgess's Portrayal of Malaya as the Fatigued and 'Unglamorous' East'. Gilroy indicates in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) that he was inspired by the Mitscherlichs' study of the inability of Holocaust war crime offenders to deal with their guilt. See Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 98.
[574] There is even a chapter on 'A note on English melancholy' in Ackroyd's *Albion* which laments on fallen civilisations. Gilroy mainly draws examples of postcolonial melancholia from non-fiction work.
[575] Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, p. 90.
[576] 'Small wars' is a term used by the 1940 United States Marine Corps Manual to describe unconventional and guerrilla warfare.

context that Gilroy defines, results in an 'increasingly brittle and empty national identity'.[577] However, as Gilroy asserts in 'The Closed Circle of Britain's Postcolonial Melancholia' (2011), it is not always the case that post-war British writers would cave in to melancholia in response to the collapse of the Empire. As suggested in the epigraph from Jonathon Coe's novel *What a Carve Up!* (1994), comedy can also function as a catharsis to a national identity deficit, where he states that the 'appropriate response [to the ruthless times] lies not merely in sorrow and anger but in *mad, incredulous laughter*'.[578] Like Coe's narrator, Burgess's anti-heroes and narrator also respond to the Malayan Emergency with jocular riposte, although amidst its burlesque *mise-en-scéne*, it betrays a trace of melancholy.

Saturating the Violent Realities of the Malayan Emergency with Comic Relief

> [Victor Crabbe] thought of Rivers, violent face contorted above the moustache which grew out of the lean British nose. Rivers now, on the boat, would be saying, "Lash them, beat them, flay them alive…." Was Rivers right? No, Rivers was not right. It was best not to wear oneself out with violence. The East would always present the calm face of faint astonishment, unmoved at the anger, not understanding the bitterness. That was why it was pointless to attempt to take any action at all against this young Chinese

[577] Roy F. Baumeister, *Identity: cultural change and the struggle for self* (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 212. See also Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, p. 106.

[578] Please see Paul Gilroy, 'The Closed Circle of Britain's Postcolonial Melancholia', in *The Literature of Melancholia: Early Modern to Postmodern*, ed. by Martin Middeke and Christina Wald (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 187– 204 (pp. 198 – 9). See also Coe, *What a Carve Up!*, p. 277. *What a Carve Up!* is a novel set in the late 1980s to early 1990s Britain. It is a satire of Margaret Thatcher's administration.

> [Communist] betrayer, to protest any further to Boothby. A pattern would work itself out.[579]

Victor Crabbe's internal monologue in the quotation from *Time for a Tiger* (1956) above presages the Malayan Trilogy's strategy of deflecting the carnage of the Communist insurgency, with the characters' comedy of errors. Earlier on in the novel, Victor suspects one of his students, Shiu Hung, a Malayan born Chinese, of organising clandestine meetings in the dormitories, to indoctrinate his schoolmates with Communist ideologies, and attempts to draw a confession out of him. Wary that the school grounds are being used by Shiu Hung to recruit members into joining the Communist Youth club, Victor arranges to meet the principal of the school, Boothby, to persuade him to monitor Shiu Hung's activities. Initially, it seemed that Victor was close to catching the Communist informant at the school, until he fumbles in the process of eliciting information from Shiu Hung and accidentally implicates himself as the guilty party, making him appear as the one indoctrinating Shiu Hung with Communism instead. Taking advantage of Victor's clumsy interrogation method, Shiu Hung writes a letter of complaint to Boothby informing him that Victor was a Communist sympathiser and was attempting to influence him into recognising the Communist Party. As a result of Victor's own maladroitness, Boothby is unable to take Victor seriously and proceeds to rebuke him, even accusing him of being paranoid. What follows after is the monologue that conjures up the image of confronting the young Communist Shiu Hung with violence as he visualises what Rivers, the planter would do: '"Lash them, beat them, flay them alive"' before conceding to the pointlessness of 'wear[ing] oneself out with violence', and

[579] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, pp. 165–6.

insinuating that in the East, people are undeterred by sudden outbursts of anger, indicating: 'The East would always present that calm face of faint astonishment, unmoved at the anger, not understanding the bitterness.'[580] In the epigraph, we see Victor making an excuse for his miscommunication with Shiu Hung and arguing that it is useless to take any actions against him, before we see him ultimately resigning to fate.

Burgess presents Victor Crabbe as a tragic character that is burdened by his past guilt—his younger self's dedication for a Communist utopia, which was to be part of his undoing in Malaya. It is the fundamental reason for his failure to implicate Shiu Hung, as he reminds Victor of his own past involvement in the Communist Youth club in his university years. Contrary to Sillitoe's depiction of the Malayan Emergency in his novels, Burgess's Malayan Trilogy transforms the violent atmosphere of the Communist insurgency into a backdrop for Victor Crabbe's struggle with his inner demons, just as Sillitoe uses the Malayan jungle as a metaphor for Brian Seaton's personal growth.[581] In *Time for a Tiger* (1956), we see Victor striving to suppress his history with Communism. However, his efforts to exorcise it would go downhill after a coincidental reunion with Rupert Hardman, in the state of Dahaga, in *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958). Rupert was Victor's university acquaintance as well as a member of their university's Communist society. Both Rupert and Victor contributed articles and poems for the society's journal. In the journal, there is one particularly incriminating article Victor wrote about the 'universal necessity for Communism' and the 'Communist revolution in the East',

[580] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 165.
[581] For further information on the symbolism of the Malayan jungle on Brian Seaton's personal development, please see my analysis of Sillitoe's presentations of the Malayan landscape in Chapter 2, p. 29.

which would almost jeopardise his position as the headmaster of the school in Dahaga.[582] But in a manner that is evocative of Balzac's *La Comedié humaine* where human failures are inevitable, it is Rupert who is to put the nail in Victor's coffin, when he unintentionally exposes Victor's Communist past to his enemy, Jaganathan, who wanted to depose Victor from his headmaster post and replace him. In a scene at the Sultan of Dahaga's birthday party, Rupert carelessly prattles to Jaganathan of Victor:

> "For here the British always prided themselves on bringing the justice and the institutions of their traditional parliamentary democracy. And they who came here were always the kind of person you mention—good clever young men from the universities."
>
> "It doesn't last," said Hardman. "Why, look at your boss over there: Conservative, Christian, almost reactionary." He gestured towards Crabbe, who was delivering a long frowning speech to Mrs. Talbot. "He was a great Communist when I knew him, leader of the Communist Group and all that sort of thing. His conversation was thick with Lenin. But he changed."[583]

Clearly appalled by Victor's dramatic change since their time at university, Rupert reminisces of Victor's past when he was the society's Communist leader as opposed to the current Victor, who is more conservative and intolerant of left wing radicalism. Unaware of the effect of his comment on Victor's past, Rupert has unintentionally revealed Victor's secret about his involvement with the Communist Youth Club when he was in university to his Malayan colleagues. Victor has always been

[582] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, pp. 142–4.
[583] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 98.

paranoid that his Malayan colleagues, Jaganathan especially, who do not quite understand the difference between supporting the Communist cause in Europe at the time of the Spanish Civil War (1936–9) and Communism in Malaya, would have the tendencies to conflate the two. This is exactly what would happen. In Burgess's fictional Malayan world, because of the atrocities the Malayan Communists committed on civilians, supporters of Communism in the past and the present were viewed as advocates of terrorism. When Jaganathan confronts Victor of his involvement with Communism in his younger days, Victor, bewildered, breaks down in front of him: '"How little you understand," said Crabbe. "That's a dead world. That was another me. We all believed in it then. It was our new myth, our new hope. It was all very foolish."'[584] Victor's confession of his Communist past is resonant with Sillitoe's Brian Seaton, who was a Communist sympathiser in his early days in Malaya in *Key to the Door* (1961) but became increasingly anti-Communist when he returns to England in *The Open Door* (1989).

As we can observe in the repercussion of Rupert's revelation to Jaganathan about Victor's communist past, Victor continues to be met by one misfortune after another, like a fallen hero. In a later scene of *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), much to his horror, Victor discovers through Father LaForgue that his Chinese servant Ah Wing, has been supplying food to his son-in-law, a Communist who has been hiding in the jungle. Victor immediately realises that Ah Wing had committed 'the most ghastly offences against the Emergency Regulations'.[585] What ensues is the hilarious episode of Victor attempting to talk sense into Ah Wing and failing, because Ah Wing, in his

[584] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 144.
[585] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 121.

'senile innocence', is unable to see that his son-in-law had been involved in the massacres of innocent people:

> Ah Wing seemed rather pleased than otherwise at the prospect of Red China ruling Malaya. Blood was thicker than ideology. The son-in-law, moreover, was a young man who had always worked hard and had fought bravely against the Japanese. He was a good boy. He the Enemy of Mankind? Nonsense. It was genuine innocence, the most dangerous thing in the world. Crabbe shook when he considered his own position. He always paid the food bills himself—Fenella was no housekeeper—and he had never troubled to check the invoices. Fenella had, admittedly, once commented on the amount of waste that went on, but Crabbe had taken no notice. Now he had visions of terrorists sitting down to the kippers he sent back uneaten […] Ah Wing had not even stolen anything: he had used only the servant's privilege of appropriating rinds, crumbs and tail-ends.[586]

As the passage demonstrates, the comedy is invoked from the contrasting reactions between Ah Wing and Victor Crabbe of their involvement with the Malayan Communists. Ah Wing could not see that his son-in-law has been involved in the murders of innocent civilians. In his eyes, as his family member, he believes his son-in-law is doing the right thing. Fighting against the Japanese imperialists for instance, to Ah Wing, is a heroic act. Victor on the other hand, is livid of his failure to take notice of any abnormalities that had been going on, such as Fenella's comment about the excessive amount of food that had been regularly ordered in. It is

[586] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 122.

aggravated by the fact that Victor's realisation of his accidental involvement with the Communists is a result of his own negligence. Panicking, he starts visualising the newspaper headline, which would definitely ruin his career: 'EXPAT TEACHER SENT SUPPLIES TO C.T. [Communist] HIDEOUT', and continue making the wrong decisions, including not to turn Ah Wing in to the security forces because he was afraid Ah Wing would tell on him to the entire village.[587]

As we have observed, compared to Sillitoe's novels that do not underscore the threats of the Malayan Communists as I have demonstrated in Chapter 4, Burgess shifts the focus from the percolating sense of danger during the Emergency in the Malayan Trilogy, to the invocation of his protagonist's past history with Communism. Consequently, this strategy reduces the portrayal of the Malayan Communists as a source of menace and we the readers, are led to focus on the misadventures of Victor Crabbe that stem from his past guilt instead. Another instance where Burgess mitigates the violent realities of the Malayan Emergency in the Trilogy is by its trivialising of the Communist threats. In *Time for a Tiger* (1956) for example, outbreaks of the Emergency in 1948 which culminated in the deaths of three European planters, are reduced of their significance. For a start, Burgess names a character after Sir Henry Gurney, the then British High Commissioner in Malaya (1948–51), who was killed in an ambush in 1951 by Communist insurgents. The character that goes by the name Gurney indicates to the patrons of a colonial club reserved only for Europeans that there is '"[t]rouble again at Kelapa Estate"'.[588] The exchange between Rivers, Hart and Gurney with Nabby Adams interjecting into the conversation that ensues following Gurney's announcement of the trouble in Kelapa

[587] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 123.
[588] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 70.

Estate, is clearly a reference to the real-life murders of three rubber estate managers on 16 June 1948 in Sungai Siput, Perak – Arthur Walker, John Allison and his assistant, Ian Christian, which led the colonial government to declare the state of Emergency:

> "Oh God, Kelapa again?" Rivers clutched the right wing of his rank moustache as though it were a talisman.
>
> "Withers shot his way out. They got that Tamil bloke though. Cut his guts out and then sang 'The Red Flag' in Chinese." Gurney sipped his pink gin.
>
> "That's an unlucky estate," said Hart, nursing a fat bare knee. "There was Roebuck and then Fotheringay and that young assistant, what's-his-name. They'll get Withers."
>
> "It's bound to be our turn again, any day now," said Rivers nervously. A tic throbbed under his left eye […]
>
> "There's a big battle-cry going on up there," said Gurney. "'Death to Withers'. What hurts the C.T. [Communist]'s is that they gave him a chance to pay protection money, but he wouldn't do it."
>
> "Couldn't do it, I should think," said Hart. "Debts all over the place." Nabby Adams listened sympathetically.
>
> Nabby Adams said, by way of making conversation, "Withers and Rivers sounds a bit alike. It might be 'Death to Rivers'."
>
> Rivers writhed and showed big teeth under the pelmet of the moustache. "If you think that's funny, old man…"[589]

[589] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, pp. 70–1.

Initially, the conversation between Rivers, Hart, Gurney and Nabby Adams is about the discussion of the atrocities committed by the Malayan Communists on the Kelapa estate. An Indian worker on the estate as Gurney recalls was disembowelled while the Communists were singing 'The Red Flag'. The incident is an indication of how cold-blooded the Communists can be. They mention Withers, the manager of the Indian worker, who manages to escape the ordeal. Rivers and Hart, the military veteran planters, remark that the estate has had a history of being a hotspot for Communist terrorism and expresses concern about being their next targets. However, the serious discussion of the tragedy at the estate escalates into a gossip about Withers' financial problems: '"Debts all over the place"', Hart comments regarding Withers' inability to pay the Communists protection money, suggesting the Communists were mercenaries rather than a group driven by the goal to erect a Communist Republic in Malaya.[590] The weighty discussion they had earlier is further lightened by Nabby Adams's interjection into the conversation, where he attempts to rile Rivers up: "Withers and Rivers sounds a bit alike. [The Communists' battle-cry "Death to Withers"] might be 'Death to Rivers'", diverts our attention from the account of the Communists' horrific acts of violence.[591] Rivers's stoic response to Nabby Adams on the other hand, only evokes more laughter.

Another demonstration in the Trilogy where the Communist threats are subdued is illustrated in the lackadaisical attitude of Victor and Fenella Crabbe, Nabby Adams and Alladad Khan while driving into the deep jungle to watch an aboriginal dance performance, making them vulnerable to sudden ambushes by the Communists along the roads. In *Time for a Tiger* (1956), Alladad takes the sign '"YOU ARE NOW

[590] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 71.
[591] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 71.

ENTERING [AND] LEAVING A WHITE AREA"' very lightly, driving past it assuming that the guidepost was designed for the Communists because he reasons, they could read English and '"are gentlemen and will keep on the right side of the notice."'[592] Like Victor's servant Ah Wing in *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), Alladad's childlike innocence would lead him, the Crabbes and Nabby into an unfortunate encounter with the Communists and result in his near death experience. The attitude portrayed by Alladad, the Crabbes and Nabby are a far cry from Burgess's own sentiments of Malaya at the time of the Emergency. In *Little Wilson and Big God* (1987), Burgess writes: 'There was a war on [in Malaya], called *dzarurat* or emergency, and we were to be sent to the royal town of Kuala Kangsar in the state of Perak, where the Chinese communist terrorists were at their most active.'[593] He also describes the atmosphere at the time as 'war-like', highlighting that 'car trips to Ipoh could be dangerous', adding that the 'mems […] went to do their shopping in armoured vehicles' – a situation that is described in precise details in Sillitoe's *Key to the Door* (1961).[594] The Trilogy also discounts casualties caused by the Communist terrorists. In *Time for a Tiger* (1956) when Alladad was hospitalised due to a gunshot wound from the Communist ambush while they were driving through the jungle, he is asked by Hari Singh, a fellow patient in his ward regarding his injury. Alladad explains to Hari that he was shot at by the Communists and had a bullet removed from his arm. However, rather than alarmed at his statement, Hari deflects the severity of Alladad's injury by emphasising that his injury from football is a lot worse: '"That, nowadays, would seem to be a common occurrence. I can assure you that this injury I sustained at football was extremely

[592] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 158. A sign that says 'YOU ARE NOW LEAVING A WHITE AREA' indicates that the motorist must approach the area or village with caution due to active Communist threats there.
[593] Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, p. 370. Ipoh is the capital city of Perak.
[594] Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, p. 379.

serious.”’[595] Hari’s statement that his football injury is more severe than Alladad’s gunshot wound from Communist ambushes as ‘common occurrence’, is ironic. Another case in point where the gravity of the Communist menace is not heeded is where a drunken soldier suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), who witnessed his colleague ambushed and killed with holes found in his body, is deliberately ignored by Victor Crabbe and Anne Talbot, the wife of the State Education Officer at a hotel bar. In a cry for help, the soldier bellows while lunging towards Anne: ‘“They killed him […] He was ambushed. That’s why I’m getting tight, see? […] Found his body, they did, full of holes, see?”’.[596] Burgess’s characters’ evasion of the accounts of Communist violence is evident of its attempt to deflect post-imperial melancholia, a reminder of Malaya’s period of disorder under British rule in the twilight of the Empire.

In retrospect, I have examined Burgess’s treatment of the Malayan Emergency with his injection of humour to minimise the impact of change brought about by the disorder caused by the Communist guerrilla war. I have expounded on Burgess’s deployments of his characters’ comedy of errors as well as their conscious burying of the extent of damages and casualties incurred by the Malayan Communists. I will now move onto my final point, which is Burgess’s caricature of the Malayan Communists in his fiction. A case in point is the depiction of the Communist insurgents as having a defeatist attitude in *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958). In reality, they were nothing like they were portrayed in the Trilogy. In the novel, thirty Communist terrorists, one of them being the son-in-law of Ah Wing, approach the intoxicated Victor and beg him to make a phone call to the police so they could be

[595] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 170.
[596] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, pp. 169–70.

turned in and be deported to China. They thank Victor for the food supplies and inform him of the newspaper clipping they read of the amnesty that Ah Wing used to wrap their rice with.[597] Their leader, Ah Wing's son-in-law Boo Eng, indicates to Victor about the government amnesty which promises to pay their fares to China:

> "It is the amnesty. It was in the newspaper wrapped round the rice. The Government will ask no more questions. They will pay fares to China. […] We are all Chinese. We want to go back to China. So Ah Wing brings us to you […] We have come out of the jungle. It was no good staying there. It was difficult to get food. You helped us for a long time. Then you could not help us anymore. But we thank you for the help you gave us while you could. […] So now we come to give ourselves up. You have a telephone here. But [the government] must keep their promise."[598]

Boo Eng, the leader of the Malayan Communists is seen to be giving in so easily to the government authorities, ending their lifelong armed struggle against the imperial government, whereas Chin Peng the actual Secretary-General of the Malayan Communist Party never did. In fact, Chin Peng would continue to wage war against the Malayan government until 1989. It begs the question why Burgess would write Boo Eng with that sense of defeatism. In the introduction to *The Book of Negro Humor* (1966) by Langston Hughes, he states: 'Humor is laughing at what you haven't got when you ought to have it.'[599] Ulrike Erichsen interprets Hughes's

[597] The amnesty is a reference to the 1955 Baling Talks, where the Malayan provisional government was willing to discuss terms and conditions with the Malayan Communists so they could lay down their arms and struggle.
[598] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, pp. 203–4.
[599] Langston Hughes, *The Book of Negro Humor* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966), p. vii.

comment on humour as a way of 'dealing with a […] discrepancy.'[600] In this case, the reality is that the Baling Talks in 1955 between the provisional Malayan government and Chin Peng facilitated by the British colonial authorities, failed to reach an agreement. Unlike the Communists in the Trilogy, following the unsuccessful negotiation deal, the Communists went into hiding in the borders of Malaya and Thailand. As we can see in the quotation, apart from the Malayan Communists' defeatism, they are also pictured to be very willing to comply with the terms and conditions of the amnesty, including the deal of being given a free passage to China, where one of them remarked: 'We are all Chinese. We want to go back to China.'[601] Although there were Malayan Communists who did surrender to the police, they would not have wanted to be repatriated to China voluntarily. They were sent there by force as part of the Emergency measures.[602] Not only that, the Trilogy portrays the Communists, all thirty of them, gathering at Victor's house, with one of them obligingly helping Victor get the telephone to call the police, another handing him their gun as per the instruction from the Chief Police Officer and the other waking Kartar Singh, the police constable guarding Victor's house 'to let them share in the glory' of the Communists being handed to the authorities. Victor the next day would make the headlines in the newspapers: 'a white man, […] dying of fever, had captured single-handed thirty dangerous Communist terrorists.'[603] The account is far from the reality of the Emergency and it appears that Burgess's narrative is seemingly making up for the loss of order and failures in peace talks in the final years of British colonial rule of Malaya.

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[600] Ulrike Erichsen, 'Smiling in the face of adversity: How to use humour to defuse cultural conflict', in *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial*, ed. by Susanne Reichl and Mark Stein (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2005), pp. 27–41 (p. 31).
[601] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, pp. 203–4.
[602] For more information, kindly refer to Low Choo Chin, 'The repatriation of the Chinese as a counter-insurgency policy during the Malayan Emergency', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 45.3 (2014), 363–392.
[603] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 206.

There is another instance in *Beds in the East* (1959), where Burgess caricatures the Malayan Communists by simulating the low morale in the ranks of some Communist members, in the period leading up to Malayan independence. He does this through the characterisation of the government veterinarian, Vythilingam, who is a Communist but is not fully committed to the cause. Vythilingam is depicted to be at odds with his Communist membership. He is passionate about some aspects of Communism where it does not discriminate people based on their race, religion and caste, while he contemplates going into the jungle to join his comrades 'stinging the efféte capitalist regime [the British colonial government] with odd bullets'. At the same time, he 'did not really like the Chinese [Communist members]' and 'he was not really fighting the oppressive British' because they were leaving Malaya anyways.[604] In a later scene in the novel, Vythilingam questions the relevance of Communism in an independent Malaya: 'And now what about Chou En Lai and the Communist Manifesto? Eh? Were they over, then, the days of doctrinaire musings, the mere dreaming of action? Was it at last time to act?'[605] Just as the Trilogy uses comedy to change the outcome of the 1955 negotiation deal between the Malayan government and Communists, the Trilogy also parodies the low morale in the ranks of the Communist members. By doing this, the Trilogy lightens the visceral effect of the Malayan Emergency, making it appear less violent than it actually was. This narrative strategy resists from succumbing to postcolonial melancholia, especially so since Burgess was writing as Britain confronted its Empire's decline, and that it would have to withdraw from Malaya. The following section uncovers further how

[604] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, pp. 9–10.
[605] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 184.

the Malayan Trilogy betrays that melancholia as it attempts to deflect it with its comedic façade.

5.2 Beneath the Surface of Comedy Carnival: Unmasking Melancholia in Burgess's Comedic Treatment of Malayan Decolonisation

> 'In general, humour seems to serve a variety of different functions on all levels of verbal utterances, first of all, […] of expressing a certain emotion. In a postcolonial context, […] humour is often used to camouflage rather than express emotions, for instance to cover up aggression or the pain of being an *outsider* or of being considered inferior. […H]umour is a way of dealing with […] discrepancy.'
>
> - Ulrike Erichsen.[606]

> 'The intended laughter is specifically that of post-imperial tristesse, a look back in laughing sadness (or is it sad exultation?) at expended power and faded glory, at models and virtues that are no more […] as they were once said to be.'
>
> - Detlef Gohrbandt.[607]

> 'Comic pageantry buries the political conflict of the historical context of decolonization, which is both in the context of composition and the fictional setting of [Burgess' Malayan Trilogy].'
>
> - Man Yin Chiu.[608]

[606] Ulrike Erichsen, 'Smiling in the face of adversity: How to use humour to defuse cultural conflict', in *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial*, ed. by Susanne Reichl and Mark Stein (Amsterdam: Rodopi, B.V., 2005), pp. 27–41 (p. 31). [Emphasis original].
[607] Detlef Gohrbandt, 'After-laughter, or the comedy of decline: Ronald Searle's critique of postwar Englishness in The Rake's Progress', in *Cheeky Fictions*, pp. 131–45 (p. 143).

Earlier in this chapter, I indicated that post-war British literature actively resists manifesting postcolonial melancholia. One of the strategies as we have seen earlier in Chapter 3 is exhibited through the deference of the violent and chaotic events leading up to decolonisation in Britain's former colonies. The other strategy as Paul Gilroy points out in 'The Closed Circle' (2011), is the use of cathartic 'liberating laughter' to confront the multitude of social, political and economic crises following the decline of Britain's imperial prestige and the demotion of its status from a former global economic power.[609] Each epigraph I have selected from Ulrike Erichsen, Detlef Gohrbandt and Man Yin Chiu for the opening to my examination of Burgess's comedic treatment of Malaya's decolonisation, give an insight into how humour is deployed to evade post-imperial melancholia. The first quotation is extracted from Erichsen's essay 'Smiling in the face of adversity: How to use humour to defuse cultural conflict' (2005), which investigates the various functions of humour and points out significantly that one of its uses is to 'camouflage' real emotions, for instance to hide the 'aggression or the pain of being an outsider' or to avoid being perceived as inferior.[610] Erichsen derives her theories on the functions of humour from a number of sources including Susan C. Vogel's *Humor: A Semiogenetic Approach* (1989), Victor Raskin's *Semantic Mechanisms of Humour* (1985), Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1965), Henri Bergson's *Laughter* (1900) and Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651). Although her study is geared more towards postcolonial texts specifically those written by Asian and Black British authors from the former colonies, some aspects of her interrogations of humour in literature are relevant to British colonial writings in the period of decolonisation, especially in her

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[608] Man Yin Chiu, *Written Orders: Authority and Crisis in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives* (Saarbrüken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing AG & Co. KG, 2010), p. 114.
[609] See Gilroy, 'The Closed Circle' in *The Literature of Melancholia*, p. 199.
[610] Erichsen, 'Smiling in the face of adversity', in *Cheeky Fictions*, p. 31.

positioning that humour is also used as a defence mechanism to confront a 'discrepancy' or a 'lack of [emotional] balance'.[611] There are instances where Burgess's European expat characters in the Malayan Trilogy are seen to be cloaking their pain of being an outsider, specifically as we see through the characterisations of the main protagonist of the novel, Victor Crabbe and Rupert Hardman, the lawyer who converted to Islam in the period leading up to Malaya's independence. Both of them are desperate for acceptance and relevance as European men in the new Malaya, where the official state religion is Islam and the national language is Malay. In *Beds in the East* (1959), Victor strives to help the Chinese boy Robert Loo compose a musical symphony to celebrate Malaya's day of independence and contribute to the foundation of Malaya's postcolonial culture: '"This symphony could be played as a big gesture of independence. We in Malaya have thrown off the shackles of an alien [British] culture."'[612] Rupert on the other hand, takes an even more extreme approach than Victor to be accepted by the Malayan people. In *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), he marries a wealthy Malay widow, the representation of the privileged group in the new Malaya and changes his religion. In the novel, Rupert boasts to Victor of his new status of privilege as a Malay man and a Muslim, having been married to an elite Malay woman: '"I have a stake in the country. I can never be thrown out […] I shall be respected as a Malayan, a good son of Islam, a good worker who keeps his money in the country. You know what they call you expatriates? White leeches."'[613] In the few examples I have pointed out of Burgess's comic Malayan novels, it is evident that their humorous tone betrays a certain feeling of melancholy that stems from the pain of being an outsider. In this case, Burgess's employment of humour in his novels differs from Erichsen's proposition that humour

[611] Erichsen, 'Smiling in the face of adversity', in *Cheeky Fictions*, p. 31.
[612] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 53.
[613] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 117.

in fiction disguises the anxiety of being considered inferior by other communities or social groups. None of Burgess's European expat characters are concerned about being looked down as inferior by the Malayan characters. In fact, they all wallow in the '[*n*]*ostalgie de la boue*' or the desire for degradation.[614] Rupert Hardman in the beginning of *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) for instance, is indifferent to the debts he incurred despite his profession as a lawyer until his Malay friend Haji Zainal Abidin offered solutions to get him out of debt.[615] Nabby Adams like Rupert Hardman is also unconcerned about running up tabs with Chinese creditors for a couple of glasses of beer.

The second epigraph is taken from Detlef Gohrbandt's essay 'After-laughter, or the comedy of decline: Ronald Searle's critique of postwar Englishness in The Rake's Progress' (2005), where Gohrbandt studies British satirist Ronald Searle's cartoons in *The Rake's Progress* (1955). The quotation refers to the post-imperial melancholia, which Gorbandt terms as 'post-imperial tristesse', connoting a state of sadness underneath the layers of Searle's humorous depictions of his colonial heroes' failures. Gorbandt also describes Searle's cartoons as a kind of 'sad exultation' at the faded glory of the British Empire and the loss of its colonial 'models and virtues' that bears resemblance to Burgess's cast of laughing stock colonial figures in his Malayan Trilogy, as opposed to the gallant colonial heroes in the novels of Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) and H. Rider Haggard (1865–1925), such as Nabby Adams, the alcoholic colonial police officer and Boothby, Victor's incompetent headmaster.[616] Finally in the third epigraph which I have extracted from Man Yin Chiu's *Written Orders: Authority and Crisis in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives* (2010), whose

[614] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 167. [Emphasis original].
[615] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 31.
[616] Detlef, 'After-laughter', in *Cheeky Fictions*, p. 143. See also *Cheeky Fictions*, p. 16.

approach to reading Burgess's Malayan novels in light of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival, forms the basis of my interrogation in uncovering the underlying melancholia in Burgess's comedic depictions of Malaya's road to independence. In the same vein as Erichsen and Gohrbandt, Chiu argues that the comedy carnival in Burgess's Malayan Trilogy has the effect of muting the significance of Malaya's decolonisation process, including the political crises that arose from it, such as the Communist insurgency and inter-communal ethnic tensions.

Burgess and the Anarchic Rabelaisian Comedy Carnival

> To Burgess, the coarse and the rough are just one aspect of Catholic culture. He feels that the kind of life he has lived has been totally conditioned by the Catholicism in which he grew up. [Burgess:] "When Rabelais wrote his great book *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, he was not really glorifying vomit and defecation and drunkenness; he was telling a symbolic story in which we are all thirsty for the faith, and the wine or beer or drunkenness is a kind of symbol of religious ecstasy. I've always had a capacity to see these things as symbols, as something deeper."[617]

The study of Burgess's Malayan Trilogy within the framework of Bakhtin's theory of carnival is relatively uncharted territory despite the glaring evidence of the influence that François Rabelais's *La vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel* ('The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel', c. 1532–64) have on Burgess's narrative style. It is Man Yin Chiu, the author of *Written Orders* (2010), who is the only scholar to

[617] Rosemary Hartill, 'We Must Be Free', in *Conversations with Burgess*, p. 160.

propose reading Burgess's Malayan Trilogy through the lens of Bakhtin's carnival, drawn from Bakhtin's study of medieval folk culture in Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in *Rabelais and His World* (1965).[618] Although there were other critics before him who suggested that the absurd and theatrical feature prominently in Burgess's Malayan Trilogy such as in the cases of Walter Sullivan in 'Death without tears: Anthony Burgess and the dissolution of the west' (1969) and William H. Pritchard in 'The Novels of Anthony Burgess' (1966), they were not able to identify the palpable influence of Rabelaisian carnival in Burgess's fiction.[619] For instance, in 'Death without tears', Sullivan came close to surmising the carnival spirit in Burgess's Malayan Trilogy and concludes that Burgess's Malayan world in the novels is absurd: 'In Burgess' work, there is almost never actual sorrow […] because an absurd world cannot be tragic'.[620] Similarly in 'The Novels of Anthony Burgess', Pritchard foregrounds the theatrical aspect in Burgess's novels and even their grotesque characters, a crucial element of the carnival, but fails to identify their link with Rabelais's rambunctious narrative style.[621] Consider the following scene from *Gargantua and Pantagruel*: 'As soon as [Gargantua] was born, he cried not as other babies use to do, miez, miez, miez, but with a high, sturdy, and big voice shouted about, Some drink, some drink, some drink, as if inviting all the world to drink with him.'[622] Then compare it with the scene from Burgess's *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958): 'The Abang's feet were washed in goat's milk and his testes blessed and

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[618] *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel* is Rabelais's five volume comical novels about the adventures of two giants, Gargantua and Pantagruel. They are characterised by their scatological humour and exaggerations.

[619] Walter Sullivan, 'Death without tears: Anthony Burgess and the dissolution of the West', *Hollins Critic*, 6.2 (1969), 1–8 <http://hollins.edu/grad/eng_writing/critic/critic/critic.htm> [accessed 23 August 2019]. See also William H. Pritchard, 'The Novels of Anthony Burgess', *The Massachusetts Review*, VII.3 (1966), 525–39.

[620] Sullivan, p. 3.

[621] Pritchard, p. 527.

[622] François Rabelais, 'On the Infancy of Pantagruel', in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 2 vols (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1954), I, p. 19.

anointed behind a gold-thread curtain. Veiled girls danced to the skirl of Indian pipes, rich curries were eaten and mounds of cold rice distributed to the poor.'[623] It is apparent in both extracts that Burgess and Rabelais have similar techniques of employing exaggerated and absurd imageries as well as ironies. There is also the unmistakable sense of festive joviality in their narratives.

In the interview with Burgess by Rosemary Hartill for her book *Writers Revealed: Eight Contemporary Writers Talk about Faith, Religion, and God* (1989) which I have extracted in the quotation, Burgess speaks of the 'coarse and […] rough' in Catholic culture, a clear attribution to the medieval folk culture of big feasts and merrymaking during the *Mardi Gras* (translated as 'Fat Tuesday') festival before Lent, a period of fasting for Christians.[624] The festival, Bakhtin notes, is rooted in a pagan Roman tradition of Saturnalia, an agricultural festival to honour the deity, Saturn.[625] Some significant aspects of the carnival are the indulgence to excess and the culture of 'folk carnival humour' and the marketplace.[626] Rabelais (1483–1553), the French Renaissance writer as well as the inspiration for Burgess's comic novels is according to Bakhtin, a non-conformist in literary traditions.[627] There is an element of subversion in his depictions of the Provençal that seems to be challenging the high culture with the low and the official life, established truths and figures of authority with the carnival by inverting hierarchical and religious order in which Bakhtin's terms as the logic of the 'inside-out' or the 'turnabout', a process of 'continual

[623] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 6.
[624] Hartill, 'We Must Be Free', in *Conversations with Burgess*, p. 160.
[625] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 8.
[626] Bakhtin, p. 4.
[627] Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* (1799–1850) as I have mentioned previously in this same chapter, is another source of Burgess's inspiration for his comic novels. Kindly refer to p. 212 under the sub-heading: '*Comédie humaine*: Burgess and the Comic Novels'. For the reference on Rabelais's non-conformist literature, see Bakhtin, p. 2.

shifting from top to bottom, front to rear, of numerous travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings.'[628] I will demonstrate how in a similar approach, Burgess's Malayan novels liberally mock the Malay royals and Islam. Chiu states in *Written Orders* that '[n]othing is too sacred [for the carnival discourse] to profane.'[629] On the note of the logic of the 'inside-out' in *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* there is the concept of the Rabelaisian grotesque imagery which Burgess refers to in the interview with Hartill as images of vomiting, defecation and intoxication, all relating to the lower stratum of the body – the belly and genitals. They represent the salient feature of the carnival, which is degradation, that is the 'lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract', akin to the function of Semar in bringing down the divine kings and princes to the material world.[630] This leads us to Burgess's commentary on *Gargantua and Pantagruel* where he insinuates that when Rabelais wrote them, he 'was not really glorifying vomit [,] defecation and drunkenness' but rather, he sees them as symbols, especially drunkenness for the individual's thirst for the faith, in a language that common people could understand and relate to, instead of the sombre and highly abstract language used by religious officials.[631] In *Written Orders* (2010), Chiu sees Burgess's deployment of the carnival in his Malayan novels as 'insurrectionary' and 'anti-authoritarian' to Empire novels, similar to Umberto Eco's concept of 'semiological guerrilla warfare' which I have pointed out in my analysis of Sillitoe's Malayan fiction in Chapter 4.[632] However, he also asserts that their criticisms against colonialism are not consistent and that Burgess's carnival discourse betrays a suppressed anxiety of Malaya no

[628] Bakhtin, p. 11.
[629] Chiu, p. 121.
[630] Bakhtin, p. 19.
[631] Hartill, 'We Must Be Free', in *Conversations with Burgess*, p. 160.
[632] Chiu, *Written Orders*, p.122. See also p. 135 under the sub-heading 'The Anarchists and the 'Semiotic Guerrilla Warfare' in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

longer being under British rule and especially the anxiety 'over the blurring, or […] erasure, of the boundary between the metropolitan and the [Malayan/Peripheral] Other.'[633] I will return to this point later in my explications of Burgess's Malayan Trilogy.

Undressing Burgess's Comedy Carnival of Malayan Decolonisation

> 'Comedy is concerned with truth quite as much as tragedy; and the two, as Plato recognized, have something fundamental in common. They're both *stripping* processes; they both tear externals and show man as a poor, forked animal.'
>
> - Anthony Burgess (1972).[634]

The epigraph above is extracted from a 1972 interview with Anthony Burgess by John Cullinan for *The Paris Review*. Cullinan was inquiring Burgess regarding his comment on his novel, *A Vision of Battlements* (1965), which Burgess describes as a 'slow and cruel stripping off of illusion' and asked whether the nature of comedy is cruel.[635] As we can see in the quotation, Burgess responded by citing Plato, stating that comedy like tragedy, is concerned with the truth. Using the expression stripping off like a poor, 'forked animal', which he borrowed from Shakespeare's play *King Lear* (c. 1605–6), Burgess illustrates the manner in which comedy exposes man's vulnerability and insecurities.[636] When inspecting Burgess's explanation of comedy

[633] Chiu, *Written Orders*, p. 149.
[634] John Cullinan, 'Dealing with the Hinterland of Consciousness', in *Conversations with Burgess*, p. 73. [Emphasis added]
[635] Cullinan, 'Dealing with the Hinterland of Consciousness', in *Conversations with Burgess*, p. 73.
[636] The expression 'forked animal' could be found in William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. by R.H. Wheastley (Leipzeig: Gustavus Graebner, 1861), pp. 60–1: 'Why, thou wert better in thy grave, than

closely and especially his allusions to *King Lear*, one could note a hint of dysphoria. This explains why in spite of the Malayan Trilogy teeming with comedy carnival, there is a melancholic undertone, even dismissive at other times in the narration of Malaya's decolonisation process. In the examination of the Malayan Trilogy, I have identified three instances where postcolonial melancholia is resisted by its masking with cacophonous carnival atmosphere but somehow the texts still betray signs of melancholia.[637] The first instance is the state of pain and this is reflected in the inability to mourn the decline of the British Empire through its glossing over Malaya's move towards self-governance. The second instance is the state of aggression or anger. Subsequently, with the replacement of British colonials as the ruling class in independent Malaya by the majority Muslim Malays, the Trilogy behind the veil of comedy, relentlessly mocks the paragon of Malay identity: the Malay rulers, culture and Islam. Then there is the final state, which is guilt. While the Trilogy is seen to be soft-pedalling the ascending American influence in the former British colonies, towards the concluding instalment of the series, there seems to be an acknowledgment, albeit with reluctance for Britain's past colonial guilt. I will be explicating each of these points shortly.

I will begin by elaborating on the first point, which is the Trilogy's initial state of pain in Malaya's eventual road to independence, masked by its slapstick exterior. In the interview with Pierre Joannon, which I have cited in the earlier section of this chapter, 'The Curious Case of Burgess's Comedic Treatment of the Malayan Emergency', Burgess also mentions that comedy can be derived from the human

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to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies […T]hou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.'

[637] These defence mechanisms in disguising pain, anger and guilt are drawn from the work of Alexander and Margarete Mistcherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1975).

struggle to adapt to change and not succeeding very well, in the spirit of Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* (1799–1850).[638] Therefore, taking Burgess's commentary on his comic novels into account, the entire Malayan Trilogy is about the struggle of Burgess's characters in confronting the paramount changes taking place in Malaya's decolonisation process. I have mentioned the foremost significant changes which occurred during this time: the inaugural 1955 Malayan General Elections followed by the Baling Talks later in the same year, General Templer's Malayanisation program which he initiated in 1952, and American ascendency to global economic power after the Suez Crisis in 1956. In *Time for a Tiger* (1956), sandwiched between the hilarious accounts of Ibrahim, Victor Crabbe's effeminate servant and Alladad Khan's wife, is Alladad Khan's Nietzschean-like narrative voice which describes the end of the British rule in Malaya as apocalyptic: 'The world was speedboat-speeding to its final collapse. Friends go and women and boys are faithless and God may not exist.'[639] In its hyperbolic expression, it depicts Malaya's move towards self-governance as a world that is coming to an end, godless and where decadence is indulged, hinting at the chaos that is to follow without the presence of the British policing in the background. *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) demonstrates the initial state of pain, manifested in denial through Victor Crabbe who in the beginning, refuses to let it sink in that Malaya was going to gain independence from the British in a few years and informs his wife Fenella that Malaya is not ready for self-governance: '[The Malayans] are not ready to take over [from the British] yet.'[640] In an earlier scene, Victor is humiliated by the gargantuan full-course English

[638] Joannon, 'The Sense of an Audience', in *Conversations with Burgess*, p. 141. Kindly refer to p. 212 under the sub-heading '*Comédie humaine*: Burgess and the Comic Novels' of this chapter.
[639] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 203.
[640] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 73.

meal that his cook Ah Wing had prepared for him, a reminder of the earlier colonial days which no longer have any place in the new Malaya:

> Somewhere in Ah Wing's past was a frock-coated whiskered law-bringer who had established the pattern of square meals and substantial beavers. Perhaps Ah Wing was to be seen on some historical photograph of the eighteen-seventies, grinning behind a solid row of thick-limbed [British colonial] pioneers, all of whom had given their names to ports, hills and city-streets. Certainly, in the gravy soups, turbot, hare, roast saddles, cabinet puddings, boiled eggs at tea-time and bread and butter and meat paste with the morning tray, one tasted one's own decadence: a tradition had been preserved in order to humiliate. Perhaps it really was time the British limped out of Malaya.[641]

When Ah Wing presents Victor with a generous array of traditional English meals, he begins to have nostalgic feelings of the meals of British pioneers in the Far East, such as the ones Stamford Raffles (1781–1826) and Francis Light (1740–94) had in the early colonial days. He imagines Ah Wing was taught by one of the 'frock-coated whiskered law-bringer' figures, a reference to the attire of these early pioneers. Noticing how out of place they seem to be, as he realises that he is not one of the early Empire builders but the last of the British colonials to be brought into service in Malaya in the twilight of the Empire, he sees them instead as a tradition preserved to humiliate. As is insinuated in Burgess's quote from Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) in the beginning of the novel, Victor is the

[641] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 71.

representation of the colonial late-comers where those who come last are 'torn to pieces' and easily discarded, unlike the Empire builders who had street names, ports and hills named after them.[642] In the same novel, the Crabbes are also described as the 'last sacrifice' of the British Empire.[643]

However, when the narrative of the Trilogy begins to accede to Malaya's preparation for independence through the voice of Rupert Hardman, it is accompanied by a cautionary tale. In a conversation with Victor, Rupert asserts that if Malaya persisted to go ahead with independence, it will be a 'mess': '"The Malayans are ready to take over [from the British] now. It's probably going to be a hell of a mess, but that's not the point. Whether the fruit's going to be good or rotten, the time is ripe."'[644] The mess appears in the forms of ethnic conflicts and a tower of Babel of a plural society with diverse cultural backgrounds, religions and languages. In *Beds in the East* (1959), Sundralingam, an Indian minor character gripes about the hostility between other races in Malaya: '"Too much despising of one's own race and too much despising of other people's races. That is going to be the big trouble of Malaya. You take this [Malay] man Syed Omar. He has a mad hatred of Tamils."'[645] As Victor's deputy officer Nik Hassan mentions to Victor gravely, '"We're starting our independence in an atmosphere of mistrust."'[646] In another scene where Victor is having a conversation with a Singaporean Chinese lawyer, Lim Cheng Po, who identifies himself as British instead of Asian, Lim scoffs at the idea of an independent Malaya, calling it 'ridiculous' in a 'mixed-up place' like Malaya and

[642] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. i.
[643] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 109.
[644] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 118.
[645] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 35.
[646] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 57.

arguing that it has '"no nation, […] common culture, language, literature [and] religion"', insinuating that a homogenous nation would be better.[647] The Malayan Trilogy poses the question of how the newly elected provisional Malayan government would handle these complex issues without the facilitation of British law and order and as the regulator for Malayan unity. It is suggestive of British paternalism. Matthew Whittle also makes note of British paternalism in the Trilogy in *Post-War British Literature and the "End of Empire"* (2016): 'The text's rejection of a superior British imperial identity is expressed alongside a contradictory commitment to the continued importance of Western culture in Malaya as a means of unifying the nation and preventing deep-rooted internal conflict.'[648] In fact, the Malay majority state of Dahaga in *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) that is fashioned to be a microcosm of a postcolonial Malaya and described to be 'tardy to yield' to British administration, is described as a state where '[l]aw and order is not possible.'[649]

But perhaps the more striking aspect of Burgess's Malayan Trilogy is the saturation of Malaya's celebration of its independence day. Although the novels have an overall carefree, triumphant mood, when it comes to reporting this particular event, there is a noticeable lack of jubilance. Instead, as we see in *Beds in the East* (1959), the opening of the novel announcing Malaya's 'dawn of freedom' reads like Boothby's yawn, Victor's headmaster at the elite Mansor school: 'Dawn of freedom for yet another nation, freedom and all the rest of the abstractions. Dawn, dawn, dawn, and people waking up with various kinds of mouths and carried-forwards of the night or

[647] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 44. Nevertheless, Burgess would a year later revisit the theme of multiculturalism as the one in Malaya in his novel *The Right to an Answer* (1960) that is set in post-war Britain where there were mass migrations of people into Britain from its former colonies.
[648] Whittle, p. 56.
[649] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 12.

day before. Dawn, anyway.'[650] The narrator opens with a dismissive 'Dawn of freedom for yet another nation', evidently attempting to reduce its significance to a common occurrence, where the Malayan population carry on with their lives just like any other day. Plainly, there is a great discrepancy between the lukewarm narration and the actual festive atmosphere in the anticipation of the Independence Day celebration. Similarly, when it does come to accounting Malaya's day of independence, the momentous event is glossed over. In the novel, the attendants of the Dataran Merdeka (Merdeka Square) to witness the proclamation of independence also appear as if they do not even want to be there:

> In a shower of rain the tape to a shining-new free land was cut, the keys of authority handed over. And the full-throated cries of "Merdeka!" Even Rosemary joined in, though her woman's eyes were really on the so-sweet clothes of the Duchess of Gloucester. Nobody said what Crabbe had ironically said: that Karl Marx's real name was Mordeca and might well carry the same Arabic transliteration as the slogan that had brought the Alliance to power (without, which so many people thought a good sign, opposition). One cynic, a Malay trumpet-player who had once played in a Singapore orchestra under a French leader, would only shout the first syllable. Rosemary heard him quite distinctly and wondered why.
>
> And the men, oh, the men. So many strong and handsome Europeans, impeccably dressed.[651]

[650] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 1.
[651] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 222.

The passage begins with the handover ceremony of British rule to the Malayan government followed by the 'full-throated cries' of '*Merdeka*!' (Freedom!) from the crowd. However, the air of festivity is immediately dampened by the pan to Rosemary Michaels among the spectators, the Anglophile Indian character who has no emotional attachment to Malaya and is only interested in the European men at the square. Rosemary, unconcerned with Malaya's declaration of independence, only half-heartedly joins in the cheers to Malaya's freedom while being reminded of Victor's ironic remark of '*Merdeka*', the Malay word for freedom having the same Arabic inscription as Karl Marx's real name, Mordeca.[652] In the passage, we also see the peculiar Malay trumpet-player in a marching band, who would only shout the first syllable of '*Merdeka*'. This is followed soon after with the narrator's listless declaration: 'Independence achieved and celebrated, everybody went back to work', as if it was just a regular day not deserving of a big celebration and a day off work.[653] Unlike the actual day of Independence on 31 August 1957, thousands of Malayans flooded the Merdeka Square to witness Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Malayan Prime Minister (1955–70) read the proclamation of Malaya's independence from British rule and the new Malayan flag hoisted while the national anthem was played in the background, followed by fireworks. In fact, the night before the ceremony, the Malayans flocked to the Royal Selangor Club in Kuala Lumpur to observe the Union Jack flag lowered.[654] If anything, the ceremony was full of zest and the Malayans made sure they were part of the historic moment. However, that spirit is not captured

[652] Marx's real name was rumoured to be Mordecai, not Mordeca but this has never been confirmed.
[653] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 223.
[654] The Royal Selangor Club was founded by the British in 1884. It is located next to the Merdeka Square where Tunku Abdul Rahman declared Malaya's independence.
For reference on Malayans flocking to the Royal Selangor Club to watch the Union Jack lowered, please see '1957: Malaya celebrates independence', *BBC News* <news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/31/newsid_3534000/3534340.stm>
[accessed 30 August 2019]

in Burgess's novels. What we get instead is a rather fatigued portrayal of the ceremony.

I have uncovered the first state of postcolonial melancholia masked underneath the Trilogy's comedy façade, which is pain. The next state that I will be examining is aggression. In a carnival discourse, nothing is exempt from mockery. The Malayan Trilogy seemingly mocks everything and everyone—the British colonial officers, Catholicism, Chinese, Indians, Malays, Eurasians, Turks, Armenians, aboriginal people, Australians, American ethnographers, Islam, Malayan history and mythologies. Carnival laughter, as in the case of Eco's semiological guerrilla warfare, has a subversive function and aims at levelling and upsetting social hierarchies and religious order. However, the recipient who gets the most beatings out of Burgess's Malayan Trilogy's travesty is what I refer to as the quintessence of the Malay identity and they appear in the triptych of religion (Islam), monarchy and culture.[655] This also has to do with the fact that it is the indigenous Malays who took over the helm in ruling Malaya from the British. We gather this in *Beds in the East* (1959) in a conversation exchanged between a group of Indians where one of them indicates: '[The Malays are] hypocrites, using Islam to assert themselves and lord it over people. They pretend to be the *master-race*.'[656] Another clue is insinuated in *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) where Talbot, the State Education Officer in Dahaga informs Victor: 'This State's being Malayanised pretty fast, and all the top

[655] There are differences of opinions regarding the core elements of the Malay identity. A.B. Shamsul enumerates three: Malay language, the monarchy and Islam, whereas Ida Baizura Bahar lists six elements: Malay language, monarchy, Islam, *adat*/culture, ethnicity and identity. Please see A.B. Shamsul, 'A History of an Identity, an Identity of a History: The Idea and Practice of 'Malayness' in Malaysia Reconsidered', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32.3, 355–366. See also Ida Baizura Bahar, 'The Paradigm of Malayness in Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2012).

[656] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 36. [Emphasis added]

jobs [administrative government posts] are going to Malays.[657] But why would the Malay characters and their religion be subject to hostility in Burgess's Malayan Trilogy? After all, they are the indigenous people of Malaya.

In *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977), Syed Hussein Alatas reveals that the trope of denigrating the native population and especially its government has its origin in justifying colonial capitalist rule. It was the rich natural resources and fertile lands suitable for cash crops that European colonialists were after and therefore as Alatas posits, the 'degradation of the native population' was a 'historical necessity'. He adds that 'once their country was taken they had to accept a subordinate place in the scheme.'[658] In the case of Malaya, because these rich fertile lands with abundant resources were under the sovereignty of the Malay sultans, the colonialists' character assassination of the Malay people was strategic, as they had to justify their presence there. It was according to Alatas, Stamford Raffles, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen/Bengkulu (1818–24) whose memoir is responsible for influencing the bulk of colonial literature with the distorted image of the Malays. Raffles was of the belief it is the Malays' conversion to Islam that led to the deterioration of its law and order. In his memoir, he remarks: 'Nothing has tended more decidedly to the deterioration of the Malay character than the want of a well-defined and generally acknowledged system of law. The Malay nations had in general made considerable progress in civilization before the introduction of the religion of Islam among

[657] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 208.
[658] Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A study of the image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th century and its function in the ideology of colonial capitalism* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1977), p. 24.

them.'[659] What Raffles had done was peg Islam as the source for the Malays' degeneration, backwardness and uncivilised culture. Therein is the root for the attack on the trio elements of Malay identity. The colonial stereotypes that Malays are inherently indolent, country bumpkins and have no acumen for business were birthed from Raffles's erroneous deduction, which unfortunately became a textbook reference for mainstream colonial literature. What I would also like to demonstrate is that these stereotypes through comedy do creep into Burgess's Malayan Trilogy as well and serve to delegitimise the Malay claim to power in place of British rule in postcolonial Malaya. In *Time for a Tiger* (1956), the Malay monarchy, the apex of the Malay society are presented as living 'unedifying' lives.[660] In the novel's introduction to Victor Crabbe as the Trilogy's constant protagonist, the narrator delivers the history of Kuala Hantu, which reads like a parody to the *Malay Annals* (1612), a genealogical history of the Malay royals mixed in with fantastical elements of mythology.[661] In it, the narrator details each of the decadent lifestyle that the past Malay royals led: 'The [Malay] 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.[662] In each description of the Malay rulers, none of them are good examples of a Malay Muslim leader. On the contrary, they are all degenerates and sinners. Sultan Yahya was a drug addict, Sultan Ahmad was a glutton, Sultan Mohammed was tyrannical, Sultan Aziz contracted syphilis and Sultan Hussain did what is forbidden in Islam – he had more than four wives. However, when the narrative mentions a Malay sultan with a

[659] Thomas Stamford Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Thomas Stamford Raffles*, ed. by Sophia Hull Raffles, 2 vols (London: James Duncan, 1835), I, p. 98.
[660] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 25.
[661] The manuscript was originally titled '*Sulalatus Salatin*' (Geneology of Kings).
[662] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, pp. 25–6.

praiseworthy character, he is given the name Sultan Iblis. In Malay, the word '*Iblis*' means the devil, a deliberate transgression against propriety. Another sultan, Sultan Mansor is portrayed as a hypocrite. The narrator describes him as 'cosmopolitan when abroad' but parochial in his own country.[663] By degrading the Malay royalties to degenerates and hypocrites through comedy carnival, the Trilogy strategically denies the Malays' claim to power.

A more blatant mockery of the Malay monarchy is the genealogical history of the Abang, where in the typical carnivalesque spirit, scatological humour is injected. The Abang (Big Brother) is entirely Burgess's invention. There is no Malay ruler known to have the title Abang but nevertheless, he is supposed to represent the residual strain of the hybrid Animist/Hindu/Islam practised in the Malay culture. In *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), the Abang is described as 'a man with […] titles as Scourge of the Wicked, Friend of the Oppressed, Loved of God, Father of a Thousand, who claimed descent from the faeces of the White Bull of Siva.'[664] In the narrator's descriptions of the Abang, while he is revered among the people of Dahaga, where even his installation ceremony is more lavish than the state Sultan's coronation, there is no divine or even a royal trace in his descendent. The narrator states that he is just merely a descendent of the White Bull of Siva's faeces, implicating the silliness of the people of Dahaga for holding him with such high regard. Then there is the strange mix of lineage of the Abang, which is supposed to poke fun at the genealogical history of the Malay rulers in the *Malay Annals* (1612). The Abang is believed to be descended from figures in various cultures including the

[663] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 28.
[664] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 5.

Portuguese Admiral D'Albuquerque, who was responsible for causing the downfall of the Malay Malaccan Empire in 1511 to the Portuguese colonisers: 'The names of some of Abang's ancestors were chanted, great heroes who had tried to subdue the world to the True Faith: Al Iskander [Alexander] the Great, Aristotle, Mansor Shah, Averroes, D'Albuquerque, Abu Bakar and others'.[665] Most significantly, the Trilogy also points out that with the increasing Islamisation of Malaya, the odd admixture of Animism, Hinduism and Islam in the Malay culture is also slowly being phased out. The Abang like the British, struggles to find his place in the new independent Malaya: 'the end of colonialism meant also the end of a grotesque seigniory in Dahaga.'[666]

While nothing may be spared from being lampooned in Burgess's Malayan Trilogy, it cannot be ignored that Islam and the Malay characters are its main subject of relentless mockery. As I have mentioned earlier, to deny Malay hegemony in Malaya, the critical elements of the Malay identity have to be inverted. As it turns out, in the Malayan/Malaysian context, the Malay identity is so interwoven with Islam to the extent that there have been misconceptions among the non-Malays that converting to Islam equals becoming Malay. Sharon Siddique has pointed out this aspect regarding the Malay identity in her article 'Some Aspects of Malay-Muslim Ethnicity in Peninsular Malaysia' (1981): 'In the context of Malay ethnicity in Malaysia, it is more accurate to attach the hyphenated ethnic label "Malay-Muslim" to the community popularly known as "Malay" because their ethnic identity is

[665] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 6.
[666] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 108.

exclusively tied to Islam.'[667] In Article 160 of the Malaysian Federation constitution, it defines the Malay person as one 'who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language [and] conforms to Malay customs.'[668] Since the Malay identity and Islam are inseparable, the Malayan Trilogy strategically debases the depictions of Islam by portraying it as a religion that is hollow. In a conversation with Rupert Hardman, Father LaForgue, the lapsed pastor in *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) describes Islam as 'mainly custom' and 'mainly observance' and that '[t]here is very little real doctrine in it, only [the] belief in one God, which [the Malays] think is so original.'[669] Father LaForgue is cynical of Islam, claiming that the monotheistic creed in the oneness of God in Islam is borrowed from other religions. The Trilogy also pokes fun at Koranic verses. In the same novel, in Talbot's narration of the namesake of the Haji Ali college to Victor and Fenella Crabbe, he mimics the voice of Haji Ali's ghost over the construction workers building the college: 'And the voice of the Lord was heard in a kind of stereophonic sound, saying: 'Woe to the children of the scripture, for their aspirations shall become as garlic on the wind.'[670] Haji Ali's ghost's booming voice parodies the linguistic style of Koranic verses relating to the Children of Israel as well as verses directed to the 'People of the Book' (Christians and Jews).

After uncrowning the Malay rulers and Islam, the main aspects that make the triumvirate Malay identity, the Trilogy profanes the Malay people's practice of

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[667] Sharon Siddique, 'Some Aspects of Malay-Muslim Ethnicity in Peninsular Malaysia', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 3.1 (1981), 76 – 87 (p. 76).
[668] Malaysian Federal Constitution, Art. 160, p. 153 <http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/uploads/files/Publications/FC/Federal%20Consti%20(BI%20text).pdf> [accessed 1 September 2019]
[669] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 61.
[670] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 44.

Islam, which it presents as not the 'true Islam.'[671] The Trilogy especially portrays the Malay people as hypocrites and wayward Muslims. In the opening scene of *Time for a Tiger* (1956), Inche Idris bin Zainal, described as an important man in the Malay 'Nationalist Movement' is seen ordering bacon and eggs at a Chinese restaurant. The message the Trilogy conveys is that if this Malay man is one who champions the rights of the Muslim Malays, then his behaviour does not mirror what he professes. In effect, it delegitimises his cause. In another instance as we see earlier in the novel, the narrator describes the '*bilal*', the person who makes the call to prayers, of going to Mecca to perform his pilgrimage with money he retrieves from gambling, which really defeats the purpose of going for pilgrimage if the money that was used was made through means that are prohibited in the Koran.[672] This would render his pilgrimage invalid, as money gained from gambling is sinful. Another example of hypocrisy the Trilogy portrays among the Malay people is seen in *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) where one of Rupert Hardman's Malay acquaintances, Haji Zainal Abidin made his pilgrimage to Mecca but is a heavy drinker. Moreover, the novel demonstrates, despite his Haji title, his knowledge of Islam is also very parochial.[673] As Rupert points out, he stomped on an English translation of the Koran because he believes that the Koran is 'too sacred to be translated.'[674] This act, whether it is done towards translations of the Koran or the Koran itself, is still blasphemous. Apart from that, the Trilogy also pokes fun at the superstitious Malays, parodying the mélange of Animism, Hinduism and Islam in the Malay culture but in an exaggerated manner. In the State Education Officer's narration of the construction of the Haji Ali College to Victor Crabbe, he mentions the absurd rituals that took place: '[W]hen [Haji Ali]

[671] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 49.
[672] Burgess, *Time for a Tiger*, p. 9.
[673] 'Haji' is the title given to a Muslim man who had performed their pilgrimage in Mecca. For a Muslim woman, she is called by the title 'Hajjah'.
[674] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 30.

died there was universal mourning. Drums going all night, black kids sacrificed to obscure Hindu gods. Then they started building this [Haji Ali] school.'[675] In the scene, the figure of the Haji, a supposedly religious man by his title, is debased into the central figure of absurd pagan rituals, all meant to project the Malays' practice of Islam as disorienting and meaningless. The only person the Trilogy portrays as actually practicing Islam genuinely is ironically Rupert Hardman, who in the beginning, only wanted to pretend to be a Muslim in order to marry Che Normah.

As I have mentioned earlier in this section, the subversion of the Malay identity that is closely bound by Islam in Burgess's Malayan Trilogy through comedy carnival, is strategic in undermining the Malay administration of postcolonial Malaya. In *Beds in the East* (1959), its ferocious assault on the Malay Muslim identity is more pronounced and is found to betray a desire for Malaya to return to the control of the British colonial government. This is manifested through its Jaffna Tamils mouthpiece: Maniam, Arumugam, Sundralingam, Parameswaran and Vythilingam. Parameswaran begins by talking about the 'shiftlessness of the Malays' and that 'if Malaya were left to the Malays it wouldn't survive for five minutes', followed by Arumugam's comment that '[w]ithout the Malays it would be a good country.'[676] Parameswaran is implying that if the Malays were left to govern Malaya in the absence of the British, the country would be in chaos while Arumugam's xenophobic remark about the Malays insinuates that they are the reason for the country's lack of progress. The irony is that Parameswaran's name is drawn from the founder of the Malay Malaccan Sultanate (1400–1511), Parameswara (1400–14), whose empire was

[675] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 44.
[676] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 36.

renowned for its busy international trading port and sophisticated maritime law.[677] However, the conversations between the Jaffna Tamils become more apparent that they are echoing the desire to return to the British divide and rule policy. Another one of them, Sundralingam, remarks that the Malays should not be ambitious and ever join up politics, so that they could be kept in their place:

> "[I]f only people would get on with their work—the Malays in the kampongs [villages] and in the paddy-fields and the Indians in the professions and the Chinese in trade—I think all people could be quite happy together. It is the ambition [partaking in politics] of the Malays which is going to prove so tragic."[678]

Note that Sundralingam mentions the indigenous Malays should be kept as peasants in the villages in the rural areas, working in paddy-fields, while the Indians work in the professions, which he really means in the legal field and education, while the Chinese in the economic sector. The stereotype is that the Malays are incapable of any of these fields reserved for the Indians and Chinese. This was the policy that the British colonial administrators used to hinder the native Malays from advancing politically and economically, while providing professional and government job opportunities to the Indians and the Chinese, as if to add salt to the injury to the Malays who were already disenfranchised in their own land. In the same novel, Lim Cheng Po, the Anglophile Singaporean lawyer also shares the same sentiment as

[677] See Mardiana Nordin, 'Undang-undang Laut Melaka: A Note on Malay Maritime Law in the 15th Century', in *Memory and Knowledge of the Sea in Southeast Asia*, ed. by Danny Tze-Ken Wong (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 2008), pp. 15–22.
[678] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 36.

Sundralingam on the Malays, which mirrors the argument of the 'Real Malay' by colonial writers such as Hugh Clifford (1866–1941) and Frank Swettenham (1850–1946) in discouraging the Malays from being involved in politics, so they are kept as 'picturesque sons of the soil'[679]: '"Blame the middle-class Malays, if you like, political men, but don't blame the kampong [village] blokes. For them, the world hardly changes. But there should never have been a Malay middle-class, they're just not the middle-class type at all. They're supposed to be poor and picturesque, sons of the soil."'[680] Lim Cheng Po's comments on the Malays underscores the Trilogy's underlying anxiety of the advancement of the Malay people in politics, which it sees as the undeserving successor to British hegemony in Malaya.

At this juncture, I have uncovered two instances where postcolonial melancholia are betrayed in Burgess's Malayan Trilogy, which are pain in its account of Malaya's independence and anger at the Malays in succeeding the British administration in postcolonial Malaya. I will now be unmasking another layer of postcolonial melancholia buried under the Trilogy's comical narratives, which is guilt. Concordant to the Trilogy's denial of independent Malaya at the helm of a Malay-led government, it also at other times attempts to mitigate the impact of Americanisation in the former British colonies. Correspondingly, in its gradual acceptance of the American rise to power, it begins to recognise Britain's past colonial guilt. Towards the end of *Beds in the East* (1959), when Victor Crabbe meets Temple Haynes, the American ethno-linguist and seeing that Americans are supplanting the British as the new imperial power, Victor retreats into admitting Britain's colonial guilt and the

[679] See Hugh Clifford, *Saleh: A Prince of Malaya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). See also Frank Swettenham, *The Real Malay* (London: John Lane, 1899).
[680] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 44.

constant denial of their wrongdoings in the colonies: 'Crabbe remembered that the American, being of a race with as little guilt as history, would not be so self-denying.'[681] Victor's recognition of this colonial guilt, as we learn in the novel, with the 1857 Indian Mutiny being one of them, as pointed out by Lim Cheng Po of 'a hundred years since that nasty business in India', is indicative of postcolonial melancholia.[682] We also see Victor, in a conversation with Lim, wallowing in conflicts in the colonies that the British 'neglected in the past.'[683] In that moment of recognising Britain's colonial guilt, Victor then makes a comparison with the Americans, whom he surmises, would not have to look back at their past colonial crimes with regret because the magnitude of their crimes are only 'little' as opposed to Britain's. It is rather an absurd observation on Victor's part and insinuates that colonial crimes can be absolved simply because they are not as much as or bigger than the crimes committed by Britain on the colonial subjects.[684] As Gilroy points out in *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005), the dismissal of colonial crimes for the 'embarrassing and uncomfortable information about imperial and colonial governance' no matter how big or small is a sure sign of denying postcolonial melancholia.[685]

However, it should also be noted that as soon as the Trilogy recognises the Americans as a 'race with little imperial guilt', it begins to project the British self-image onto the Americans. It looks to their eager and innovative scholars as a

[681] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 159.
[682] Burgess, *Beds, in the East*, p. 45.
[683] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 45.
[684] For Victor to conclude that the Americans would feel less guilt than Britain because they committed less colonial crimes is absurd. When the Americans acquired Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico after their victory in the 1898 Spanish-American war and Cuba in 1898, the extent of damages they caused on each of these territories were massive.
[685] Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, p. 93.

reminder of the British in the early colonial years as well as a hopeful successor to the British Empire. As Moneypenny, the Protector of the Aborigines puts it, the Americans are 'part of the vanguard' who will replace the British when they retreat from Malaya and Southeast Asia.[686] Victor Crabbe also sees Temple Haynes as 'pure Mayflower', a reference to the early British colonial settlers who had just arrived in North America and were eager in their civilising mission of the colonies.[687] The Trilogy depicts the American scholars of possessing state-of-the-art recording apparatus which they use to analyse the language of the Temiars, an aboriginal group in Peninsula Malaya. Both Moneypenny and Victor revel in the progress made by the the Americans in place of the British in a range of academic fields including linguistics, ethnology, teacher training methods, 'time-and-motion study' (business efficiency technique) and behaviour-patterns, albeit with a 'gloomy vicarious pride' in the case of Moneypenny. As in the case of Victor, he feels inferior to the Americans whom he views as 'professionals' compared to the 'amateurish' British: 'The British, [Victor] decided, had been merely gifted, amateurs: Singapore has been raised on amateur architecture, […] town-planning, […] education, […] law. Now was the time for the [American] professionals.'[688] But this imperial guilt in the Trilogy and its subsequent supplanting through the projection of the British ego onto the American ascent to power is only fleeting. In its comedy carnival fashion, the Trilogy then begins to lampoon the methodologies used by the American ethno-linguists. Moneypenny for instance, argues with Temple that their studies are only theoretical and could not be applied practically: '"You've got to get into the jungle. You've got to come face to face with the living reality. There was Barlow at the university reading books and dishing up the books in his essays; there was I actually

[686] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 152.
[687] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 155.
[688] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 154 and p. 157–8.

doing the job. There's no substitute for real experience."'[689] Victor Crabbe also questions Temples's use of duplicate pictures of the same object to elicit its plural expression from the Temiars in their language: '"Why do you have more than one picture of each thing?" asked Crabbe. "That," said Temple Haynes, "is for plurals."'[690] On top of that, the Trilogy also pokes fun at American mass culture. This is portrayed in the pointlessness of Syed Omar, the Malay policeman selling the newspaper *Suara Amerika* (Voice of America) as a side-income to the village people so that, as Syed rationalises, would allow them to read more about world events. However, Syed's effort is futile because most of his consumers are illiterate. The only reason the newspaper sell so well, as we later find out, is because people buy them to use them as wrapping-paper, indicating how meaningless it means to the Malayans in the novel.[691] Therefore, we see that through comedy, the Trilogy initially recognises Britain's past colonial guilt as opposed to the Americans, the new imperial power, which it sees as having infinitesimal imperial sins committed in its name. It then covers the shame of Britain's colonial past by viewing the expanding influence of Americanisation as an extension of its self-image before inadvertently demoting American supremacy by mocking their scholarship and mass culture.

I have now uncovered all three manifestations of melancholia that Burgess's Malayan Trilogy attempts to deflect with its comedic exterior. They are pain, anger and guilt. Pain is demonstrated by Burgess's main British characters' feeling of displacement in postcolonial Malaya where its national language is now Malay and the state religion is Islam. Anger is revealed through the Trilogy's relentless mockery

[689] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 162.
[690] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 155.
[691] Burgess, *Beds in the East*, p. 228.

of the three paragons of Malay identity: monarchy, culture and Islam. This assault on the trinity of the Malay identity is strategic in its denial of the Malays' claim to power. Guilt is evoked by the British characters' admission of Britain's colonial crimes. Before this discussion of resistance to postcolonial melancholia, this chapter has also shown how the Trilogy's comedy palliates the violent realities of the Malaysian insurgency and compensates for a British imbalance in adapting to change, especially in the context of Britain's withdrawal from Malaya and its decline in imperial status.

CONCLUSION

In essence, the core findings of my reading of Sillitoe's and Burgess's Malayan novels reveal a self-reflexive assessment of colonial literary tradition. Their fiction engages critically with its underlying assumptions of racism and classicism. Sillitoe's Malayan fiction (and in extension his anti-imperial Algerian fiction) in particular, carries a universalist message that recognises a collaboration between his British working-class protagonists and the colonised nations to work towards achieving independence from European imperialism.[692] They work against the assumption of postcolonial theorists (read: Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak) that Western literature tends to rely on Orientalist tropes that the Eastern peoples are primitive and savages, their cultures and space exotic, and a negative topography all at the same time. Sillitoe's texts disavow these tropes. There is an absence of exotic elements in his texts. Therefore, the inclusion of Sillitoe's decolonisation novels in postcolonial debates disrupts the Manichean colonial master/colonised slave binary and compels a more nuanced response from postwar British fiction to the colonial project leading up to decolonisation.

In the same vein as Sillitoe, Burgess's Malayan Trilogy also works against the Orientalist tropes in colonial fiction. They overturn the colonial master/colonised slave power dynamics and relegate the colonial master as subordinates to the colonised slave. His British colonial protagonist becomes the servant to his Asian counterparts (Victor Crabbe to Nik Hassan in *Beds in the East*) and the Malayan wife has the upper hand over her British husband (Rupert Hardman to Che Normah in *The*

[692] Or in the term that Sillitoe uses in his Algerian Trilogy, the 'capitalist-imperialist' system, showing an affinity between the British working class and the colonised subjects.

Enemy in the Blanket). Burgess also ventured into a de-exoticising project for instance by removing exotic elements that make part of the aesthetics of pleasure in literature and supplanting them with elements of non-event and boredom. However, Burgess's texts are unable to escape the spectre of Orientalism, which he set out to dispel in his de-exoticising project. In fact, they tend to recirculate the colonial stereotypes that view male colonised subjects in feminine terms, as in the case of the transvestite Malayan character Ibrahim, which his text presents as an avatar for degeneracy and imperial decline. The Malayan Trilogy also betrays British paternalism and a desire for Malaya to return to under British rule. Nevertheless, I opened up a discussion on gender fluidity in Burgess's Trilogy, which has not been explored in previous studies.

Regardless, my research is only limited to Sillitoe's and Burgess's Malayan decolonisation novels. I was not able to exhaust all the decolonisation fiction in other settings such as South Asia, Africa and other parts of Southeast Asia. My suggestions for future research would be to extend the study of colonial and decolonisation texts written by British women working-class writers, another marginalised group. It would also be interesting if there was a study that would follow up Lynne Segal's study of hyper-masculinity in Angry Young Men literature that reveals anxious masculinity and interrogate the link between Sillitoe's hyper-masculine anti-heroes with the British social concerns of homosexuality and effeminacy in men in the period of Britain's imperial decline as Burgess pointed out in *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) that the British 'ha[d] become an effete race'.[693]

[693] Burgess, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, p. 8.

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