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(Brother Lawrence of the Decalced Carmelites)

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Wong Ming Yook

Was the winter tree,
blasted and raw,
what it took to turn an eighteen year old mind
to desert contemplation?
Black and thin against the blankness
of the white inferior land,
was it that which brought to bear
upon a soul most pliant
a vision of heavenly things?

Your desert solitude,
within a life most quiescent,
quiet in a quiet land
most fruitful, most rare...
This do I envy you for,
brother,
whose heart beat a different blood
from my unquiet one,
whose eyes saw the colours of a
vision primary--
past the bleakness of what life was not--
whose joy was most simple
and most rare.

GRANDFATHER

by

Wong Ming Yook

When you spoke, we trembled, all three,
and edged with caution to the door,
ready for flight past grandma
and all that stood between us
and freedom.

There was no time you did not terrify,
with your strange, ferocious brow,
all wrinkled white with rage,
and all the aliveness pinned
inside.

We never knew you.

When you died, I think I cried
from something, perhaps,
that said there was more to you
in me than I then knew.
I was only eight.

You are grandfather,
Your image passes me at times
in the mirror, when I'm not looking,
and shadows me
with things you would have said
and done. (what would you not have done?)

Grandfather, wild and white until you died.
I remember, I will remake you
in memory,
pick up your fragments of
a life too leashed,
too small for you to
make much of,
and hope renewal in your blood will
appease you, and wrench the anger
from deep within
to rest you easy
in a frail eternity.

PHOENIXES

by

Wong Ming Yook

Birds which take fire to themselves
and spin a bright new life
from ashes and cloud; call
them phoenixes, they will not answer,
anyhow.

Consuming tongues of fire,
they cannot but rise up to
the ecstasy of blood and heat;
they are unhearing of all the
sounds which hammer below,
calling them back to a life
thin and elusive.

Only
in the sharp fall of dying,
and the tear of fresh life,
in the burning and charring of old flesh for
new,
they hear themselves
crying, with the breath of new tongues
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JADE

by

Wong Ming Yook

Refine the rocklike surface, sharp and hard as
crystals,
I am beneath its rough exterior;
Feel that fineness as you draw me to the
surface,
O master cutter.
I am lucent and green;
I am all light.

As you turn me round, catch my brightness,
but gently move;
how is my brilliance felt but in the loving
touch
of blood which warms me and creates
the lucent sheen? Touch, but
gently touch, and you will see
my self revealed.

Beneath this hard imprisonment,
I am all purity and line;
I am no ornament, make me instead
your door to wisdom.
For so do men call me bright,
and think me rare to have.
Here, I give myself to you, and you at least,
may
wear me like a pendant,
for my name is jade.

THE ECHO FROM THE CLIFF: POSTCOLONIAL VOICES IN MAKASSAR SAILING

by

Margaret Yong

For sixteen months before the second world war, G.E.P. Collins lived in Makassar in the Flores Sea; Makassar Sailing[1] is the record of his life on the southeastern tip of the island, near the village of Bira. However, the phrase "record of his life" may be misleading, for Makassar Sailing is not written in the form of a private diary: not is it an explorer's journal. Rather, it is a mix of journal and fiction. Collins has injected a rather lively dramatic mode into parts of his narrative and many elements of his discourse come straight from the stuff (and style) of fiction. Indeed, some facets of his story-telling, such as the physical isolation of Bira, the loneliness of the author who was the only "white man" in the region, the mystery of why and how he came to be there at all, contribute to generic expectations of the travel or exploration novel. These fictive features ripple through the narrative, but Makassar Sailing is far from being a typical romance of the eastern seas. As the title of the book suggests, it deals in part at least with sailing and sailing ships and, in particular, the author's own sailing ship which he was building in Makassar. This situation forms the core of the narrative and generates the "plot," if the light storyline may be so termed. The structure of Collins' personal situation may be seen as the core of the

narrator's character, reified in the shape of his life in Makassar.

Being determined to have as well-built a boat as he could manage, Collins decided that the only way to achieve that objective was to stay in Bira and watch (over) the shipbuilders at work. The building of his boat took far longer than he had envisaged, and the enforced stay in Makassar afforded him plenty of opportunity to comment on the customs and habits of the Makassarese. He displays a sociological bent, which gives the discourse a special flavour. Collins mixes sociological observation of the Birans with the story of how he spent his days, while his ship was being built by the master shipbuilders of Bira. Since he was convinced--with some evidence--that he would be cheated by the Makassarese unless he was on hand at all times to supervise their work on his ship, Collins became rather well acquainted with shipbuilding customs in Bira. Makassar Sailing documents these discoveries faithfully and some of the record can be quite entertaining, or even absorbing, not least because Collins inadvertently reveals his own mind in the process; and what a strangely opinionated mind Collins turns out to have! Makassar Sailing is unusual in the acidity of its author's views, given under the guise of both fiction and objective statements.

Collins lived in the government rest house or baruga, which stood on a hill covered with tangled scrub and rampant growths of prickly pear. There were three narrow beaches inside the reefs below, where ships could safely anchor and the baruga offered a vantage point as it was on a crescent of high rugged cliffs directly

above Marumasa, the central beach. The spot afforded a commanding prospect of the seas.

As this paper will attempt to show, the relationship between Collins in his ("native") surroundings is exactly imaged by the hill beside the sea, this hill being in turn linked to an imaginative use of "voice," as Collins narrates his encounter with Makassar, from his symbolic position on the hill. It is this imagery of "hill" and "voice" in the postcolonial encounter which concerns this paper. Collins' situation catches up many aspects of this encounter, not least in the generic features of the exploration novel mentioned above. The government house on the hill, overlooking an expanse of colonial possessions, postulates part of the generic theme. However, I am here concerned with a special aspect of this encounter--the manner in which Collins "speaks" his situation. By this is meant quite literally the sound(s) enunciated by Collins, specifically the way in which he "speaks" during one important episode, the ship hauling, which opens the narrative of Makassar Sailing. The analysis will end with the happy conjunction of Collins' speaking voice and the symbolic function of the hill.

The baruga occupies its superior spot on the hill in quite splendid isolation. Around it is mostly the scrub of Bira, the village itself being some distance away. Lower down the slope, in spite of the poor soil of the hill, some patches of ground have been cleared for cultivation. The Birans have planted some "maize, a few edible roots, and bananas that [were] mostly of coarse flavour" which struggle in the rocky gardens and attract hordes of "big

dark monkeys." Now, observes Collins, these monkeys had "a most human look, just as many Birans are much like monkeys" (my emphasis). In case we miss his point, Collins adds that there was also an old man working in one of the garden plots who "might well be taken at dusk for a chimpanzee." (All quotations are from page 13.)

Remarks such as these may well bring to mind another traveller to foreign parts whose mental balance was never the same again after his meeting with certain ape-like humanoids called Yahoos. Gulliver would have been more comfortable had the pernicious race of man been exterminated: Collins advocates steps almost as drastic to prevent the Biranese stock from degenerating further into the diseases which beset the villagers. He contrasts the physically weakened Birans to the hardy "race" of the Scots, who, he believes, have benefited from "the wise practice" of Boethius as recorded in Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, which he cites. This advice should be quoted in full to appreciate its application to Collins' context:

> Heretofore in Scotland ... if any were visited with the falling-sickness, madness, gout, leprosie, or any such dangerous disease, which was likely to be propagated from the father to the son, he was instantly gelded; a woman kept from all company of men; and if by chance, having some such disease, she were found with child, she with her brood were buried alive."
> (45; my emphasis)

Luckily for the Birans, de Roock the Dutch doctor never took Collins seriously. Clearly, Collins was deeply perturbed by his daily encounter with erupting sores on the wasted human frame, which modern antibiotics could not combat because of various local practices and beliefs. Indeed, Bira was a place of many ills of the flesh: framboesia ("an erupting disease whose germs de Roock told me are almost the same as those of syphilis"), leprosy, cholera, typhoid.

However, not all the observation in Makassar Sailing is as extraordinary as Collins' recommendation for the gelding and entombment of the living. Much of Makassar Sailing deals with Biranese customs and practices in a (comparatively) more commonplace manner--such as Collins' report on how the Birans conduct marriages and burials and so on--though even here, his disapproval of such alien practices is never far from the surface. I am in no position to offer an opinion on the justness and accuracy of Collins' "sociological" observations. No doubt they are as good as any amateur of his time and prejudices can make of them: many of the customs are noted as superstitious practices and Collins gets quite emotionally involved with what he is reporting. I will comment no further on Collins' sociology, for the point I wish to make about Makassar Sailing and its estranging culture is the limited one of Collins' reification of the postcolonial encounter in the opening scenes (chapter one) of his discourse.

Makassar Sailing is an autobiographical narrative, using the first person singular speaking voice. This feature of its style introverts and finally deconstructs the

narrative. Makassar Sailing seldom, if ever, offers a transparent subject, though its "authorial" (narrative) voice speaks strongly and singularly from its pages. "Voice" echoes in numerous ways in Makassar Sailing, but I am here concerned with only one of its reverberations. I wish to suggest that it is this particular echo from the autobiographical voice which modulates the complexly discordant tones inherent in Collins' discourse.

Many voices speak in Makassar Sailing, but the voice I mean resonates most potently in the first chapter. There is little doubt that the opening scenes of Makassar Sailing are particularly ably handled. The narrative begins with the exciting panoply of a tropical sea crowded with sail on the tropical horizon. This scene is set into motion with eager voices addressing Collins and speaking the meaning of the occasion: "The ships! The ships, Tuan! The ships are coming home!" (11). Collins identifies the speakers in typical fashion with the phrase "their quiet voices" (11). At once the dialogic situation (between "quiet" or soft "native" voices and the strong tones of the authorial voice) foreshadows the postcolonial strategy of the "voice" speaking from the hill in Collins' discourse. These "native" voices are not just "quiet" (which becomes significant when heard against later tones in the narrative), but also anonymous and "native," like many voices in Makassar Sailing[2] which are "other" than the narrator's, who is "Tuan." The Conradian echoing is not used self-consciously, but it enhances our expectation of the genre.

Bira ships sail away from the village during the wet and stormy east monsoon, when

strong winds and the boiling surf around Bira make it too dangerous to approach the coast, or even to harbour behind the reefs. So when the east monsoon ends, Bira ships return in full glory, approaching the sandy beaches ceremonially, to "the ring and boom of gongs and drums." This ceremonial "voice" of the nonEuropean "other" is woven into the thematic chanting of "native" voices in the narrative. This paper will examine another ceremonial use of "native" voices in the ship hauling, but it would be beyond its scope to address all the rich modulations of ceremonial voices in the narrative. I will merely note its heralding presence of Collins' discourse of "voice."

As Collins watches from the hill, the Bira ships sail into harbour with their rigging "gaily dressed with flags" (signifying yet other kinds of speaking), a hundred and eighteen ships in all. The whole village turns out for the ship display, articulating a wide range of welcoming voices.

Collins uses the festive occasion to lead into an account of ship hauling practices in Bira. The masters of the sailing ships use teams of men to haul their ships up the beach with long ropes, encouraging the men on with great rhythmic shouts, which lead in turn to the ritual of chants used by the hauling teams. Collins describes his first experience of this oratory of voices:

> "A prahu master began to prance up and down the beach ... screaming at the men. His shrill harsh cries went on, and sometimes at the end of a long

> yell he stopped his prancing for a second or two and clapped his hands, letting out a still higher shriek. At last, when the men should have been worked up by his cries, he screamed at them Himbang! Himbang! Himbang!

On this occasion, instead of heaving ("himbang"), the men are mesmerised by Collins who is aiming his camera at them.[3] Collins describes the prahu master in a manner which signifies lack of empathy, for many of his terms hark back to an image of the Biran-as-monkey (with another set of antics): "prance," "screaming," "shrill harsh cries, "shriek" and so on. As these cries are ineffectual, Collins decides to lend his voice to the prahu master's task: "Then I shut the camera and put it in its case, and went among the men and made a great noise."

Collins' use of descriptive epithets is instructive: the prahu master, he tells us, yells, screams and shrieks; and he himself makes a great noise. These terms denote levels of sound, almost (but not quite) undifferentiated sound; morphemes, so to speak, become as basic as it is possible to get and still retain "meaning." At this level of pure (human) "noise," he observes that "The voices of these island people are weak and shrill ..." while he himself possesses a fearful roar ("never before had they heard such roars"). Collins is quite unabashed about the level of noise he is capable of producing. It seems a matter of pride, instead, that his shouts can get the men moving, hauling on the ropes at last to pull the ships up the beach. His roar, he

notes with satisfaction, galvanises the men where the prahu masters fail--for he discovers, he says, that Bira folk are mighty lazy and will pretend to work if they can get away with it.

He goes amongst the sailors, his roar undiminished for days urging them on: "taking turns with the prahu masters, following their walk and words as nearly as I could and out-roaring the lot of them." (Ironically, Collins is aping the prahu masters without really knowing the meaning of his words.) He soon discovers that the shouting (called colourfully "taking the tree") is not merely noise, for while "[m]ost of this shouting is to the men just sound ... some of it has meaning."

The "roars," in fact, are only one aspect of a complex formula of shouts and responses for inspiring the men who are hauling the ships up the beach. Collins describes the interleaving of shouts and physical motion, which creates a complicated dialogic form. "The whole formula" is repeated in cycles of "fifty-four shouts" (26).[4]

As the work progresses, Collins' voice dominates more and more. He attributes this to a physical cause: "the prahu masters' voices were hoarse and weak," but Collins could still roar at the men with undiminished might. However, by the "third day" Collins finds that "though I could roar as loudly as before, my speaking voice was a whisper, for I had done far more than my share of the shouting." (29) His shouting voice, in other words, drowns out all other quieter voices, an irony which he does not seem to appreciate.

Collins sometimes climbs upon the decks of the prahus, giving himself a rest, "high up on the stern of a ship that was being hauled." (29) From this superior position he is able to look down on the men (just as he was able to from his hill) hauling on the ropes, rocking the prahus violently. On the final day of hauling, he is the only man left who "could speak in anything but a hoarse whisper, and I had to do nearly all the shouting" (32). In this parable of voices, the sound of Collins' discourse (at this level of the documentation of "native" customs) has nearly silenced the symphony of sounds which first opens the narrative of the homecoming of the Bira sailing ships.

Collins gives a lively account of all this in a chapter (i.e. the first) which is almost self-contained but prefigures the voices which follow in the rest of the narrative. In the rest of Makassar Sailing, "voice" plays a less obviously provocative and dialogic role. The interplay of voices raises numerous questions, but I would like to ask a simple one here: what does it tell us of the (autobiographical) narrator and his position in the cross-cultural encounter?

The answer may be crudely outlined by Collins himself. He sees all his tremendous bout of shouting as indicative of superior vigour: his louder register, his more sustained stamina, and so on. He also describes his attitude tellingly: "before the last ship was hauled I was cursing yet laughing at the Birans for being such half-witted louts as to need so much shouting to rouse them to work" (32). These words show a degree of affection, but it is the affection of the superior towards the

inferior; it underlies the (misguided) paternalism denoted by the excessive zeal of applying Boethius' advice to the Birans' situation; it is, ultimately, too, embedded in the orientalism of Collins' outlook.

The last word on Collins' prodigious voice is added by the "commodore" or leader of the men. Gomek thanks Collins for his great voice:

> 'I've never heard anything like the noise you made. If someone had told me last week that anyone could shout like that I wouldn't have believed him.' (32)

Gomek's admiration reinforces the impression of the supra-normal level of noise made by Collins' "voice." Collins' "voice" is greater than that of any Biran, but Gomek's words are of course inherently ironic.

Collins however interprets this admiration quite simply. Gomek then invites Collins to have palm wine with one of the fishermen. Again, Collins shows that his capacity is greater than that of any Biran: "At the hauling of the prahus I had [shouted] more times than Gomek and all his party put together: and in Ali's house my share of the palm wine had been in proportion to my shouting." (33-34)

The narrative ends with one final image of this prodigiously greedy "voice." Collins, Gomek and his men leave Ali's house in their "dug-out." It is long after sunset, there is no wind and they drift south "past the cliffs between Kasusu and Marumasa" (33). Marumasa is

near the hill with the baruga. Gomek's party is stupefied by the palm wine, but Collins commands the universe with his "voice" in one last echoing shout:

> Though I should have been weary of roaring, I made more noise than ever, booming across the still water and raising great echoes from the high sheer cliffs. (34)

The chapter closes on this echo from the cliff. What then does Collins' "voice" have to say? The "voice" speaks in a strangely postcolonial context, composed from his naive belief in the efficacy of ethnic cleansing, as it were; his undoubted prowess as shown by his loud clamours which can get the "lazy natives" to work; his unrelenting energy after his companions have been subdued (by wine after their exertions). In its final reverberation, this "voice" reflexively and mockingly reifies only itself; and moreover it does so from one of those high cliffs from whose commanding heights Collins began his discourse. The rest of Makassar Sailing modifies this reverberation in complex ways, but this is not the place to go into those other echoes of Collins' "voice." In the prefiguring first chapter of his narrative, Collins aptly ends his discourse with the confounding echoes of the cliff. In the cross-cultural dialogue of Collins' "voice" with "other" voices, the cliff seems to have the last (and postcolonial) word:

> 'Ho-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o! O! La-he-la! Hela! La! He! La! Ya-ya-hela tukrang bembe!"

but Collins has forgotten that the "the meaning of some of these cries is no longer known" (26-27).

REFERENCES

1. G.E.P. Collins. Makassar Sailing. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992. All quotations are taken from this edition.

2. Collins rarely identifies his sources of local information; these sources remain like the voices at the beginning of the narrative--part of the native spectrum which remains anonymously "they," or the "other." There is insufficient space to go into the ramifications of these unknown voices, but they add to the foregrounding of Collins' own voice which is the theme of this essay.

3. V.S. Naipaul appears to be casting a long backward shadow here. It may be worth noting too that Collins uses a camera as a divisive organ (sight), whereas the prahu master attempts to unify the men with an auricular organ (sound).

4. The formula of chants would make a fascinating study, but such an addition to this paper would make it too long, even though it would enhance many of the points I am making here.

THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH

by

Chan Yue Weng

INTRODUCTION

As is true in many areas of language teaching today, the teaching of grammar is fraught with controversy. The language teaching materials that are referred to as 'functional', 'notional', or 'communicative' are often interpreted as signalling the death of grammatical mastery as a primary goal of language teaching. Many teachers feel caught between the necessity of teaching grammar and the desire to use modern communicative methods which put little emphasis on direct grammatical instruction. A concern with the communicative purpose of language has caused a re-evaluation of traditional linguistic priorities, reviving interest in discourse analysis and semantics. Should grammar be taught and how should it be taught?

The main objective in the teaching of English in Malaysia as specified in the Malaysian Secondary School English Language Programme (KBSM) is communicative competence. The shift in emphasis from the structural approach to that of the communicative approach in language teaching has inevitably generated among many Malaysian secondary school teachers and even teacher-educators some misconceptions,

one of which concerns the role of grammar. Since students need to be actively engaged in real communication with the focus of their attention on content rather than on grammar, the assumption is that grammar need not be taught. What does it mean exactly to teach grammar 'in context and in a meaningful way and not in isolation as far as possible' as specified in the KBSM Curriculum Specifications? Does it mean absolute abandonment of explicit explanation of grammatical rules? Why must grammar be taught deductively? What has communicative competence to do with the teaching of grammar? These are basic and fundamental questions that must be answered for effective and appropriate teaching and learning to be achieved.

This article, firstly aims to provide some insights into the role of grammar in communicative language teaching. Secondly the concept of Hymes' communicative competence will be examined and explained as it is the ultimate goal of language teaching in Malaysia. Finally, we will examine the role of grammar in the Malaysian KBSM syllabuses.

THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

To facilitate a clearer perspective of the role of grammar in communicative language teaching, we shall examine the state of teaching grammar before the communicative approach came onto the scene. The diagram below provides an overview of the differences of a structural approach from a communicative one.

Approach: Deductive		Inductive		
RULES OF GRAMMAR (Teaching in isolation)	+	RULES OF USE (Teaching in context)	=	COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE
. Structures/Forms		. Functions		
. Explicit Grammar		. Implicit Grammar		
. Overt Grammar		. Covert Grammar		
. Usage		. Use		
. Reflective Grammar		. Functional Grammar		
Aim:				
. Mastery of forms		. Mastery of both functions & forms		
. Linguistic Competence		. Communicative Competence		
. Accuracy		. Fluency		
Weakness:				
. Learners are not able to use the forms appropriately in communication. (Structurally competent but communicatively incompetent)		. Too much emphasis on functions but very little focus on Grammar will lead to: i. Premature fossilisation ii. Pidginisation of the language		

An Overview of the Deductive and Inductive Approaches in the Teaching of Grammar

i. Rules of Grammar

Many new terms have evolved referring basically to the forms or structures of the language. The most prominent ones are namely: Explicit Grammar (Barry Taylor) Overt Grammar (Jeremy Harmer), Usage (Widdowson) and Reflective Grammar (Robert Lado). Prior to the communicative approach, grammar was taught using the deductive approach where the teacher explicitly describes and explains the rules of grammar in isolation/as discrete components. The primary aim of the deductive approach in the teaching of grammar is mastery of grammatical forms/structures. Chomsky calls it 'linguistic competence' while Widdowson calls it 'accuracy'.

The major criticism against the deductive approach in the teaching of grammar is that it may result in the phenomenon of the learners becoming structurally competent but communicatively incompetent. In other words, mastery of mere forms alone does not ensure that the learners will be able to use those forms mastered appropriately in various communicative activities.

ii. Rules of Use

With the shift in emphasis from forms/structures to content and functions, a new term/concept came onto the scene - 'Rules of Use'. Basically, Rules of Use refer to the rules of social interaction, rules that determine the appropriacy of a

spoken utterance in a natural discourse. According to Hymes, both the rules of grammar and the rules of use should be given emphasis and taught in order to achieve communicative competence. The inductive approach in the teaching of grammar claims that learners will internalise the rules of grammar through practice without the teacher having to explain the rules of grammar explicitly (Implicit Grammar and Covert Grammar). These forms/structures must be taught with functions (the purpose for which these forms/structures are used), thus Robert Lado labels it as 'Functional Grammar'.

The ultimate aim of the inductive approach is communicative competence i.e. the mastery of the functions and forms of the language for communicative purposes. Thus fluency automatically also implies a certain mastery level of form/structures (accuracy).

Emphasis given to accuracy or grammar in communicative language teaching cannot be taken lightly as findings from many research studies have shown that too much emphasis on functions at the expense of forms/structures will lead to two serious situations namely: premature fossilisation and pidginisation of the language.

The diagram below shows an exaggerated illustration of a continuum that depicts an acute emphasis on teaching grammar structurally at one extreme to an acute emphasis on teaching grammar 'too functionally' i.e. with an acute neglect of emphasis given to forms/structures at the other end of the continuum.

Structurally competent but communicatively incompetent	Communicatively competent	Structurally incompetent with a certain level of communicative competence
e.g. Are you an owner of a fire?	e.g. Excuse me sir, may I trouble you for a light?	e.g. Hello, I want smoke-lah, you got match?

A Continuum: Structurally Competent but Communicatively Incompetent to Pidginisation of Language

In all three situations shown above, the learner is performing the same function of requesting for a match or lighter from a stranger as he wants to smoke. One of the major criticisms of the teaching of English in Japan is that after about ten years of formal instruction in learning the language, the majority of the university graduates cannot converse fluently in the language. These graduates are structurally competent as they can read and write well but are communicatively incompetent as they find it extremely difficult to use the language orally. The prevailing popularity of the Grammar-Translation Method that emphasises the forms/structures of the language for reading and translation purposes is the major reason for such a phenomenon. The

communicative competence of our recent graduates is a cause of concern as it reflects the relatively low levels of both accuracy and fluency in the language. If this situation is allowed to persist, it may lead to the pidginisation of the English language.

To dispel the misconception that with the communicative approach, grammar need not be taught, it should perhaps be brought to light that the increasing emphasis on communication does not obliterate the significance of grammar in language teaching. The importance of the social rules of language in communicative language teaching compared to rules of grammar is apparent in Hymes' (1972) statement that there are rules of use without which rules of grammar will be useless. Carroll (1980), however, adds that there are rules of grammar without which the rules of use would be inoperable. According to Johnson and Morrow (1981) communicating involves using appropriate forms in appropriate ways and therefore the acquisition of forms is very important.

It is important to understand that even among those who argue most vehemently for a language learning experience devoid of focus upon language form there is nowhere the implication that the form in and of itself is not a crucial part of language. In his pioneering work on notional syllabuses, for example, even Wilkins (1976) leaves the way open for some considerable attention to formal matters:

> The acquisition of the grammatical system of a language remains a most important element in language learning. The grammar is the means through which linguistic creativity is ultimately achieved and an inadequate knowledge of the grammar would lead to serious limitations on the capacity for communication. A notional syllabus, no less than a grammatical syllabus, must seek to ensure that the grammatical system is properly assimilated by the learner.
> (Wilkins 1976:66)

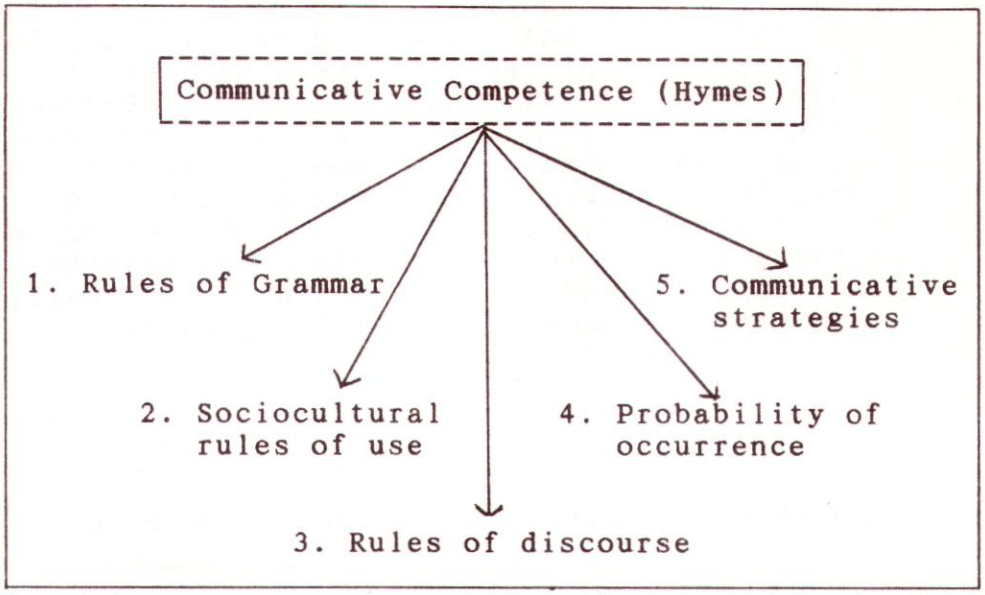
CHOMSKYAN COMPETENCE AND HYMES' COMPETENCE

In order to appreciate revised notions of communicative competence, it is necessary to take a look at Noam Chomsky's ideas on linguistic competence and linguistic performance. To him, linguistic competence is what the speaker knows and what the linguist should be concerned with, and linguistic performance is what the speaker does i.e. says or writes, at any given time, and what the linguist should not be concerned with. Chomsky made the claim to the effect that linguistic competence meant that the rules of grammar were internalised in the head of the speaker, and provided the basis for the speaker's understanding of linguistic relations. The most influential reaction to Chomsky's claims, from the point of view of language education, came from Dell Hymes. He pointed out that neither of

Chomsky's categories (competence and performance) allows for characterising the appropriateness of what a person says or writes to any given social context (Yalden 1987:16). Dell Hymes believed that a different theory of language was needed to handle practical and theoretical problems in language development. In such a theory, competence would be defined differently, to include interactional competence, and it would be called 'communicative competence' (Dell Hymes 1972).

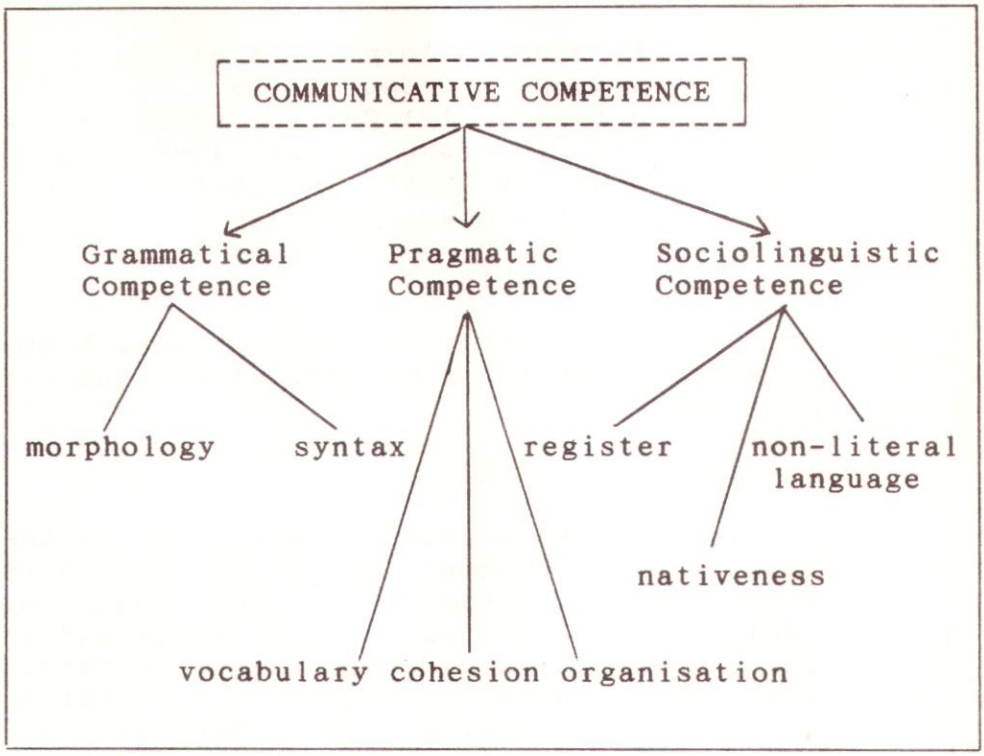
Chomskyan Competence	Hymes' Competence
linguistic competence	communicative competence
. mastery of rules of grammar	. mastery of both rules of grammar & rules of use
. accuracy	. fluency

Chomskyan Competence and Hyme's Competence



Components of Communicative Competence
(Hymes 1972)

In still another recent examination of communicative competence, Lyle Bachman and Adrain Palmer (1983), posit three distinct traits of communicative 'proficiency' (they do not use the term 'competence') viz: linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, and sociolinguistic competence. The figure below illustrates their theoretical scheme.



Bachman and Palmer's Theoretical Scheme of Communicative Competence

TEACHING OF GRAMMAR IN THE KBSM SYLLABUSES

The KBSM Curriculum Specifications for Forms I, II, and III have specified the following for the teaching of grammar:

5.0 Grammar

> The grammar forms part of the language content in the Forms I/II/III Curriculum Specifications. These items should be taught in context and in a meaningful way and not in isolation as far as possible.

What does it mean exactly to teach grammar items within context and in a meaningful way and not in isolation?

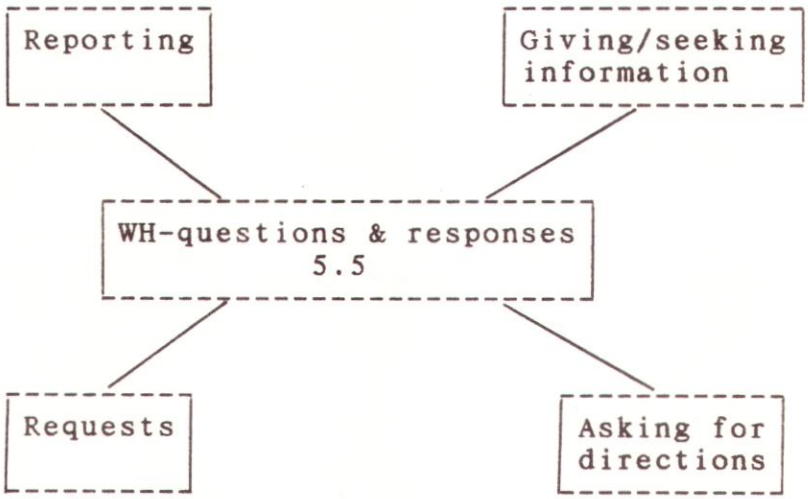
i. Inductive Approach

Firstly, the inductive approach in the teaching of grammar is encouraged here where rules of grammar are not taught or explained by the teacher explicitly and in isolation but instead the teacher provides learners with various interesting interactive activities for practising and using these forms and structures and hopes that these learners will eventually internalise them.

ii. Forms and Functions

Secondly, the grammatical items must be taught together with the various functions with which these grammatical items will be used. The diagram below illustrates that a particular grammatical item, for instance, the 'Wh-questions and responses' is taken from the syllabus and it can be taught inductively through teaching the various

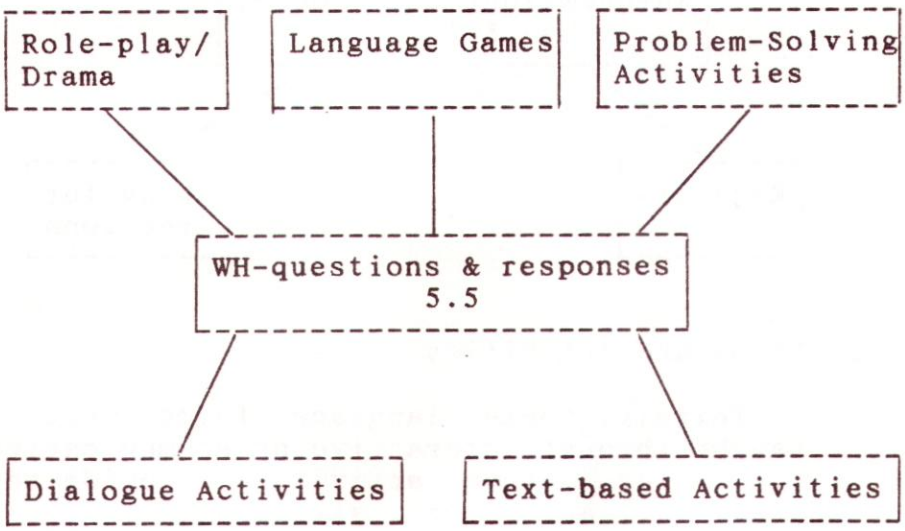
functions such as making requests, asking for directions, giving and seeking information and even reporting. Irrespective of what functions are being taught, both the teacher and the learners must be aware or conscious of the forms/structures being practised. It is important to take note that grammatical items are not neglected but are just not being taught or explained explicitly. It may be said that behind every language function performed by the learners, a particular language form is practised and hopefully will be internalised by them.



iii. Forms and Activities

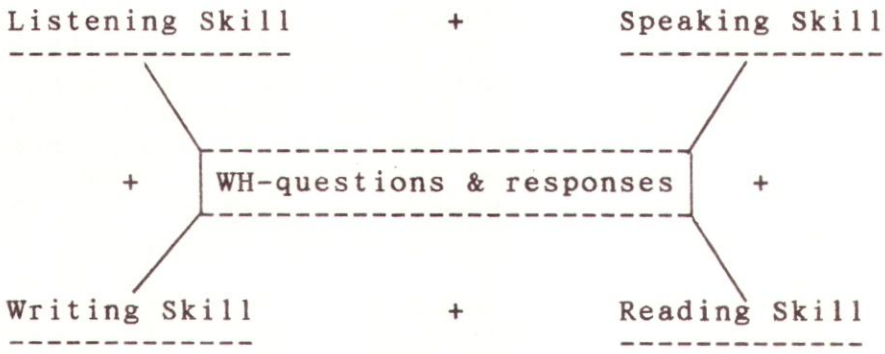
Thirdly, these language forms must be taught through interactive or communicative activities. These activities provide the contexts and the situations for the

learners not only to practise and use the language forms but more important is that they learn the rules of use or social interaction and rules of discourse, two of the components of Hymes' Communicative Competence mentioned earlier. The diagram below illustrates the various kinds of activities that a teacher can use in teaching a particular language form. It is important to note again that every activity must focus around a particular language form. Both the teacher and the learners must be aware of it being used and practised repeatedly throughout the activity. Grammatical items are not neglected here but in fact given a practical or rather communicative role. Learners can easily see for themselves how, when, why and to whom they are used and directed within a communicative network.



iv. Forms & Language Skills

The KBSM Curriculum Specifications also states that 'Grammar is to be incorporated into the four language skills'. Once again a particular language form or structure can be taught while teaching a particular language skill, for instance, the listening skill or teaching a combination of language skills, such as reading and listening. During the teaching of these language skills, grammatical items are emphasised, presented, practised and reinforced.



v. What about the deductive approach in KBSM? It is interesting to note that the KBSM Curriculum Specifications for Form IV states:

> Grammar: Grammar is to be incorporated into the four language skills and should be taught in context and in a meaningful way. However, grammar items <u>can also be</u>

taught in isolation if teachers feel it is necessary to do so.

(p. 4, KBSM Curriculum Specifications Form IV, 1989)

Here, teachers can adopt the deductive approach in explaining and describing the rules of grammar explicitly to the learners. The role of Explicit Grammar cannot be denied or underestimated. Taught within a communicative context, explicit grammar instruction can meet four significant needs:

- Since it has been shown that some students are able to profit from direct instruction in grammar (Krashen 1977), that instruction should be offered as a supplement to, but not instead of, real communicative experiences for those students who can profit from it. 'Mastery', however, should not be required - nor should participation.

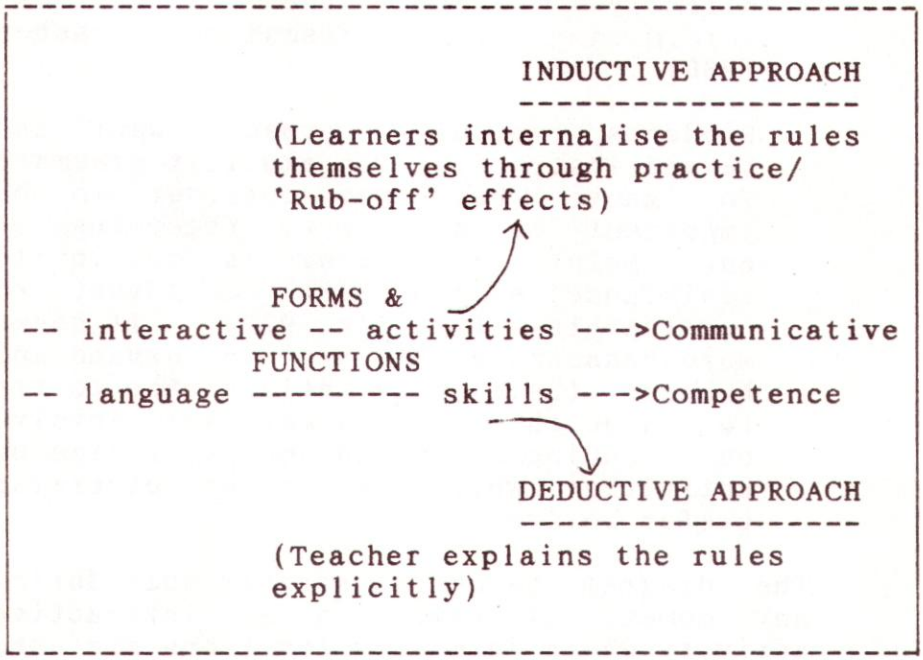
- Since our classes, no matter how communicatively-based, may not provide enough real language input for students to be able to acquire forms on their own (Krashen 1980), grammar can be offered as an optional supplement for those students who can make use of explanations, clarification and rules.

- Because the language used in presenting, explaining and discussing grammar is real, communicative language, students can profit from this additional exposure to language even if they cannot profit

directly from the grammatical information being discussed (Krashen 1980).

Students typically expect, want and demand instruction in explicit grammar. To ignore what they consider to be important or necessary, regardless of our point of view, is to invite resistance, either overt or covert, to our teaching (Stevick 1980). It seems more reasonable to try to expand and broaden their expectations than to try to change them. This may well involve our spending a limited amount of time on activities which we might otherwise prefer to avoid.

The diagram below illustrates that during any moment of time in an interactive activity where forms and functions are used and practised, the deductive approach in explaining the rules of grammar explicitly may be used if the situations warrant it. The main criteria to determine the use of the deductive approach are: the complexity of the form/forms in the activity, the complexity of the given task in the activity and most important of all is the proficiency level of the target learners.



The Deductive Approach in Explaining the Rules of Grammar Explicitly

CONCLUSION

Dell Hymes advocates that communicative competence can only be achieved if both the forms and the functions are given sufficient emphasis in our teaching. Striving for a high level of fluency in our learners without giving certain emphasis to linguistic mastery in our teaching is almost an impossible goal. The teaching of grammar in communicative language teaching:

- does not obliterate the significance of grammar in language teaching,

- does not deny the importance of mastery of the grammatical system of the language,

- helps learners to use language correctly and appropriately and

- views that grammatical forms are taught, not as an end in itself, but as a means of carrying out communicative intent.

Malaysian English teachers as pedagogues should be prescriptive to a certain degree to ensure that accuracy is mastered to a level so as to avoid the deterioration of the English Language to a pidgin. We must endeavour to upgrade the communicative competence of our learners so that they may achieve a high level of accuracy and fluency.

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POEMS

by

Malachi Edwin

Adultery

Caught in the web of falsehood
It's an unholy union of illusion and lies.

There is no trading the present
For a flight of fancy.

For today's new is but yesterday's old
As ingenuity turns into repetition.

And even if forgotten passions begin to flicker
The flames rise from old embers.

Replacing old bonds with new
Is no liberation.

Reality is but a shade of illusion.

The foundation collapses
The walls crumble
There is no restoring the rubble
The pieces no longer fit
Strangers don't make a home.

Scorched by the passions of youth -
Castigated.
Energies ebb
Frailty follows
Futility challenges resilence
As folly mocks wisdom.

Grim realities replace hollow dreams -
Devoured.
Desires dissipate
Disintegration dictates
Exhausted by relentless discord
The mind weeps for lost energies.

The Vows

The awesome words when first spoken
Culminate all hopes and aspirations
Joining two into one.

Solace for lonely nights
Release for passions
A partnership till death puts asunder.

Should visions of bliss
Take a paler shade
The union ensnares.

Then pinned together like flies
In a cruel child's game
Freedom spell death.

As the fragrance fades
And Death beckons
You answer again: I do, I do.

'THE REAL NOT THE ERSATZ': A GLIMPSE INTO THE WORLD OF CATHERINE LIM'S *DEADLINE FOR LOVE AND OTHER STORIES*

by

Alice Samuel Pillay

Catherine Lim. *Deadline for Love and Other Stories*. Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1992. 145pp. ISBN 9971-64-286-7

Catherine Lim's collection of short stories in *Deadline for Love and Other Stories* reminds me of the kind of fiction we get in popular women's magazines. The themes in this motley collection range from the sexually repressed world of Agnes in the first story 'Deadline for Love' to the amoral, depraved world of Michael in 'The Worlds of Michael Wong Shin Nam.' Unconventional, adulterous and illicit relationships abound in this somewhat prurient collection-a marked departure from Lim's earlier works. Characteristically, Lim's vision is ironic, her style candid and stark but sadly lacking in the subtleties displayed in the rendering of earlier tales such as 'A Mother-in-law's Curse' and *The Serpent's Tooth*. Writing amidst the backdrop of a narcissistic and materialistic society of which she shows an astute understanding, Catherine Lim provides more than a glimpse into the rarified ambience of the rich and successful in Singapore.

The title piece 'Deadline for Love' aptly sets the tone for the stories that follow. Agnes' dilemma in the first story is a familiar one. It is a typically twentieth century predicament that Lim highlights in this vignette which ends on a highly ironic note. Rich, successful but lonely, Lim's protagonist takes a critical look at her life and discovers after a candid appraisal that she has been grossly shortchanged in love. The clinical way in which Lim allows her protagonist to realize 'Love's largesse to her in her thirty-seven years' (p. 1) in terms of 'number of times hand held (three), hugged (five), kissed (once)', (p. 1) is both at once comical as well as pathetic especially after Agnes reveals that her 'meagre helpings from Love's table' (p. 1) forces her to embark on a serious plan of action because 'no man had ever propositioned, much less taken her to bed.' (p. 5) Lim's portrait of a virgin in despair is executed in a whimsical manner as Agnes resolves to get her life in focus by setting herself a deadline for accomplishing love and marriage because 'she worked best to deadlines.' (p. 9) Agnes succeeds in keeping her deadline when the suave but dubious character Duane persuades her into marriage (not that Agnes would have needed any persuasion). The supreme irony occurs when Agnes realizes that her new husband is a homosexual who has married her only to obtain the marriage certificate that qualifies him for a government subsidised flat in which he can indulge his unconventional sexual preferences with his boy-lover. While Lim's story line is almost predictable, her adroit study of human character and the insights she gives us into the realm of the dark, conniving mind remain impressed upon us.

In 'The Awakening' and 'The Worlds of Michael Wong Shin Nam' Catherine Lim reveals the sexual frailties of man. Peony of 'The Awakening', desperately seeks her sister's advice on her husband's disinterest in matter sexual:

> 'You think he is having a woman outside?.... Three months, and he still not interested, he just turn round and go to sleep,' she confided. 'I buy nice negligee - Robinson's sale, this beautiful peach-coloured French negligee before sale price eight hundred dollars, sale price only five hundred. I even don't use night cream now and no curlers in hair because, as you told me, men don't like to make love to wives with cream all over body, but he just goes to sleep.' (p. 43)

Lim's ability to register Peony's suspicions through the natural rhythms and nuances of a localized variety of English adds authenticity and humour to the dilemma Peony finds herself in. The ever helpful older sister offers her sound advice and the younger one pays heed in desperation. Ginseng and rhinoceros horn do not get Kian Pang's libido going in 'The Awakening' but Benedicta, the supine Filipina maid does! (the danger within?) Lim explores the themes of infidelity, hypocrisy, duplicity and retribution with relentless ingenuity and is sometimes ludicrously funny in the manner in which she propels her narrative to its often ironic conclusion. This is especially true of 'The

Awakening.' While some of the stories in this collection are banal ('Secrets', 'Family' and 'The Mother') others like 'Gate of Hope', 'Temple of the Unborn' and 'Helen's Hands' register Lim's intuitive perception of the human character. Her observations of the foibles and follies of human life make this a fairly readable collection inspite of its commonplace themes.

A "TREATISE OF MELANCHOLIE": GERMAINE GREER'S *THE CHANGE; WOMEN, AGEING AND THE MENOPAUSE*

by

Wong Ming Yook

Germaine Greer, *The Change; Women, Ageing and the Menopause*, London: Penguin Books, 1992, pp. 472+viii.

Greer's 1991 publication, here in a 1992 Penguin edition, addresses a subject not very often dealt with in literature. The question of how women age and cope during the menopausal stage of their lives is one which often lies unvoiced. If asked, it is perhaps only with resigned acceptance woman feel that, like death, this too is inevitably part of the female experience. In any case, the reasons for such silence usually lie in the vague anxiety that growing old and dying seem to generate. Greer's attempting to articulate these silent fears springs out of her own personal experience of the menopause. It is as much a scholarly evaluation of an intriguing and mysterious subject as it is a personal "Treatise of Melancholie" (p. 220), a cathartic attempt to review and revoice a particular stage of female life from the inside out.

Re-voicing and re-telling the female story are functions of the role that Greer has set out for herself to play in this book. She is the bearer of the tale that must, of necessity, take the narrative out of the hands of unreliable

storytellers in order that a more bearable and humane perspective about ageing women, and women ageing, may emerge. With this consideration in view, Greer provides startling and frightening information into how destructively society and women themselves see the menopause, not as yet another transition in the human journey, but as a peculiar "sign" announcing the female's loss of relevance to the world through the loss of a (no doubt primary) biological function.

She regards the massive social conspiracy against allowing mature women their worth a part of the prevailing social landscape in which a fair majority of women are still marginalised and invisible. The menopausal woman endures what Greer calls an "undescribed experience," because the fifth climacteric or the menopause is an event which society sees as signalling the end of woman's social and biological utility, and therefore, which deserves no descriptive space in the social mind to explain and define it. Being without description marks out the fifth climacteric as an uncharted wilderness. It is an especially dangerous place given the difficulty of discarding the social constructs and behaviour patterns that menopausal women have lived by for at least four decades, in order to create new pathways for the self.

The dangers are worsened by the plethora of unreliable myths that medical ignorance creates and circulates about the menopause. Greer's historical and social analyses and accounts of medical "breakthroughs" and "findings" about the menopause only strengthen her argument that it is up to women themselves, finally, to explore the menopause. She presents a shocking picture of the abuse (by medical science) of women's

bodies, sanctioned by the excuse of medical progress and concern for the improvement of the health of women.

The menopausal stage is seen as a crucial one to the real development of women. Therefore, if women are to discover, through upheavals of the climacteric, a time of new freedoms and greater significance, instead of a time of desperation and hopelessness, then reclaiming control over their bodies remains the first and obvious task of menopausal women. Dealing with the biological symptoms of the menopause provides a kind of beginning to a closer examination of its more troubling effects.

Greer's focus on hysterectomy and HRT force into light how in fact women depend on external opinion to decide on an issue which will affect themselves most, either for better or worse. Hysterectomy and HRT are extreme options which medical opinion seems overly eager to persuade women to take up. Greer's suspicions about suggesting either medical option to every women who faces menopausal symptoms are based on the view that the climacteric, despite being a natural phase of women's lives, is not given the social recognition that other transitions of human life are accorded. There are no rites of passage, no socially sanctioned time taken for withdrawal and reflection, that a menopausal woman could resort to, to come to terms with her misery and grief, or else, to reconcile herself to the end of certain biological possibilities. Without such a socially sanctioned time, the difficulty of adjustment is obvious; the exacerbation of already troubling symptoms for many women even more likely. But allowed that

special time of legitimate withdrawal, Greer suggests that physical changes and emotional upheavals could be better dealt with through the natural process of time healing all wounds.

It is this point which forms the basis of what she says with regard to women fostering a more creative mythic tradition for themselves. Society's approval may not be entirely necessary here, but certainly would assist in creating a space for women to grow old in without the humiliation of being cast further aside to the margins of social consciousness. To Greer, the rewards of encouraging a female generation both wise and serene are found, for example, in the traditional Asian societies where older women form the secure knots in an extended family structure. The structure of Western societies and urbanised Asian/Eastern societies suffers from the way that older generations have their roles and contributions as senior citizens taken away from them through the nuclear family unit which acknowledges only father, mother and children. That once again, the old have only marginal roles as grandparents and mediators between the two younger generations, is quite clear from the tightly secure unit so aptly called the nucleus.

Nevertheless, Greer's view is hopeful to the last. The freedom to remake life without social pressure to conform is one advantage of the climacteric. No one, as Greer and her friend Julia discover, actually looks at old women. Being ignored can be liberating as it can be frustrating, depending on one's own self. Greer chooses to see it as a positive aspect of her experience. Freed from the prejudices that restrict and hinder a woman's growth, Greer sees

the menopausal woman at a point where she is most perceptively human.

Greer maintains therefore that the point of the twilight years is not to foster a pathetic and desperate obsession with youth and youthfulness, but instead to encourage women to reach out towards new stages of life, characterised by "calm and poise" (p. 9). Hence, she advocates a throwing off of the shackles of youth in the quest for something infinitely more pleasing to the individual: searching again for that authentic and ever-evolving self.

THE GIRL FROM THE COAST: A VERITABLE SEA OF STORIES

by

Agnes Yeow Swee Kim

Pramoedya Ananta Toer. *The Girl from the Coast*. Singapore: Select Books, 1991. xiii + 189pp. ISBN 981-00-1866-5

The Girl from the Coast is first and foremost a tragic tale. In fact, the fictional world of Pramoedya Ananta Toer is comparable to a raging "sea of sorrows" (N.S.T.:5.11.91): a world where dreams are blasted and injustices committed with impunity. The hardship and ignominy suffered by the characters who inhabit this complex world very often echo those endured by actual Indonesians or rather, the Javanese, Acehnese, Madurese and other natives of the Dutch East Indies archipelago at the turn of the century before there was an Indonesia. In Pramoedya's corpus, a dominant theme is the struggle for independence, not just political but also cultural and intellectual. The social and historical setting of **The Girl** is concerned with the forces which undermine human dignity and morality as well as man's capacity to think critically for himself. Interestingly, the enemy here is not so much the conquerors of the land but the conquered themselves. In Pramoedya's vision of liberty for the masses, caste stratification, the feudal system, the tyrannical aristocracy and sexual discrimination

pose a threat as great as or even greater than that of any colonial overlord or dictator. His story of **The Girl**, based partly on the life of his maternal grandmother, forthrightly bulldozes and attacks the very roots of class and gender prejudices and the bigotry, fatalism and slave mentality that these have created. To do this, the writer makes use of a readily accessible and no less powerful weapon: stories.

The novel is punctuated by a myriad of stories told by a variety of people. However, two striking characters stand out with their bright and inspiring repertory of stories: mBok, the girl's old servant at her husband's mansion in town, and Si Dul Pendongeng (Dul the Storyteller), the village fool who weaves tales for all occasions. Together, they form a wellspring of fables, folktales, anecdotes, legends, parables and sea shanties as well as true life accounts drawn from mythology, history, personal experiences and the day to day rhythm of life by the sea. More often than not, these stories, true or fictitious, do more than merely entertain, instruct or provide solace. They also impinge on the course of the girl's life story by reflecting and sometimes deflecting the undercurrents of the plot.

For a large part, mBok's prolific and improvised storytelling runs the whole gamut of her own experiences as serf to a noble, maid to many a noble's practice wife (a practice wife is taken only as a temporary wife while waiting to marry a woman from the same social caste) and victim of the Dutch occupation and the ruling class alike.

> Yet again it was time to tell stories. She had already told the same silly stories to at least four girls. The servant told each new first lady about the various princes who were madly in love with village girls. About the girl's going to live in enormous mansions. About them leading lives of great luxury. About Tuan Besar Guntur and his gallows. About the mass graves, all along the coast. About the rebellion Prince Diponegoro led. About the way nobles in town managed their domestic affairs. About the marriage of Raden Ajeng Kartini, and how she had subsequently died and was buried, a few years ago. (36)

mBok's tales range from enchanting fairy tales of Joko Tarub who caught an angel while he was fishing by the sea to stirring accounts of national heroes, martyrs and also villains. The latter group of stories is perhaps thinly veiled propaganda. Romanticised as they may be, they smack of a subtle incitement to stamp out oppression and subjugation.

At the forefront is the story of the heroic Raden Ajeng Kartini, referred to in a pointed manner by mBok:

> "Poor departed 'Den Ajeng 'Tini. she was a brave woman -- none braver. She wasn't afraid to stand up to the Dutch. They all

> respected her, no matter how important they were." (44)

The girl had first heard of Kartini from her father. A Javanese princess turned writer and women's rights champion, the venerable Raden Ajeng Kartini (1879-1904) is a compelling presence in the book as well as role model to many of Pramoedya's protagonists. One of the first few to attend Dutch school, Raden Ajeng Kartini commanded the respect of the Javanese nobility and Dutch colonial authorities alike. Her courage in confronting the Dutch overlords is later on emulated by the humble and nondescript village girl who challenges her aristocrat husband for expelling her from the mansion without her infant child. Ultimately, The Girl may be the lamentation of a hapless peasant girl wrested from her coastal home to be installed as the naive and reluctant throwaway practice wife to the *Bendoro* (Lord). However, it is also a telling chronicle of her awakening to the atrocities and hypocrisy of the gentry and her denunciation of the same.

Just as the preponderance of stories within the novel is by no means accidental, neither is the influence of vivid stories which illustrate the indomitable spirit of the unsung hero: the small man or the commoner. The magical feat of Surapati, the slave, who overthrew the native kings as well as the Dutch Company is a classic folk-tale reminiscent of David and Goliath.

> "In every war, ... the giants are always defeated by slender young warriors. The monsters are full of fire: they can't stand still for a moment. But

> the hero reaches out his little finger and the giants tumble down. They can't get up again! The hero hardly moves from his place, while the giants are jumping all over the place, towards the back, ready to explode." (53-4)

However, not all the stories end on a victorious note. The true and macabre account of Tuan Besar Guntur belongs to a dark and haunted past. Tuan Besar Guntur or Mister Thunder is a name given by the locals to His Excellency H. W. Daendals, Governor-General of the Netherlands East Indies (1807-11), who had ordered the construction of the infamous post-office road and sent many forced labourers to the gallows for having failed to meet the impossible deadline of a week. The ensuing uprising led by Prince Diponegoro which was eventually quelled is just one of the many revolts sparked by Daendals' brutality. Si Dul Pendongeng sings his verses to Mister Thunder who "drove the highway south through their district:"

> "*He was crueler than any of the gods*
> *the man died who disobeyed him*
> *regents, scribes, nobles of all kinds*
> *big and little, all became his slaves*" (113)

The significance of this chapter of Indonesian history is demonstrated in the three giant teak trees which are traditional signposts marking the fifth kilometre from the village. The trees serve, more importantly, to commemorate three village babies who had died

during the highway project:

> "When Tuan Besar Guntur forced the villagers to build this road, three women were detained and never returned home. Their babies starved to death." (99)

The outcome of this particular tragedy bears testimony to the community ethos which is one of togetherness in all things, especially in adversity. The whole village mourned the infant deaths and the memory of this incident was duly immortalised in village folklore and the tangible form of the teak trees:

> *"the villagers grieved; they wept and howled*
> *in the light of their lamps; late at night*
> *they planted three trees; forced labour is cruel*
> *a sign forever; teak trees tall and true" (100)*

Like her abused ancestors, the girl too is forcibly dragged away from her unweaned child when her Bendoro husband decreed so. Her reluctance was to no avail. No doubt Si Dul Pendongeng will make the necessary modifications to the song sung in celebration of her beauty and kindness. Thus, the girl joins the ranks of folk heroes whose life stories are lovingly preserved in the annals of village life.

"In town, there was no one like her
a beautiful flower in a far off village
the Bendoro sent his envoys to ask for
her hand
the flames of love burned around his
head
he chose the flower to adorn his
mansion
had her bathed in rosewater and
covered in jewels
but she never forgot her parents,
family and friends
The Girl from the Coast, she was
so kind ..." (114)

Indeed, the novel seems to have derived its title from Si Dul Pendongeng who first told the tender and inspiring tale of "the Girl from the Coast." The girl's anonymity which is maintained throughout the novel enshrouds her identity with a becoming air of mystery and endows her with a certain stature. Her heroism is the stuff of which legends are made.

The girl, initially submissive and docile, is elevated by the villagers solely because of the dramatic turn in her fortunes which earns her the honorific *Mas Nganten* or Mistress. In town, apart from intense misery and loneliness, she contends with the humiliation of being constantly reminded of her lowly, despised status and gender inferiority. These discriminating notions were virtually unheard of back home by the sea where people speak with the "voice of their common humanity." (124) Nevertheless, in the face of tremendous odds including betrayal and a plot against her, the girl's dignity remains intact as revealed in the following embittered speech:

> "I know that people like myself only have poverty, fear and degradation. City people make sure of that. They pay us two and half cents for crushed prawns, even though we know our goods are worth twice that. That isn't right. It is dishonest. But look at me. I'm a human being. I'm not crushed prawns; you can't pick me up from the village and stick me away in some mansion." (103)

Obviously, the values of the cities are incompatible with the mores of the Indonesian countryside and the girl is not unlike the virgin sacrifice made to propitiate an imperious Bendoro. In this story, Pramoedya painstakingly debunks the decaying aristocrats and portrays them as just as coarse, poor and afflicted as the commoners. The only supreme force in the novel is the omnipresent sea on which bounty the village depends. The Bendoro, despite his reputed piety and greatness in the eyes of the working classes, is not spared the ravages that plague the mortal self. He suffers from a blood disorder which forces him to resort to a bizarre and repulsive form of treatment: having leeches drain his blood every month. The dread and servility that he inspires in the villagers by virtue of his station in life do not render him invincible nor make him a god. The girl is well acquainted with the "famous fart" by which he announces his important presence. His staunch and contrived religiosity in performing ablutions, rites and ceremonies of Islam is in direct contrast with mBok's simple faith. At the story's end, the girl passes an impassioned

verdict on her husband and his privileged kind:

> "I hate nobles. Their brick-walled mansions are hell. Hell. Hellish and insensitive." (183)

The story of the girl ends with the poignant account of what people have seen of the heroine before she disappears:

> During the next month, people often saw a carriage stop in front of the main gate of the Bendoro's residence and a face peer out from behind the curtains of the carriage. After that time, the carriage never returned, the face never peered out from behind the curtains again. (185)

Needless to say, Pramoedya's paen to the girl's endurance and courage also pays tribute to the eternal and universal human struggle for truth and justice.

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SPECIAL SECTION

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THE SANDPIT

by

K. S. Maniam

THE SANDPIT: WOMENSIS*

by

K. S. Maniam

Characters

Santha: a woman in her late thirties.

Sumathi: a woman who has just turned thirty.

Both are the wives of the absent Dass.
The following scenes are played concurrently.

SCENE 1

The varendah of a wooden house, the type found off Jalan Bangsar or Kampung Baru or Sentul. The cement varendah is slightly raised, needing two or three steps to reach the ground. There is an old-fashioned, roughly-carpentered chair to the right. A woman, Santha, is seated on the floor to the left of the chair. It is late at night, verging on midnight, and she has been working on a wide and long piece of cloth that she has in her hands. The sari that she has on is worn primly and tucked tightly at her waist, its border wide and stiff.

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*Staged by Five Arts Centre in the Black Box, Singapore, 23-25 November, 1990 and in the British Council, Kuala Lumpur, 17-19 January, 1991.
Directed by Krishen Jit.
Acted by Ann James and Charlene Rajendra.

SCENE 2

A hotel room somewhere in Kuala Lumpur. It is furnished cheaply with an overstuffed armchair, a bed, dresser and a coffeetable. Sumathi, Dass' second wife, has gone in search of her husband and now waits in the room for news from Arumugam, a close man friend. She is wearing a fairly fashionable but rumpled dress. On the coffeetable beside the armchair is an expensive, leather handbag. It is late at night, verging on midnight. Sumathi looks tired but is resolved not to be overcome by fatigue. She has been walking up and down but is now arrested by a knock on the door.

SANTHA: I've always made my own sari border, putting in the silver or gold thread, carefully, patiently. (Holds up the sari border.) This one I started a month ago but the work was slow. Only during the last four days has the work gone forward. (Looks at the sari border.) More than an elbow length finished.

(She puts the sari border on the chair so that it hangs down almost to the floor.)

If he doesn't come the whole border will be finished. No cooking for the last four days. Just waiting.

And that woman Sumathi, she can't wait in the house. She must go after him.

SUMATHI: Aiya, stop knocking! Not your three-hour, six-hour, twelve-hour woman. Ah Pek, why you like this? Dass come soon, break your head. You people know only money. See money only,

smile-smile, do anything. Dass not here, you think I like the other women. Go away! Don't bother me. You got much service from Dass. You give now. (Listens.) What? Got younger, stronger men? Wait till Dass hear. Break your neck straightaway.

(She turns from addressing the door and looks at the armchair.)

Athan is always Dass for them. When I come here he's Dass for me. A different life from the one at home. Away from akka. What's she doing now? May be sitting there, working on her sari border. Tell her she's wrong, straightaway she'll take out the sari border. Scold her, she won't leave the sari border for days. As if the cloth and she one. Hiding behind that cloth. Tcha! She a woman!

SANTHA: He didn't marry her like he married me. Disappeared for two days. Didn't tell me anything. I had to run here, run there. For the first time after coming had here to go to the shop by myself.

That Chinese man, No-Fear-Tan, comes and tells me 'Your husband coming with a new woman. Asked you to do the Indian ceremony.' I had to buy the coconut, prepare it for their arrival. Sumathi didn't even wear a sari when she came. Just a dress. I was angry, still I broke the coconut and circled the kumkum-and-camphor tray round their heads. Why didn't that ceremony take away all the bad luck from this house?

Only more bad luck came into the family. Athan stopped listening to me.

SUMATHI: When Athan married me he told my father, 'I saved your daughter. I saved you from a lot of shame. I don't want the comedy of a temple wedding. The registration office is enough. Then a puja at the temple. After that a dinner for anyone you want to invite.'

A simple, modern wedding. No showing off. My mother's face dead through all the ceremonies and the dinner. Dead until athan and I left for this big city.

Akka is full of ceremonies. Like my family. One for every day of the week. One to choke you, one to tie your feet to the house door, one to tie up your mind. Athan saved me from all that.

SANTHA: For my marriage everything was done correctly. Everybody consulted, the priest, the horoscopes, the elders. My relatives came and cleansed me. Athan had no relatives, so substitute mother, father and uncle were found to carry out the responsibilities.

Athan brought his own people, a bus full of young men, to help with decorating the panthal and serving the food after the thali-tying ceremony in the big hall. The whole town said it was the best and most expensive wedding it had seen.

Now there's nothing to show for the marriage.

He didn't disappear that time he went to be married to Sumathi. I knew he would return. Now it's already four days since I last saw him.

SUMATHI: Where's that Arumugam? Gone for hours now. 'Sister,' he said, 'Go and rest in Dass' favourite hotel room. I'll go and look for him. There are many places where women still can't go.'

Athan took me to places women couldn't go. 'Always be brave. Show a tough face,' he said. 'If not they'll crush you.' I've taken his advice. That's why I'm here in this room, where a woman can easily be made into a prostitute. Lucky Arumugam came into such a room when I ran away to this city. I could see his eyes getting wet, his face made small by sadness.

'You shouldn't be here,' he said. 'You should be with your family.'

'I've left all that behind,' I said bravely but very frightened inside.

'This is a bad bad city,' he said.

'You're a bad bad man,' I said. 'What will your wife say?'

He laughed and said he wasn't married.

'Bring me a married man,' I said. 'The kind I can trust.'

He brought me athan. One look at him, I was in trouble. Worse than from my family.

(She sits in the armchair and an imitative mood comes upon her. She recalls and re-enacts her father's character and behaviour.)

'Come here, girl. Near this chair. Kneel down. Yes, kneel down. Is the hardness of the floor hurting you? Good. Is it supporting you? Good. Now I want to know something. Why did you go to the shops today? Doesn't this family support you? Doesn't this family give you everything?'

My father talked like that. The king in our family. Another king in that small, noisy town.

(She returns to imitation.)

'What colours of ribbon did you buy this time? Green? Blue? Red? The town already sees enough of you. The dresses you wear are flags. Why do you want more flags?'

(She laughs and getting up from the chair walks about as if just come into a room out of a cold wind.)

That wasn't the feeling I had when I first saw athan. More like the feeling I had when my first blood came. Frightened, yes. But also the knowing I was becoming bigger. Not just in the body. I had the feeling I must fight him to be with him.

He came and caught me by the hand. He pulled me, I pulled back. A smile softened his hard face. 'So you've strength?' he said. 'As much as me?'

Then I was there at his feet. As if I fell from a high bed during sleep. As if I fell out of a dream. He was that strong and fast. But he didn't hurt. He was gentle as he was strong.

Didn't have to show me. I knew. Why didn't akka see?

SANTHA: He's a man who doesn't like to be helped. Told me a story about how he got his strong body. When I saw him the first time I couldn't believe there was such a man in the world. Shoulders wide as the brow of the copper pot used for festival cooking. Waist narrow as a woman's. His hands and legs thick only like a betel nut tree trunk.

He got his strength from the sandpit, he said. Told me so many times it's like I'm there beside the sandpit. People laughed at him all the time. His legs didn't work. They were useless sticks fixed to his waist. He had to look up at the men, women and even boys. he hated that. He said he would make them look up at him one day.

So he thought and thought about how to make his legs live. At last he found a way. If he could just stand in some hole, his legs would grow nerves and veins. Then the blood would flow through them.

No one helped. He allowed no one to help him. He scratched the ground with a bent nail. Then when there was a small hole, he used the spade Chinese men use for making the cement smooth. He dug and dug until his arms became thick with muscles. They were so strong he could stand on them. But he wanted to stand on his legs.

The day came when he entered the hole. Still no one helped him. When he got down and

piled the sand around his body, his hands lost grip and he fell down. He lay there, the sand covering his face and shoulders. He couldn't breathe. He was like dead. He felt like dying. Young men stood around the hole and kicked more sand on his head. He was not going to die for them.

He lifted himself up with great struggle, his hands digging into the hole sides like crab claws. Then he was standing. And he saw the world right side up for the first time in his life.

He stood there for months and months until even the sand changed colour. From white to yellow, then brown, finally black.

'I stood there in all that filth,' he always said to me. 'That's the sandpit. There were insects, cockroaches, worms and flies. There was the blackness that was dirt. I understood life. The sandpit keeps me alive.'

'That man can life a bus,' my father said proudly.

Now all that's gone. When Sumathi came the going began.

SUMATHI: Why did she push him so much with her silence? He couldn't breath in front of her. Her silence made him do things. He would take The Stinger and crack at the bushes beside the house. Rip the leaves into shreds.

He calls me The Chatterer. But I come from a house of silence. From the house of the dead.

I'm not bluffing. You just visit my family. Better go on Friday. The incense smoke will choke you. After the smoke goes away, you'll see what I'm talking about.

The little box and the rows of photographs on the wall. Gods and goddesses live in the little box. Around the box are the dead. Dead greatgrandfathers, grandfathers, greatgrandmothers, grandmothers, nephews, cousins and the little ones, the nieces, only dead a few years ago. Every time I passed that wall, I passed a graveyard.

My body wanted to live. I waited for my family to go away to a wedding. Waited for them to go away to a funeral. Then I let my body dance. I don't know from where the energy came. I don't know from where the voice found the words. There was the dance and there was the song.

(She begins to sing a song fashioned from her words and treads out a brief dance in accompaniment.)

Don't cover young mangoes with ash,
they will ripen before their time.
Don't cover young mangoes with lime,
they will die before their time.
Let the mangoes hang on the branch,
glow with sun, swell with rain.
Let the mangoes catch the mist,
catch the sea, catch the sky.
Let the mangoes fill with life,
sway with life, dance with life,
dance with life.....

SANTHA: Why doesn't that woman come and tell me what's happening? Gone with Arumugam, that Six-face man. The man who found her in a hotel room. Athan told me. 'The girl had to be saved. Ran away from home. Couldn't take the punishment her parents gave her.' Told me after he brought her here. After he made her his second wife.

Punishment? Didn't know how to behave properly. 'Teach her how to be a good housewife,' athan told me. Just to give power to the first wife. If I told her to sit like this, walk like this, he interfered. Don't look at men when you talk to them, I said. No need for that, he said. She deserves to be punished. A women who can't be a woman.

The way she sits! (Comes down to the steps and sits with her legs spread out, her breasts thrust forward.) Like this. All the winds in the world blowing between her legs. All the men in the world touching her breasts with their eyes. Tcha! That a woman?

Hotel-room woman. What else went between her legs? Always going with that Arumugam. (Mimicks) 'He's like my brother. Brought athan to save me.' How can she use that word?

What does he see in her? All that body not properly covered up. When you see flies sitting on lot of flesh, you lose your appetite for meat.

The both of them behaving like they're the only people in the world who have bodies. He doing all those exercises, she putting all kinds of oils on her body in the bathroom. Yes, I've

seen her. And before sleeping all those perfumes. As if women don't have their own smells to bring the men to them.

SUMATHI: (Who has been dancing stops abruptly on hearing knocks on the door.): Who's that? Ah Pek, is that you? Don't disturb me. (Listens) Ask the other couple to use another room. This Dass favourite room. He come suddenly, he get angry. (Listens) Losing money already? Dass will pay you. He sure to come.

(She listens for a while, then goes and sits in the armchair.)

I was young then. Didn't know. Now a lot of mangoes in the city. Sold at all kinds of prices.

Akka doesn't know. Doesn't understand. The body's the only thing you have. Tell her that, she'll wrap herself some more in her sari. Deep inside. No use thinking about her. She doesn't care about athan.

(She looks at her wrist-watch, then gets up from the armchair.)

Where's that Arumugam? Gone off with No-Fear-Tan? The two behaving strange the last few months. Won't look at me when talking. Always talking to each other. Why did Arumugam ask athan to save me? No, no, that isn't true. Athan won't take anyone's advice. Not even mine. If only he had listened to me! He didn't listen to akka. He resisted her. He doesn't resist me. She tells him to stay at home, he goes away. I ask him to bring me here, he

quickly obeys. He takes me to the bars, the nightclubs, discos. Sometimes I don't like it at all. Am I a child for him? May be the child he doesn't want to have? Can't have?

That Arumugam isn't the old Arumugam. Six-face. He's bringing them out one by one. That time they brought athan home, beaten up, Arumugam didn't come near the house for days. After that he was always smiling. Treating me like I wasn't his adopted sister. I kept him in place. Akka thinks differently. But I didn't let him step over the drawn line.

(She sings.)

Sway with life, sway with life,
dance with life, dance with life.

SANTHA: (Gets up and goes to the chair but sees it more as her husband's territory or even as her husband himself): I never sit on this chair. From the time I came to this house, twenty years ago. When we were both young. He wasn't young to me even then. This chair was always his. He sat there when important matters had to be talked about. I sat here. (Indicates a spot at the foot of and a pace away from the chair.) Never too near. When people passed by they saw husband and wife in their correct places. They respected us.

Sumathi doesn't care for respect. 'What can you do with respect?' she says. Makchik came yesterday. An old woman. Knows athan from the time he was born. She delivered him into the world. She said, 'Can I do anything to help you?' Somehow she knows athan is in trouble. I

know he's in trouble. Sumathi pretends not to see anything. 'He has to go back there,' she says. 'That's the only place that gives him strength. Keeps him alive. You want him to die?'

SUMATHI: You think akka will come out here? There are crocodiles, rats and vultures here. All teeth ready to swallow you. All sweetness biting into your insides. All strength but ready to pull out your intestines. This is the sandpit. Akka doesn't want to know.

Athan told her many times about the sandpit. She listened only with her ears. Not with her whole body. Safe inside that sari. Pull off that sari, you think she can take the biting, gnawing, digesting?

Athan and I came here some nights. Not to enjoy ourselves as akka thinks. But to watch, guard, prevent. A man comes here smelling of money. Looks respectable, dressed like a gentleman. Beside him is a young girl. Just out of school. May be even in school. The man has talked to Ah Pek. Given him money. Wants to take the girl into a room. Athan steps in. Talks to Ah Pek. Threatens him. Talks to the man. The man sends the girl away in a taxi.

Lucky for the girl athan was there. There are other times women are not so lucky. This one athan saw one night had never come before. Wearing tight skirt, tight blouse. Hair cut short, cheeks painted red. Coming here with a man saying, 'Short time, long time, Joe? One-go, two-go, Joe? Huh? Huh? Plenty service, eh, eh, Joe?' The man not even a foreigner!

The woman chewing gum all the time!

Athan laughed. Sometimes you've to laugh. The woman didn't go to school. Married eight years. Had a daughter, seven years old. The husband a clerk. One morning he goes to work and never returns. The neighbours can't feed their own children. Relatives would throw her out if she goes back. What's she to do?

SANTHA: She's always talking like that. About death. She said her parents were killing her, that's why she ran away. How were they killing her? I told Makchik yesterday to find out what the wise women will say. I told her how Sumathi told me. (Takes on Sumathi's voice.) 'I'll be doing the housework day after day. Then I'll go ro a walk. Go to town to buy a red ribbon for my hair. One day I came back tired and sat down in the doorway. My mother was taking down the clothes from the lines. A wind was blowing. It lifted my skirt to my thighs. Before I could bring it down my mother saw. Didn't say anything.

Heard my mother and father whispering that night. You know what they did that week? Conducted a puja. A strange puja. My mother made me wear a sarung up to my chest, then took me to the bathroom. There she poured water over my head and body. Poured and poured until the body was cold. Poured and poured until the body was numb. Poured and poured until I couldn't breathe. Then she took me to the family shrine. Made me kneel down in front of all those pictures of gods and goddesses, dead grandfathers and uncles. She said some prayers. My father said some prayers and held me down by

the hair. The he sat nearby on a stool, watching me. I was not to lift my head and body until the sarung dried. The wet cloth sucked my blood away, sucked my nerves away. You call that living?

Makchik laughed and said maybe Sumathi's parents didn't understand her. What's there to understand? If she knows how to wear a sari, she'll know how to be a woman. Like me. I wear this sari even when I sleep. She wears one of those dresses that doesn't hide anything.

SUMATHI: Accusing eyes. Akka's eyes always blaming you. That time athan was beaten up, she thinks I didn't go near him. I went when she was in the kitchen. She only saw his swollen cheeks, cut arm and twisted leg. I saw something else.

His eyes hidden by the puffed-up flesh didn't want to look at me. He said, 'Go away!' But his voice said more. It said, 'Don't look at this useless body. Come back when it's healthy. It was crippled before but found its strength. That's the way it works.' So I went away.

(She chants.)

Rubbed with lime the mango is hurt
Rubbed with the lime of peoples' hatred
Rubbed with the lime of peoples' scorn

I didn't take akka's looks seriously. I waited. Athan wanted something she couldn't give. The woman in the sari. Yes, she looked after him during that time. But pay a nurse,

she'll do better. Steady hands that push the needle into the flesh. A face that isn't touched by pain. Akka should wear the white uniform nurses wear. But you already wear the uniform women have worn for hundreds of years.

Do you think the cut hand hurt him? After the swelling went down, what hurt him? Why was he looking here, looking there? He wasn't hiding from the police. He wasn't hiding from the other thugs. He knew what they would say. (Mimicks.) 'Calls himself a strong man! See how a bunch of boys beat him up!'

He went through all that a long time ago, akka. But you've forgotten. You don't see what there's to see. See only what you want to see from behind that sari border. He didn't want to see the mouths pouring scorn on him. He didn't want to hear their happiness celebrating his failure. I'm only a woman in a dress but I know these things.

SANTHA: I talk to Makchik. She talks to me. My neighbours came in the evenings and listen to me. They're not here today. They know I'm going through some troubles. But athan and Sumathi won't let me talk. So I pretend I've lost my tongue. It has been many years since athan and that wind-rubbed woman listened to me. Makchik told me something was wrong with athan's legs when he was born. Couldn't walk. Was crawling all the time. His mother said, 'Siva! Siva! Why did you give me a child that's an insect? ' His father wouldn't look at him. Stood in the sandpit for days and days, months, year. The sandpit he said was a hole he dug and somehow made himself stand there with the sand

covering him up to the waist. Maybe if he had waited a year or two his legs would have got the strength to walk. But he's impatient. How can you cure crippled legs when the doctors and other medicine men can't do anything?

When he leaves the house I ask him, 'Where are you going?' He says, 'To the sandpit. Where the insects crawl. Where there's a lot of filth. Where you've to be strong to be respected. I clean up the place.' That's the name he has given to the place in town where he goes. Comes back late at night. Has money with him. Throws the money at me the next day. 'Go and buy whatever you want with Sumathi. A car will take you to town.'

Sumathi is excited. She gets ready. Wears her short dress, puts make-up on her face. I go to please athan. Not to make him angry. Every time a different car comes to take us to town. 'See no need to buy a car. Athan can get any car he wants,' says Sumathi.

Once No-Fear-Tan brought him in a car when the cock was about to crow. Sumathi didn't even hear them coming. Sleeping with her legs east and west. That Chinese man, No-Fear-Tan, said strange words to me. 'You haven't seen me. You don't know me. You haven't seen your husband. You don't know him. Don't let himn outside the house. The police or any man you haven't seen before come come and ask for Dass say you don't know the name or the person.' He just went away leaving athan inside the house. You think Sumathi got up? No, she stretched out her legs some more and snored louder.

I've never seen athan like that. His face was swollen. There was blood on his mouth. He was trembling like a child who had seen a ghost. Who looked after him? Who boiled the water and washed his face? This women in the sari did. The woman in the dress was dead to the world.

In the morning when Sumathi heard athan came back in the night with cuts on his face, she was more frightened than him. They were like two children the outside world had bullied. Who looked after them?

SUMATHI: Here's something else you don't know. You thought we were children playing with our bodies. Your eyes told me what you were thinking. Your mind has become a transparent gauze.

After he recovered he began to do exercises. Who made him do that? You? This woman in the dress. Had to pretend I wasn't a woman. Had to be a child. That isn't easy. You try it. Easier to be full of wisdom, correctness, hatred, bitterness, disgust. To be a child -- that's difficult. The child enjoys everything. Doesn't remember what happened yesterday. Lets today be today. My brothers and sisters were children grown up. They lived under the wisdom of the dead. Believed the dead lived in a better world, a beautiful world.

SANTHA: No one came but athan didn't leave the house. No-Fear-Tan didn't come. Arumugam didn't come. Even Sumathi didn't go near athan. He was to them like he had a disease that would spread to them. I looked after him. This woman

in the sari stood outside the latrine making sure he didn't fall down. This woman in the sari put spoonfuls of chicken broth into his mouth.

Luckily no one came. But the luck didn't last for many days. Once he stopped staring everywhere as if someone was looking for him, he began to walk about the house. First inside, then at the back. Sumathi suddenly became brave. She went with him all the time.

Then he began doing exercises again, there at the back of the house. He wouldn't let anyone see, not even me. Only Sumathi could be there near him. He would finish exercising and come here. Lie down on the floor. Sumathi would put a towel on the chair, like that sari border there now. She told me, 'Have his tea hot and ready.' As if I was the servant woman. She rubbed his back, legs, hands and shoulders with camphor ointment. 'Have the hot water ready for his bath.' As if I was someone she paid to do the job. People passing by didn't see husband and wife. Only a hotel woman and a man who paid for being touched.

SUMATHI: You fed him chicken broth, dressed his wounds. But I let out the bitterness and the hatred that dirtied his blood. So I became a child for him. We played like children. He chased me around but couldn't catch me. I clapped when he kicked higher and higher. That's what I gave him. The innocence.

You like authority. Either to tell or to be told.

(She goes to the armchair and strikes it with her palm a couple of times.)

This is an armchair. Almost like the one at home. But this one is different. Covered with the sweat and desires of many men and women. That chair at home you dusted and kept clean. Didn't sit in it. Didn't let me sit in it. You walked around it as if gods used it for a throne. When athan sat in it you didn't come near him. He was as good as the wood he sat on. That's what you want. Wood. Not flesh and blood.

You don't look closely. You stand too far away. What authority do you worship? The authority of the dead. I told you how my parents turned me into a stone of virtue with their strange puja. I didn't tell you the other thing. The thing I did to become alive again. You won't understand.

(Goes into a reflective mood.)

There was a tree behind the house. The vepalai tree. Kaliamma's tree. The goddess who loves blood. Hangs death round her neck like skulls. Don't think I don't know about these things.

When we were young and got the smallpox we put a bunch of the vepalai leaves under our pillows. To keep away evil. To keep away death.

The vepalai leaves are pointed and sharp. At night when my family slept, I went out to the vepalai tree. I stood under the sky and let the cold bite into my flesh. The body only

remembered the death it had died. Under my mother's hands in the bathroom. Under my father's hands before the family shrine. Taking a bunch of the leaves I beat myself all over the body. The sharp leaves made the blood flow again. The body lived once again.

SANTHA: At that time she should have left him alone. I left him alone. I wouldn't look at him. I didn't care whether he went to the sandpit or not. I had been waiting for that time since I married him. Whenever my father visited me he asked, 'Where has your husband gone?' 'Gone to work in the town,' I said. 'At night?' he said. I knew what athan was doing all the time.

Athan wouldn't listen to my silence. He listened to Sumathi, the chatterer. He gave her that name. He called me the silencer. 'Don't open you mouth,' he said. 'You'll ask me to stop doing what I'm doing.'

So I kept quiet. But I didn't stop watching him.

SUMATHI: (She stops talking and listens, then moves closer to the door): Is that you, Arumugam? (Pause.) Ah Pek again. What this time? You want the room? You want me to bring you business? No? Sure? Brought food. Bak kut teh? What, only pow? Kachang pow. Nice to eat. Can't be just waiting? Not hungry now. When hungry I'll call you, Ah Pek.

(Goes even closer to the door.)

Ah Pek, ah. Ask you something. Where you think Dass now? Didn't see him for months? Why you bluffing? Was here with me only last month. Forget already ah? Can't forget, Ah Pek. Dass don't forget anything.

(Listens.)

Must go. Somebody calling you. OK. Go. One more thing. See that man, Arumugam, ask him to come here quickly. What? Playing mahjong? No, no, he knows this not the time to do that. (Listens.) Look for him, Ah Pek.

(She turns away from the door and returns to the armchair.)

Arumugam will come. Just trying to be the goat when the master is away. Moving his muscles, kicking his legs. He too taking exercises every day. Following athan in everything. Going everywhere with him. But he and No-Fear-Tan too close. Where was he when athan was beaten up?

I'll get the answer from him tonight. Playing the brother-sister game. I'm not blind. If he doesn't come I'll go out there and look for him.

SANTHA: (Comes down to the steps and looks at the road in front of the house): He won't come today. It's the fourth day. A bad day. He shouldn't be out there. Two, four, six are bad numbers. When he brought Sumathi home, I knew we would have touble. Two wives in the same house! I lost the only child I could have that year. Makchik came and cleaned up the baby for

burial. Only four months old. Just dropped out of my womb one morning.

Why didn't Sumathi see? Why can't she see now?

(She returns to the chair and takes the sari border and wraps it round her knuckles.)

Athan would punch the bag filled with coconut husk. He would lift himself up the bar across the two posts. But for a long time he didn't use the metal wrapped round his fingers. Like the sixth finger with its four blunt knobs. Why couldn't Sumathi see?

SUMATHI: I told athan not to use his body too much. 'The Chatterer giving advice again,' he said but went away and brought The Firemaker and The Stinger. Yes, go on. Laugh, akka. That was the one time I saw you trying hard not to laugh. You know now they just have to press a button and a bomb falls on another country? Countries don't have to send armies to fight. The man doesn't have to go near his enemy.

Do you know that, akka? Like me here, now. Just have to send Arumugam. He'll find athan because he's frightened. People must be frightened. To do the right things. They must be frightened not to do the wrong things. Yes, yes. I know these things though only a small town girl.

The Firemaker. The Stinger. Not made-up things. They're real. Like you and me. You won't understand The Firemaker. You know only one way to use the vepalai leaves. To put them

under your pillow to keep away kaliamma. I use it on my body to wake up the blood. So The Firemaker isn't new or strange to me.

The many times athan beat me with The Firemaker you just stood there and watched. I didn't care. I was becoming lazy. Letting my body go to sleep. Athan was doing with The Firemaker what I did a long time ago with the vepalai leaves. So easy to sleep. To forget where you are and what you are. I wriggled my body this way and that. There was no shame.

But when he beat you with The Stinger what did you do? Just stood there like a block of stone. Let the sari fall in shreds around you. Then picked them up and went into the room. Not to come out for three days. When you came out, you spent the time at the family shrine, praying. Are you praying now? Do you think prayer will bring athan back?

Prayer won't bring him back. You've to go out and look for him.

We've to be together. In feelings, thoughts and actions. Togetherness. That's important. Not separateness. That's what you're doing, akka. Always separating. Yourself from athan. Yourself from me. Your life from ours.

SANTHA: (Begins to imitate her husband's punches with the knuckle-duster and his movements): He saw everybody as enemies. He punched and punched as if he saw real faces before him. Sumathi clapped, sitting in the chair. Why didn't he ask her to get up from the

chair? Then Sumathi came in front of him. 'Punch me,' she said. 'If you can punch me, you can punch anyone.' She was lazy most of the time but when she was quick she was quick. Why did he let a woman humiliate him?

Slower than a woman. He was slowing down. His shoulders were not round and powerful any more. It was painful to see him trying to make his body strong and fast again.

They were like two children. I've seen children play like that. (She begins to laugh and enter a lighter mood. She imitates and parodies her husband's and Sumathi's behaviour.) He would take a few steps and kick, she would clap. 'Do it again,' she would say when he did something like this. (Recalls and carries out a series of taekwando movements.) Put his hand acorss his chest, moved forward, hit with his left hand, hit with his right hand, kicked. (Laughs.) One time he nearly fell. Sumathi caught him.

She was always there to encourage him. His partner. His playmate. He would put his hands round her neck and she would try to release herself. Here, in front of those people passing by. After Sumathi came into the household, he touched me only a few times. And not like a husband a wife. Like a man in a hurry doing his duty. But he and Sumathi! The things they did! No, no, no need to think about that now.

Did she go after him because of that? The modern woman. 'Have a child,' I told her. 'My womb is too old.' 'What for?' she said. 'To stay in the house all the time?'

(She puts the sari border back on the chair.)

SUMATHI: I too come from years of silence. The silence of my family that almost broke me. Silence isn't strength. Silence is weakness. Silence is fear. You're frightened but pretending to be strong. You use everything to get away from what's happening around you.

(Sumathi focuses her attention on the armchair.)

This armchair won't remain the same thing in your mind. You'll change it into something else. Like you've done to that chair on the verandah there. Do you know what we do when athan brings me here sometimes? Play a game. I'll sit on the bed. Athan will sit in the chair. He's the big boss. Ah Pek knocks on the door. Comes in and pays athan. Then other men come in, one by one. The hawkers, the small shopkeepers, the foodstall owners. A little something for athan for keeping the place in order. Then they all go away.

What happens afterwards? He makes me sit in the armchair. (Sumathi sits in the armchair.) Then gives me the money the men gave him saying, 'Here's a token for keeping the streets clean. Here's a present for keeping out rowdiness. Here's a gift for protecting the women.'

Then we would laugh and sit together in the armchair. Yes, we also slept together, athan and I. But like a man and a woman who knew what their bodies needed. Who knew what their bodies

couldn't do. We never forced the bodies into anything unnatural. For you even taking off your clothes isn't natural. But you were born without clothes and without thoughts in your head.

But you, akka, make the chair too sacred. That's why I sat there like a slut sometimes. Just to make you angry. Because behaving like that towards the chair you took me back to the past. I didn't want the past. I don't want the past.

SANTHA: Putting all that strength into his body. Nothing left to bring a child into the world. 'You've seen those married men with children?' he said. 'Fat stomachs, thin hands and legs. You want me to be like that?'

I think he was afraid. Didn't want any child to be born like he was. Crippled. Sometimes when he came home drunk he talked in his sleep. 'No! No! There must be no children! To be hated by his mother, ignored by his father, humiliated by the neighbours. No! No! ' He was thinking about himself.

'You're like ice,' he told me. 'Don't know how to play. Sometimes I'm afraid to breathe in front of you.' He didn't know how to play with me. I don't play with my clothes all taken off. I don't go everywhere with him, letting all kinds of men's eyes fall on me.

SUMATHI: The past. Pictures of the dead. The silence that came between living and dying. The silence that was emptiness. My father too had

his chair. Sat on it like a king. Called my mother. She went in obedience, wearing her sari and the pottu on her forehead. The pottu, the kum-kum mark of slavery. She was nothing when she didn't wear the pottu. But when she made that red dot, she could command and she could obey. Do you know, akka, how much beating she took? Not just with the stick and slippers. But the other kind of beating. When she couldn't answer back. Couldn't defend herself. Put a wrong suspicion right. The kind of beating that killed her mind. When the pottu wasn't there the forehead was as smooth as a baby's. Empty.

SANTHA: After his exercises, after Sumathi had rubbed his body with camphor oil, he sat on this chair, shining. He pushed up his shoulders like this (wriggles her left and right shoulder blades) whenever anyone passed the house. Then he stretched his hands and made his arms tight so his muscles would stand out. For all to see. Somebody bigger and stronger will come one day. The people will flock round him.

He won't listen to me. 'I found my legs. I made my body strong. Do you know how many people are afraid of me because of that? Do you know I just have to stretch out my hand and they put money in it?'

What happens one day when you can't stretch out your hand because you're old or sick? He wouldn't answer. He knew but wouldn't admit the truth.

But he changed. He bagan to save his body, not use it so much. That's when he brought home

that cane and that rayfish tail. He has funny names for them. The Firemaker. The Stinger. Two more playthings. More stories to tell himself. More untruths.

Why didn't Sumathi help me to wake him up? For her anything he did was right. Even when he beat her with the cane, The Firemaker.

Even I, a woman, felt like beating her. Maybe that's why her parents punished her. For not seeing things in the right place. When athan brought the cane and the rayfish tail, she came running to me like a child.

'No need to worry any more, akka,' she said. 'I know you think he's too old to use his body. He won't have to use his body any more. He has found something more powerful. The Firemaker. The Stinger.'

'Go and play with them,' I said.

'Only he can touch them,' she said. 'Come out and see what he does with the cane and the whip.'

SUMATHI: The vegetable-seller beat her. The fishmonger beat her. With their prices. She didn't know the people on the streets. Only her neighbours. We must know the words on the streets. The price of everything on the streets. So we won't be beaten.

When I came to our house with athan after the wedding I only saw a chair. Then you came with your sari and pottu. Then athan sat there on the chair. You stood, like my mother, at the

correct distance and asked:

'What do you want me to cook today?'

'What's to be done about the neighbour who's always making noise at night?'

'Why's that man, Arumugam, always coming here?'

'What shall we do about our childlessness? Shall we adopt a child?'

Are these questions? Only blindness. Stupidity. And you wanted to teach me the same things, sitting beside that chair.

(Sumathi economises on her movements and takes on the voice of the traditional Santha.)

You tightened your sari some more. Sat more stiffly with the head up so I could see the pottu. You began with the pottu.

'The pottu is the sign that you're wedded. It must always be on your forehead. When you wake up, wash your face, then go to the shrine, pray, and put on the pottu. Then go and look upon the husband's face. That way you won't bring misfortune to the family and yourself.'

'Wash the pots, mugs and plates with ash and assam,' you said, 'before the husband gets up. Don't sit down with the husband at breakfast. Don't sit with him at lunch. Serve him first and eat last. Don't look at any man who talks to you. Keep your head covered with your sari border.'

What were you trying to do, akka? That was the kind of life I was putting behind me. No, no, I'm not going to be just a shadow. I started living with athan. Not living for him. You've lived so much for him, you can't do anything by yourself.

(She stops talking abruptly and looks about her.)

SANTHA: (Begins to make the chair the centre of her attention. After some time, to all intents and purposes, the chair is her husband): I saw. Why didn't she see even at this late stage? You sat there in the chair first swishing the air with your cane as if beating flies. Sumathi, why didn't you see? The story you told me about The Firemaker!, athan, can that be true? (She goes and takes the sari border from the chair and twists it into a thick band to make it look like a cane.) You said it was the thinnest cane that your friend, the rattan-hunter, found. So thin it could wrap itself round a tree trunk. (Flicks the twisted sari border at the chair leg.) Can something so stiff bend itself round anything? (Addresses the chair.) Why do you call it The Firemaker?

You used it only on Sumathi. I was there all the time. Why didn't you use it on me? I remember what you said as you beat her. 'There! This will make your body burn. Little knots of flame all over.'

I also remember something else. That time you finished your exercises and Sumathi wasn't home to rub your body down with camphor ointment. I said I would rub the ointment into

your muscles. 'No,' you said. 'You can't make my body burn like Sumathi.'

Where is she now? Somewhere with Arumugam, enjoying herself. I've been here all the time, eating nothing, drinking only water now and then. I've given away my body. Made it live for something else. For you.

Remember you said, 'God gave us bodies to live with them, not just inside them?' Why didn't you make me live with it? You had to go and get that cane, The Firemaker. You had to go and get that Sumathi.

SUMATHI: All this talk about the past! Waste of time.

(She looks at her wrist-watch, then taking some scented paper towels from her handbag, freshens herself up.)

The night almost gone. Where's that Arumugam? Maybe he knows where athan is and won't tell me. He and No-Fear-Tan working hand-in-hand. 'Your man very good,' No-Fear-Tan once told me. 'Strong and fast. But once like women too much all that finished. You and the other woman looking after him properly? Not fighting? Not asking too much from him?'

And Arumugam asking me, 'After the exercises what oil to rub on the body?' I said, 'You mustn't rub it on the body. You must drink it. Then your body will shine better than the moon.' 'Don't fool me, sister,' he says.

That time athan was beaten up why did No-Fear-Tan bring him back? He never fights. His body is thin as a broomstick. Why does he always follow athan? 'We good friends,' says No-Fear-Tan. 'Work together.'

How can such a man work with athan? At another time No-Fear-Tan says, 'You lucky woman. Have a strong man. I find him the work he doing now. Show him all the shops and hotels. I not there, he finished. Won't finish for a long time.'

Arumugam going round with him, nodding his head, smiling.

SANTHA: You think I can't be like her? It's easy to be like her even when wearing a sari. (Goes and sits in the chair.) Just this one time let me sit in this chair and show how she behaves when you're not at home. Maybe like she's doing now in some hotel room. (As she talks she loosens her hair and arranges it round her shoulders and face.) That's how she puts her hair down. (Next she unwraps her sari border which has been tucked tightly round her waist and brings the upper section of the sari over her shoulder and designs it like a skirt around her hips.) That's how she wears her dresses. (Spreads her legs out and sits back slatternly.) There, I can do it too. Let all the winds in the world blow between my legs!

SUMATHI: (She goes decisively to the door and knocks.)

Ah Pek! Ah Pek! I'll find out what Arumugam is doing.

Ah Pek! Ah Pek!

Gone for almost six hours. Should have found out something.

Ah Pek! Ah Pek!

(Listens, then addresses the man behind the door.)

No, I don't want more pow. (Listens.) I told you already, Ah Pek. (Listens.) Don't care if the man owns many companies. Divorced? Ask him to marry again. Married five times already? So, he must do this thing before going to work. Then nothing bother him? Will pay too hundred dollars. Two hundred, four hundred, six hundred. I don't care. Don't want any man. Want Dass. Know where Dass?

(Listens.)

Ask you find Arumugam. He coming? Oh, send you first. Ask him to come.

SANTHA (Gets up from the chair and faces it as she would her husband): You respected me too much, let me live within my silence. Where did that silence come from? From all the hundreds of years women lived in he shadow of their husbands. That made you angry, made you rage. You didn't raise The Firemaker on me. You

raised The Stinger.

Before bringing it down on my body, you told me the story of the rayfish. Did you want me to see some meaning? Not an ordinary rayfish, you said. A big one with fins as large as waves. Had been lying on the seabed for several years. Its back was covered with a layer of hard sea things, almost like a rock. Its underside was white and soft. That made you angry. And its eyes had the look of having seen hundreds of years. The fish was still alive when the fisherman asked you to cut its tail. You cut it off with one blow. When you brought home the tail, it was still smelling. The skin was not completely dried. There was flesh over the bones. I saw you curing it, drying it in the sun, oiling it until you could roll it up into a small coil.

You took it to town, hiding it under your shirt. When I asked you why you were late one night you beat me with it. What were you beating? The Stinger didn't touch my body at all. It only tore my sari and blouse until I was almost naked. Yes, I still have that sari in the house. Just to remember and learn the meaning. But I didn't feel naked.

Today, when I'm by myself, I still don't feel alone. You're somewhere near. And you'll come when you know my true self. Sumathi can go and throw herself on you but you'll know who has been here all the time.

SUMATHI (Turns away from the door, goes to the armchair and sits, waiting for Arumugam. After a while she turns her head towards the door at

the sound of Arumugam approaching. Keeps the door closed): At last the man himself. Have you really looked for my husband?

Here and there? You said you knew all the places. Now you can't find him. You didn't try.

(Listens for some time and hears Arumugam moving outside the room.)

So you're telling me what happens to strong men. Four stages. (Repeats Arumugam's words with varying emotions: first mockingly, then in disbelief and finally in anger and revulsion.) When fully strong the man enters any building through the front. Stands in front of the counter. Doesn't say a word.

When half-strong, he doesn't enter so boldly. Isn't well-dressed any more. Looks more like a thug. Stands before the counter and says, 'Where's the gift? The present?'

When less than half-strong he creeps in like some insect. Bangs the counter and shouts, 'You don't give me something see what happens to your stall. Just wait and see what happens to your face!'

When not strong at all, he doesn't enter any building. Roams the back lanes.

(Pause. Still seated, Sumathi questions Arumugam.)

What happens there, Aru?

(Listens.)

Don't tell me about the four stages of women. Too many people telling us about women.

(Listens.)

They all have a price? Yes, but not in money ways. (Listens.) You say you sold me to Dass. You brought us together. Remember that, Arumugam. You didn't sell me. Nobody can buy me. May be you tried through Ah Pek just now. He didn't buy me. Money can't always buy women.

(Listens.)

Now go! Before I kick you between the legs!

SANTHA (Looks at the twisted sari border and then unwinds and smooths it out): No, I wouldn't turn this sari border into some smelling, dried up rayfish tail. Even if you call it The Stinger. I started this border the day you ripped my sari with The Stinger. I've put twenty years of our life together into its gold threads. I've put the years of suffering in silence into it. Now I'll place it on the chair where you always sit.

(She places the smoothened sari border on the back of the chair, stands away and contemplates them both.)

Soft cloth and hard wood. Just like the rayfish you talked about. Soft underbelly and hard top skin. We're like that -- you and I. Sumathi is some cheap cloth and sour perfume which won't last for long.

(She moves away from the chair but still talks to it as if her husband is seated there.)

We've always been together. We'll always be together. I'll be the silence, you be the noise. You think I don't know you? Yes, I haven't been to that street where you're the master and everybody obeys you. Here we work together. You can be me, I can be you.

Sumathi chatters away, puts on all kinds of dresses and perfumes. I put on different things, enter different smells and bodies. My work is with people. I've watched you all these years. Know your movements and your feelings. Sumathi sees only the outside of you, your body. I go inside and can become you.

(She tidies her hair and works it into its old bun at the back of her head. She readjusts her sari, tightening and tucking it at her waist.)

During the last few months you've come home beaten many times. Not blows on your face or cuts on your hands. That happened many years ago. You gave back blow for blow, cut for cut. But these recent months you couldn't give anything back.

You returned one night quietly. No car brought you back. I was still awake. You just have to breathe and I know you're there.

(As she talks she begins to take on her husband's problems, moods and movements.)

You stood here near the chair. Not straight but like a tired old man. Your legs

were trembling. You started talking to your legs. Yes, I saw and heard everything from the door, which I had opened to a small gap. You were so busy with yourself, you didn't notice anything else.

Left, are you ready? Right, are you there? (Bends down and listens.) What? You don't want to work today? Worked for too long? Nobody rests. You only rest when you're dead. (Listens.) You didn't want to be born? I didn't want to be born. But I was born with you as useless sticks. The bidan, Makchik, brought me into the world. As a human being? No, as a worm, as an insect, that crawled on the floor. My father didn't look at me, my mother didn't want me. So don't talk about being born.

That's how you talked and stood all the while without moving. A man once strong. A man with shoulders round as the earth.

Left, your're all right. Right, you're the stubborn one. I gave you blood and nerves. Now move. (Listens.) What? Still won't move? (Listens.) What? Nothing to move for? When you've legs you move, that's all. (Listens.) Must move for something, for somebody? You move for me. I'm somebody. Somebody big. Not any more? Because you don't obey me.

The legs didn't move. They were stuck to the floor. You thought and thought. I saw your face trying to hide the suffering. Then you bent down again.

I know how to make you move, you said. I stood there in the sandpit for days and months so you could get your blood and nerves. I'll

open your nerves and veins! (Listens.) Part of me? If you're part of me you'll obey or else ... I'll give you a beating. With the Stinger.

(She reaches out her hand for the sari border and almost falls.)

You almost fell. But you didn't give up. Stood straight again. (Listens.) I'll suffer pain? That's nothing new. I knew pain as a child. The pain of being humiliated, of being treated like an insect. They said, 'There goes the cockroach. There goes the lizard. It's going to the hold. Give it a shovel. The job will go faster. It can finish itself off.' They wanted me dead. Buried.

If you behave like the dead, people will step on you, crush you. Now move!

You forced yourself. The legs moved a few paces. You took The Stinger off the hook. (She takes the sari border and treats it like a whip.) There, you said, you can move. Only have the determination. Think of those years of silence from which this rayfish tail comes. Those eyes that watch without feeling. You must care for yourself, live for yourself.

And then you struck your leg with The Stinger.

(She strikes her right leg repeatedly.)

Punished yourself. Like Sumathi's parents punished her. Beat the blood out of your leg. Your face couldn't hide the pain any more.

SUMATHI (After Arumugam leaves, Sumathi stands still for a while trying to understand her situation): No, athan won't work for anybody. Can't work for anybody. The man who knows The Firemaker, The Stinger. Akka, do you know what The Firemaker is? Not just a rattan cane. Something you hold. It's something that takes hold of you. It's inside you all the time. Beats you for being lazy. Beats you for sleeping. Beats you for not knowing. Beats you into wakefulness.

Do you know what The Stinger is? A set of rules. Rules that have come through time. Rules that have come through people. Rules that beat you down. Rules you use to beat down others.

SANTHA: Isn't there something beyond pain? Isn't there something beyond determination. Isn't there something beyond the body? So, I know about you. I may be the silence you talked about, the ice that wouldn't melt.

During the day I work. During the night I lie awake listening for our footsteps. Fear made you find your legs, fear made you stand up. That fear is destroying you now, bringing you down to your knees.

You want me buried. You and that woman. The silence buried me all these years. Like you I've entered the sandpit waiting for you these last few days. But the fear of your not coming back is not going to make me bend my knees. I'm your right leg, stubborn, and working only with half understanding all this time. I'm The Stinger that will tear you to pieces as you tore

my sari to shreds. I'm waiting here for you without fear, filled only with that hard rock of patience that's my life.

SUMATHI: The sandpit. This is the sandpit. (Looks around herself.) Where a price is put on everything. On men. Women. Children. Not just a hole where athan stood to get his legs. he sandpit is here and now. The sandpit is the roughness of life. The sand is the burying scorn of the people. The sand is the dirt people throw into your mind. The sand is what makes that woman say, 'Short time, Joe? Long time, Joe?' The sand is uncertainty. Don't' blindfold yourself with the sari border, akka. Step out into the sand. I'm going to step out into the sand. Search the back lanes. Search out athan.

(She picks up her handbag and slowly breaks into a bitter song and dance.)

SANTHA (Turns to the chair and addresses it directly): Can't you see? Why do you try to catch the flashes in the sky? Why don't you be the sky, rising above everything, silent, watching, waiting?

(She comes forward and sits down to the left of the chair and smoothing out the sari border begins to work on it. She looks in front and sees that the sun is about to rise.)

I'll not just put gold and silver thread into this sari border. My patience is not born out of being passive. My patience will be the anger I haven't used since I married you. If

that woman can be like a man, I'll be both man and woman, the left and right legs. (Pause.) It's going to be the fifth day. A good number. I'll sit and wait and work on this border. Maybe before I finish it you'll come. We'll make another beginning, start a new border.

(Sumathi appears before her singing and dancing; Santha rises with the sari border in her hand and offering a sort of contrast to her, dances in her own controlled and yet in a vital fashion.)

SUMATHI: Dance through life, dance through life,
don't be thrown into the pit.
Be with life, be with life,
don't be ruled by certainty.
Clap for life, clap for life,
don't be swayed by authority,
don't be swayed by uncertainty,
don't be swayed by the unholy.

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