ALAM PANTUN MELAYU

Studies on the Malay Pantun

ALAM PANTUN MELAYU

Studies on the Malay Pantun

François-René Daillie

Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
Kuala Lumpur
2002

Contents

Acknowledgements

None of the present research and study could have been achieved without the precious help of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Malaysia, who invited me to come and work as a guest writer for six months and placed everything I could need at my disposal, a privilege for which I have great pleasure in conveying to them here my heartfelt thanks.

I am particularly grateful to Datuk Hassan Ahmad, Ketua Pengarah, and Encik Anuar Ayub, Timbalan Ketua Pengarah, for their friendly welcome, understanding and sense of humour, but also to all the directors and members of the Literature, Translation, Library and other divisions, to all those who made my stay in Malaysia rich and pleasant and my work easier and more fruitful.

F.-R. D.

FOREWORD

This book does not claim to be an exhaustive study of the Malay pantun but, in a more modest way, an attempt to put together the various aspects of a personal experience regarding this poetic genre: firstly, in particular, as a poet fascinated by it to the point of deciding many years ago that a day would come for him to devote a good part of his time to translating some of these peculiar quatrains into his own tongue; secondly, as a Frenchman aware that in his own country, unlike many other types of Asian poetry, the pantun has never obtained the fame it deserves, in spite of its introduction into French XIXth century poetry under the adulterated name and in the erroneous form of the "pantoum".

This personal experience unites the kind of special contact, intimacy and inner knowledge obtained by the attentive reader and translator of pantuns together with the study of most books and articles written on the subject by specialists of Malaysian language, literature and civilization. I hope it will appear clearly, however, that this is not a compilation. I wish to make it clear that I am thankful to all the authors I had the opportunity to read for all the enlightenments they brought me, and that critical appraisal on my part, should any occur in these pages, is rather a matter of personal opinion, not devoid of doubt and interrogation, than outright criticism.

Thus, these are only a few chapters on the Malay pantun, not an exhaustive study, as I said, and for at least two main reasons, irrespective of those which may have escaped my attention: firstly, I should have added to them one on the thematics of pantuns, secondly, given more space to "the pantun in Malay civilization", particularly to its specific use in traditional Malay society. But I felt both questions required much more than a chapter each, a whole

book actually — which I may write sooner or later, after my own fashion, as an accompaniment to my French translations.

F.-R. D.
May 1987

Most of the English translations of the pantuns quoted in this book are mine, for which I crave indulgence, if not forgiveness. A few of them I borrowed, as a kind of homage, from A. H. Hamilton's *Malay Pantuns*, in which case they are marked "(A.W.H.)".

November 1987

CHAPTER I

The Malay Pantun as an Adventure in World Literature

I have always conceived literature as an adventure, that is, etymologically, something that happens to you, that you have to go through, a series of events in which you get more or less deeply involved, happenings which have an impact on your intellect, your spirit, or even better, on your whole being, body, heart and brains. The adventure can be as brief as the explosion of surprise of the *haiku*, as long and complicated in its development and gradual in its action upon you as the novel at its best. Literature, when worthy of this name, is in fact chiefly an adventure not so much because it can make you share in the vicissitudes or discoveries of a character in a story, for instance, as by leaving you another man or woman than you were before entering into the book, however slightly different. Of course, getting involved in literature both as a reader and a writer, all the more so if the writer is a literary translator as well, can become one long and continuous adventure.

To me, the encounter with the Malay pantun has been until now one of the most striking episodes as well as one of the main elements of the whole adventure of life, not simply of literature as distinct from life, but of life *and* literature closely mixed together. Thus in my life, the discovery of the pantun is in close connection with that of the country where it was born and of the people who gave birth to it, which I will henceforth call Malaya and Malays as distinct from today's political notions of Malaysia and Malaysians: inseparable from them, I should say, both as one of the emotional channels of my love for this part of Earth and as an expression, not to say the most

comprehensive expression, of the sensitiveness, culture and civilization of its original people.

This is really important because, from the very start, my experience of Malaya as a place where I lived, worked, loved, etc. together with its own people with whom I shared life, work, food, joy and love, and my experience of the pantun as the unique, original and delicious fruit of this country and people, of their language, from their remotest past to their present and from the humblest and simplest circles of their society up to the highest and most refined ones, were closely related, intertwined, inseparable for me organically as well as spiritually.

This is probably why, although I was separated for years — a good twenty years as a matter of fact from my earlier experience of Malaya and her culture, of the way of life and language of the Malays, neither did the vividness fade of my former impressions of the land and of my first contact with the language, nor disappear the urge to do something, when I had time, to make the pantun known to my countrymen by means of translations and as full a study of this literary genre as I could contribute. Which was probably the most active force which finally brought me back, first to the pantun, then to Malaysia.

I am afraid people will think that I insist a little too much, more than I ought to as a scholar, on the individual, subjective aspects of the adventure instead of simply considering its result from the general point of view of academic research. But I am not what might be called an academic, writing and literature are something more to me, as I have said, than the dissection of a corpse at a medical school or a mortuary — they are a warm living body and the only possible relationship with them is that of mutual love and understanding. Actually, to the more "academical" aspect of this work will I come, indeed, in my own way, in the course of this book. But let this chapter at least be conceded to the subjective and affective needs of the author as a living being and a writer of poems and stories, to his ideas and feelings as one in love with the earth, its beauties and universal poetry, not as a critic and analyst of literary products and production — one in love with a country and its people, their language and their most striking literary achievement, the pantun.

As a Frenchman, however, I was not ignorant of the word, or at least of its curiously frenchified form "pantoum", if not aware of the real nature of the original Malay model. And to tell the truth, I must

say that I had never been specially attracted by its French avatar — a very minor aspect indeed of our XIXth century poetry (as will be seen in the next chapter) and most artificial as well. So that I would not have been particularly inclined to look forward to the discovery of the Malay pantun if somebody had not told me — one of the very few French planters who had long lived in Malaya and spoke her language well — shortly after my arrival : « I see that you are interested in the Malay language, then you ought to study Malay pantuns. They are probably as old as the language itself and yet still alive — a perfect mirror of the Malay world as a whole, and of the Malay soul. You will learn a lot from them, and surely be won over by their peculiar qualities. To me, they are one of the finest, cleverest, most effective and touching poetical forms in the literature of the world...»

This sounded a little emphatic to me at first. But the man looked serious. He knew the country well and loved it. He did not assume the superior air and condescending attitude of the white man usually to be found in colonial surroundings. He asked me if I had ever read Henri Fauconnier's book, *Malaisie*. I had heard about it, but never been able to lay hands on it.

Winner of the Goncourt Prize in 1930, this autobiographical novel had sold well, about 120,000 copies at the time, but never been reprinted afterwards and was no longer available in any bookshop. It would probably have taken me months rummaging through the shelves of second-hand booksellers' booths and boxes along the river Seine before I could lay hand on some decrepit volume, and I had been shipped to this place in a matter of weeks.

So the planter lent me the book, saying : « One word of warning, anyhow : don't expect Malaya to be now what she used to be when Fauconnier lived here. That was about fifty years ago and things have changed a lot, of course. But I think you can trust him as to what he says about the soul of Malaya and her people or whatever of it may appear between the lines. And you can trust him also when he speaks about pantuns; it is a good introduction to them. » And that was all. He was not the man to repeat himself. I read the book for myself and found in it what he had said I would find. It is still there.

Translated into English in 1931 as *The Soul of Malaya*, Fauconnier's book has been constantly reprinted here. But I am surprised it was never translated into Malay.

The book begins with a pantun — I mean that its first chapter

has a pantun for an epigraph, one of the very first I was to translate many years later:

Jikalau tidak kerana bintang,
Masakan bulan terbit tinggi?
Jikalau tidak kerana abang,
Masakan datang adik ke mari?

If not because of stars above,
Why does the moon rise up so high?
If not because of you, my love,
Why should I ever venture nigh?

This was then my first pantun, not too difficult to understand for a beginner. And there were more to come, together with some rhymed couplets. The next one struck a more definitely sensual note:

Tanam padi di bukit Jeram
Tanam keduduk atas batu,
Macam mana hati tak geram
Menengok tetek menolak baju?

Planting rice on Jeram Hill,
Rhododendrons on the rock,
However could my heart keep still
Seeing her breasts beneath her frock?

but the connection between its two couplets was less evident, and that was probably my first approach of the controverted relationship of *pembayang* with *maksud*, to which one of the following chapters will be devoted.

The rhymed couplet was more like a proverb — and I was then only beginning to get used to one of the familiar processes of a fascinating language still new to me —, more like a way of veiling one's thought behind echoing sound similarities to make it, finally, easier to grasp for those accustomed to this kind of expression:

Padang perahu di lautan,
Padang hati di fikiran.[1]

[1] In Henri Fauconnier, *The Soul of Malaya*, (see Bibliography), p. 57. The pantuns quoted above are on p. 3 and p. 43 respectively.

The field of a boat is the main,
That of the heart is memory.

though more than once bordering on the mysterious and the enigmatical as in the case of the following one, at the head of the next chapter:

Murai gila jadi tekukur,
Ajaib hairan hati tafakur.[2]

The robin craves to be a dove,
The puzzled heart is deep in thought.

The book went on with the first period of that new phase in the life of the narrator while I, his reader, was in a similar way proceeding with a really new one in mine, although not on a rubber estate in the midst of the jungle. In a way, my position was more or less identical with his, I had to learn from his book in the same way as he had learnt from his friend Rolain's experience. « I turned in a circle, like a beast in a cage. He was reading.

"What are you reading?"

"The Bustanu's-Salatin."

"You're only interested in the Malays," I said. "A fine sort of people — lazy, deceitful, and vain. That's my opinion."

"You say 'my opinion' as that carpet would say 'my place'," said Rolain calmly, and went on reading. »[3]

That served him right, and I applauded inwardly as if I had been a witness to the scene. Personally, I did not need to be taught that sort of lesson, just because I had already had many opportunities to think myself out of the usual tracks of our Western mind and establish different relationships with time and necessity. And this kind of so-called laziness was an attitude I could appreciate fully for what it was, a real philosophy of life: « The Malays do not at all wish to be considered in this light. Their point of view is contrary to ours. They can easily get their daily rice by working one day a week and they ask for no more. All fatigue is useless and harmful. Life is long, so why hurry? In the morning, perhaps, they visit their nets along the river or

[2] *Ibid.* p. 72.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 59.

their traps at the edge of the jungle and there they may find some beast of the water or of the forest which the Tuan Allah has allowed to be caught, so that their bodies may become man and their souls, in the souls of men, may learn to know Him better ... »[4] How much was said in a few sentences, bringing home an intimate knowledge which volumes of philosophy, sociology, religion would probably fail to explain. The really ecological attitude, combining a natural mixture of experience, old beliefs, magic, and the more recent religion of Islam to make for a soul where life is in constant communication between all the elements of God's creation. To me, it was a token of great wisdom that a man did not try to catch more fish, for instance, than was actually needed for his family, for the day's hunger, and would not kill an animal or fell a tree without necessity.

The Malay pantun bears the unmistakable mark of such an attitude. This brief poem is an epitome of life and a universe in a grain of sand. It carries within itself all the elements of the Malay man's life: his land, his house, his garden, his paddy field, the river; the sea or the forest; the trees, fruits, animals, birds, fishes; the few simple things of everyday use; it expresses his customs and traditions, wisdom, beliefs and feelings of all sorts, his love of man, woman and God. It also sounds, very often, like his personal magic *mantera*, which everyone can use for himself without the help of any established *pawang* or *bomoh* — magician or sorcerer. It belongs to everyone, it is composed of the simplest words of everyday use, its syntax itself is reduced to the essential connections — to the point of making it rather kryptic sometimes — and its rhythm deeply ingrained in common ordinary speech. There is no gap between the language of pantuns and the language of daily communication. Anyone, I discovered, can be a *pemantun* for a while, whether he or she recites pantuns that were composed long ago or creates his or her own for the circumstance. When did the first pantuns appear? I wondered. How long did it take for this form of poetry to achieve the perfection with which it seems to have been practised for centuries? Pantuns, apparently, were always present in the life of Malays, through all the layers of society, so that the Malay language itself would never have been what it is without the pantun. The various chapters of this book will try to illustrate and develop these various points.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 59–60.

Kupu-kupu terbang melintang
Terbang di laut di hujung karang.
Pasal apa berhati bimbang
Dari dahulu sampai sekarang?

A butterfly is flying athwart
Where the sea with reefs does play,
Why have I felt uncertain in my heart
From days long past to the present day?

This pantun came also as an epigraph to a further chapter of Fauconnier's book.[5] I realize only today — but how could I presume? — that this was just a slight variation in the first stanza of a string of four *pantun berkait* which the same Fauconnier did not seem to know had been "the first pantun in French literature"! What richness, when I think of it today and realize that there was still more to discover in this book than I had been able to find out twenty-five years ago! But these are details, refinements available only now, after devoting months and years of study to the same domain. At the time of fresh surprise it came out differently, mixed up with the vicissitudes of everyday life. Differently and, so to speak, in a more essential way.

I must own I am glad a fellow-countryman and writer of my father's generation was at the origin of my interest in pantuns and gave the initial impulse to my quest. The fact, also, that he had written the essential about them was certainly responsible for my love: « The two first lines of a pantun are only a preparation for the idea that is to develop in the succeeding ones. They create the atmosphere without the crudity of the metaphor »[6] Or: « So short a poem needs to be read slowly as a still life should be looked at for a long while. Indeed it is a still life ... »[6] The pantuns which came as examples in this "lesson" are among the best I have ever read:

Asam kandis asam gelugur
Ketiga dengan asam rembunia.
Nyawa menangis di pintu kubur
Hendak pulang di dalam dunia.

[5] *Ibid.* p. 59.
[6] *Ibid.* p. 80.

Sour mangosteen and gourd
Sour mango makes a third.
The soul is crying in the tomb.
So eager to come back on earth.

Or:

Nasi basi atas para
Nasi masak dalam perahu.
Pucat kasih badan sengsara
Hidup segan mati tak mahu.[7]

Rice on a rack, no longer fresh,
Cooked aboard and left to lie.
Paleness of passion, aching flesh,
Loth to live, averse to die.

And the direct, simple comments : « Here are bitter-sweet fruits, plants with an acid savour. It is to introduce what follows, as a heart is offered after fruits and flowers, leaves and branches. » Or about the second one: « Stale rice left in a boat. We think of a voyage or of an adventure, of him who was in the boat, and cooked the rice, and was hungry at that time — and yet the food is left untouched, and we scent a drama. Or perhaps this white rice that no one wants is in itself symbolic. The last two lines reveal the *soul-state* of the picture: it is the expression of so deep a disillusion that no desire survives, not even the desire of death. »[8]

This was the essential, and all I could read afterwards here and there about the Malay pantun, all I could find out myself, all that my present study in its country itself has enabled me to gather, has its importance, is necessary for a full study of this literary form, but nothing, at the level of poetic emotion, can compare with the initial enlightenment and impulse given by these few passages in Fauconnier's narrative : « *We think of a voyage or of an adventure.* » and this is precisely what it was, what it probably would never have been but for that impulse.

Henceforth was I sent on my quest, and could welcome events like the following, which implied receptivity and understanding: one Saturday morning, shortly after breakfast, I had heard a noise

[7] *Ibid.* p. 80 for both pantuns.
[8] *Ibid.* p. 80–81.

coming from the office room near by, the hesitating clack of a typewriter. This could not be the secretary, as she did not work on weekends. So it had to be Zain, the gardener, who was also in charge of the classrooms and other public parts of the house — a rather tall, handsome boy with jet-black hair and great dark eyes which contrasted with the fair complexion of his face. He would always smile kindly when I addressed him, and did what he had to do at his own sweet will but with care and regularity. The house and the garden were well kept, although he hated cutting the thick grass of the lawn with a mechanical mower which he had to push very hard. I could see him from time to time standing still and day-dreaming for a while between two strokes of the rake or broom.

I opened my room door just a crack, and there he was, a few steps away, standing in front of the typing desk, his broom stick propped against it. I went close to him. What had he been typing, with one finger, letter by letter, on a sheet of cigarette paper, which he had, God knows how, managed to insert into the big office typewriter? A bit self-conscious, he handed the tiny, flimsy rectangle to me, with a pantun neatly typed on it — quite the right size actually! I asked his permission to write it down in one of my note books, or on a sheet of paper, perhaps .... All I know now is that I could never find it again later among my papers. But I remember it was a clever pantun in every respect, and have never forgotten the image and the meaning of it, so that I tried to write something similar, in French to begin with:

Rivière trouble, éclairs dans l'ombre:
Est-ce vipère ou bien poisson?
Mystère double, tes yeux sombres:
Est-ce délice ou bien poison?[9]

then, more recently, in Malay:

Sungai lumpur selepas hujan:
Ikan, ular sayup berkilau?
Hajat bercampur di mata tuan:
Bisa, penawar siapakah tahu?[10]

[9] and [10]These two pantuns, in French and in Malay, are not the translation of each other, but only approximations of what Zain's pantun must have been.

Muddy river after the rain:
Fish or snake dimly flash below?
Wishes mixed in your eyes remain,
Poison or cure, ah, who could know?

In fact, Zain's pantun had slightly different connotations: in the troubled water of the stream, the fish or whatever it may be are difficult to perceive clearly — vague, fugitive, changing shadows or swift streaks of light; in her eyes as well, the girl's sentiments cannot be read with certainty.

I did not ask Zain whether he had composed that pantun himself or was simply trying to remember one he could have heard on the evening before: it did not really matter, as pantuns have nearly always been anonymous and belong to everyone in Malaya. To me, it was a proof that they were still as popular as before and that any Malay boy or girl, man or woman, whether young or old, was able to create a pantun, that one did not have to be a specialist for that, anything professional like a poet, a writer or a man of letters. It was clear that pantuns had always been the expression of a common soul, an expression, moreover, which was by no means awkward, naive, cheap as usually happens with what is termed "popular" art or literature in the West. Oral, anonymous, both simple and subtle, concrete and mysterious at the same time, terse and perfectly balanced in the organization of sounds as well as in images and meaning: something to be equalled only by very few poetic genres in the literature of the world, a fine mixture of original conception and artistic achievement.

The adventure was not to founder in the marshes of oblivion when it became obvious that I was not coming back to Malaya after home leave. The unforeseeable in life's adventure as a whole was taking me to other parts of the world and years would elapse until I could revisit the beloved country, and many more again before I could find the right time and mood to start doing that which I had promised myself I would do: to try and translate pantuns into my mother tongue. But in the meantime, two booklets I had found there followed me around the world and never left me: Hamilton's *Malay Pantuns*,[11] a collection which contains most of the best, and, very precious too, Katharine Sim's *Flowers of the Sun*,[12] "an introduction

[11] A.W. Hamilton, *Malay Pantuns* (see Bibliography).

[12] Katharine Sim, *Flowers of the Sun*, "an introduction to the *pantun*" (see Bibliography).

to the pantun" published in Singapore in 1957: discreet companions who spoke for me the language I loved and were alive not only with the genuine poetic feeling of those people in the distant peninsula but with the smells and tastes and pictures and music of the land itself.

(I should mention it here that the smell or rather the inebriating scent of the land had called me long ago about the end of my childhood, awakening an unconscious longing for a part of the earth which I could not name at that time: near the high school which I attended in those days, lay a vast beautiful public park with a botanical garden and there rose a large glass-house full of tropical plants with a central part high enough to shelter some lofty jungle trees. The air in it was warm and damp, with a spicy odour which was my first impression when I landed at Kuala Lumpur Airport (the old one) some twenty-five years later. I had hardly set foot on the top step of the ladder at the door of the aircraft in the thin early morning breeze when it enchanted my nostrils, not in startling discovery but in delighted recognition).

Hamilton's choice, his translations and notes helped me a great deal, but K. Sim's book was even more to be the seed of an everlasting interest and a source of broader knowledge after the initial impulse given by Fauconnier. In addition to those of the pantuns equally present in Hamilton's selection, her book gave me many more to appreciate which still have a place among the most famous and best I have ever known. Mostly, she taught me what she had been taught herself by her *munsyi*, especially about images and symbols, proverbs and customs, which otherwise I would probably have passed by unawares. And her English translations, although there was no attempt in them at any regular metre or rhyme, were unpretentious and as faithful to the originals as she could manage, which was much better, finally, than Hamilton's *maniéré* exertions. Put together, the two books represented a choice of about two hundred and fifty pantuns, my only treasure for all those years, which thanks to their notes, glossaries, explanations and English translations, would become more and more familiar to me so that I could run the risk, some day, of putting them into French directly from the Malay text.

A part of this book will be devoted to some of the problems of translation. Suffice it to say, for the time being, that thanks to the guide-lines provided by these two booklets I felt more certain not to go astray, in my own attempts, from the likeliest meaning of the traditional images, symbols, implicit comparisons and other veiled or

subtle hints and allusions in the original pantuns — which made me more confident when I tried to deal with some for which there was no previous interpretation or translation available.

But let it be quite clear that my French translations could not have been achieved in any other way than directly from the original. This is not the least exciting or instructive part, or aspect, of the journey, of the adventure: to realize how "dangerous" it can be to translate a literary text by means of a translation into another language. English, for one, is always a "dangerous" language as an intermediary to French (and as such should be used with great care and always counterchecked), all the more with the additional complication of a questionable poetic style ... but this will be examined further on. What I wish to point out here is that the translation of poetry, like poetry itself, is an adventurous journey in language which like love, so to speak, will not admit of any foreign witness, will not suffer any third party to stand between you and your love. It is a matter of direct knowledge.

In this case, it meant that I had not only to stick to the four lines in Malay and to nothing else — asking afterwards, and afterwards only, from one of my guides, or from both: do you agree on this point? Are we thinking alike? — but also to go a long way into the Malay language itself in order to become aware of the intimate relationship of the pantun with the language, or its music in connection with the music of everyday speech as well as its unique adequation to the soul and spirit of a whole people without any distinction of class and education — not simply of a thin layer of privileged persons made sensitive to this particularly sophisticated poetic form ....

Adventure and voyage reached a climax when I was invited to go to Malaysia and work with the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka for half a year, an invitation in acknowledgement of which, with the utmost gratitude, I have been writing this book.

Kuala Lumpur and the Dewan were not the end of the journey, — just as the collection of pantuns available in print are not quite the end of the pantun as a popular, oral and anonymous literary form. Not quite, though nearly. Today, unfortunately, there is something "folkloric" about such radio broadcasts as can be heard only after midnight or on a Sunday afternoon on Radio Malaysia. In fact, the same phenomenon has taken or is taking place in Malaysia as formerly in Europe, for instance: radio, television and cinema have

brought about the end of the pantun in Malay society just as they brought about the end of evening sittings with neighbours during the winter months and other social gatherings in rural France. Even in the remotest areas, in places which are still without electrical supply, people have got transistor radios and even battery-operated TV sets. When they get together, if they do gather at all, it is only to stare silently at the screen, no longer to listen to pantuns or *cerita rakyat*. This is really the end of genuine art forms which had thrived for centuries and were still alive not long ago. These are the very last days of the traditional *seniman* or *pemantun*, of all those who carried in their minds and transmitted to their children or disciples the secular poetic memories of a whole people — a people among whom many a youth, many a man or woman used to know all sorts of stories and pantuns by heart, was able to create his or her own pantuns for the occasion or when feeling the urge to give voice to a strong emotion, to an overwhelming sentiment, like declaring oneself to his or her beloved, in a more or less indirect way.

I had the opportunity, shortly after my arrival, to accompany a team of DBP research workers to some of the farthest rural areas of Hulu Dungun, Terengganu — places which can be reached, ultimately, by Landrover along perilous jungle tracks and then by boat up the river Dungun and some of its tributaries. The story of the trip itself, its various stages and means of communication, the passage from "civilization" to more "primitive" ways of life, from a luxury hotel to the bare floor boards of riverside jungle cabins, the innumerable stop-overs for food, drinks and durians, specially durians, would be interesting enough in themselves to fill several chapters with picturesque details and exhilarating episodes ... but let us keep to the main object of the expedition, which was to collect pantuns and stories from the lips of old men and women before they forget them and die without being able to transmit them to anyone else, as the younger generation, in general, is not really interested.

To me, going upstream in the long thin flat boats — however propelled by noisy modern outboard engines — was like a journey into the past, getting back to the very source of pantuns, to the still comparatively unpolluted spring from which some of the last genuine samples of these traditional Malay poems could be gathered. Actually, the kampungs themselves could not be essentially different from what they had been for centuries: elegant though simple and modest wooden houses on stilts in the midst of luxuriant

orchards and gardens rich with all sorts of fruit-trees: *rambutan, durian*, mangosteen, *duku, nangka*.... But you could see that the children, especially adolescents, had already been influenced by the contact with city life: they had to go to secondary schools in bigger townships where everything is different from what their parents and grand-parents had experienced until recently. Most of their games, interests, conversations are now closely connected with modern town life, although most of them will have to come back to their kampungs after middle school and live there more or less in the old traditional way — but at the same time already living half-way between the old and the new, with a definite inclination towards and an overwhelming longing for the latter and all its lures, at any rate with little taste for their elders' ways of thought and favourite entertainments. They had eyes only for the Toyota Land-Cruiser which had brought us there past the end of the carriageable road along a slippery track after which only longboats could be used if the water level of the streams allowed it, and with the foreigner who had come with the team, surprised as they were to discover that *he* was interested in such antiquated things as pantuns and did not mind sleeping on a thin mat on the unequal floor boards of what had been the village former mosque, just opposite the new one, or having his bath after sundown in the stream that ran softly and swiftly at the foot of the kampung hillock.

The recording of pantuns and stories was done in various places and at different moments, although usually at the end of the day: here for instance, in the local *kedai makan* after dark when all the possible customers, including us, had had their evening meal and drinks, by candle light. The only electric current available was that of the tape-recorder batteries. On the low platform where the shopkeeper — a thin elderly woman who had lost nearly all her teeth — used to prepare food and drinks, pandanus mats were laid, with cushions at one end and a few candlesticks. Another elderly woman seemed to come suddenly out of the dark and sat shyly on the cushions while we prepared and installed our recording devices. The shopkeeper herself came and sat down close to her, whispering to her ear as if to encourage her, to suggest a possible beginning. The cassette recorders were now being tried, the head of our team uttering a few words to test the microphones — place, date, name of the *pemantun* — which he repeated then for good. We waited for the woman to begin, after taking a few pictures of both: flashlights, a few seconds of dazzled

blindness, then the scene was visible again in front of us in the dim candlelight, and I heard, or rather I now know that I heard, then, though I could not understand, mainly because of the peculiar Terengganu accent:

Pucuk pauh belimbing batu,
Sengat sembilang di tapak tangan;
Sungguh jauh negeri satu,
Hilang di mata di hati jangan.

Catfish sting in palm of hand,
Mango shoot, star-fruit for mart;
Sure he's gone to distant land,
Far from the eyes, not from the heart.

then:

Anak ruan tidak terluang,
Benang sutera di dalam buluh;
Hendak buang tidak terbuang,
Sudah mesra di dalam tubuh.

Young murrel fish not emptied yet,
Silken thread in the bamboo;
Want to dismiss, not done yet,
So intimately mixed, too!

and another one, and another one, up to something like eighty quatrains, not in one single delivery but seven or eight at a time with intervals of silence, hesitation, anxious looks towards the other woman who whispered something in her ear, interruptions which were so long sometimes that we had to stop the recorder, wondering whether she had forgotten everything or really knew no more pantuns, and waiting for a sign from her, her chin thrust forward as if to say: « Put your damn contraption on again. »

What struck me chiefly was the voice, that kind of monotonous melody, ascending at the end of the first line and then going down little by little chromatically. The rhythm was definitely "iambic" and "anapaestic": I shall speak about it later on, but already one thing was clear, although I could hardly catch a word, from time to

time, of what she said. The four lines were neatly cut out, quite distinguishable from each other thanks to that rhythm, to the slight pauses in the middle and at the end, as well as to the regular number of rhythmic patterns. I did not suspect it at that time, but from that very first moment I am sure I had caught hold, in my ear, of the "metric system" of the pantun. This of course became clearer a few days later after hearing a few of these recitals and listening to the recordings over and over again. The melody might change, the rhythm remained the same to the point of giving each line a sort of mechanical motion, as if controlled by some clockwork which divided time into regular fractions containing usually two or three, sometimes four syllables. This was to prove highly enlightening when I started thinking about the prosody of pantun lines and the possible rules that governed it.

There was much to be learnt in those kampungs, with these people, much more actually than falls within the scope of the present books, but it will perhaps find its way into another, sooner or later ....

CHAPTER II

From the "Pantoum" à la francaise to the Malay Pantun

It is rather surprising to read such lines as the following on the back cover of a large collection of pantuns published in Malaysia by Malays — I mean the *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu* of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, issued only a few years ago : « Pantun sebagai satu bentuk puisi Melayu tradisional amatlah popular, sehingga bentuk ini diambil oleh Victor Hugo dan penyair-penyair Perancis lain, lalu menamakannya sebagai *Pantoum*. Pengaruh pantun dalam persuratan Perancis amatlah sebati dan mendalam, sehingga bentuk *pantoum* itu dianggap sebagai salah satu bentuk puisi Perancis yang paling sofistikated. » which in English reads: « The pantun as a form of traditional Malay poetry was very popular, insofar as to be taken over by Victor Hugo and other French poets under the name of *Pantoum*. The influence of the pantun on French literature was both deep and lasting, so that this form is regarded as one of the most sophisticated in French poetry. » The author of this note, actually, is not directly responsible for its contents, since he mentions the source of what looks more like an adaptation than a literal quotation of it: C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, Indianapolis, the Odyssey Press, 1975 — where we can read, under the heading *Pantoum*:

« The *pantoum* may consist of an indefinite number of four-line stanzas, but in any case the second and fourth verses of one stanza must reappear as the first and third lines of the following stanza. The

stanzas are quatrains, the rhyme scheme being *abab, abab*.[1] In the final stanza, the first and third lines of the first stanza are repeated in reverse order, the poem thus ending with the same line with which it began.[2] Usually considered as one of the sophisticated French forms though, as a matter of fact, the *Pantoum* was taken over from the Malaysian by Victor Hugo and other French poets. This primitive origin is evident in the monotonous repetition of lines, a monotony possibly derived from the rhythmic beating of the oriental tom-tom. »

The American writer has accumulated assumptions and errors while he ought to have known better than taking for granted assertions which stand so blatantly wide apart from the truth. First of all because, if any pantun in world literature is really worthy of consideration, it is naturally, by right of birth and achievement, as the only original and genuine form of this kind, by far the Malay pantun. Secondly because the error is at least threefold: in giving a description, not of the authentic model itself, but of what certain French poets of the XIXth Century made of it; then in propagating the idea that the so-called "pantoum" may have been « one of the sophisticated French forms » whereas it was only an artificial and superficial imitation of a genuine poetic genre which in itself was never understood at that time, as will be seen in the course of this chapter, and as such cannot be said to have become a popular form of poetry in France;[3] moreover, in speaking of a « primitive origin [...] evident in the monotonous repetition of lines, etc. » which seems to me utterly misapplied and ludicrous in view of the fact that the Malay pantun is anything but "primitive" but, on the contrary, such a perfectly mastered, exquisitely balanced, highly subtle and amazingly terse form of poetry.

It will be interesting, nevertheless, to try and trace the origin and birth of the "pantoum" in XIXth Century French literature. But to begin with, let us consult a few French dictionaries and Encyclopaedias in order to reply to the elementary question: what is a pantun — or rather a "pantoum" or "pantoun"?

The word appears as "pantoun" — which should be the normal transcription according to French phonetics — in Littré's dictionary,

---

[1] Not *abab, abab* ... but *abab, bcbc, cdcd*.

[2] Sheer invention of these French poets, who were perhaps influenced by the image of the snake that bites its tail end?

[3] The total number of "pantoums" represents an infinitely small percentage in the French poetry of the XIXth century.

with the following definition: « Genre de poésie chez les Malais », which is right but not very enlightening! But it did not appear in the 1835 edition of the French Academy *Dictionnaire*, nor in Hatzfeld and Darmesteter's, another reference dictionary of the French language. Only in the *Larousse Encyclopédique* can we read:

> Pantoum ou Pantoun, n, m, (mot malais), Poème à forme fixe, emprunté par les romantiques à la poésie malaise. — Encycl. Le pantoum fut introduit dans notre poésie par V.Hugo (*Orientales*) et Th. Gautier, et repris par Baudelaire (*Harmonie du soir*), Banville, Leconte de Lisle. Il se compose de quatrains à rimes croisées dont le deuxième et quatrième vers fournissent les premier et troisième vers du suivant; le dernier vers de la pièce répète le premier. En outre le poème développe deux thèmes parallèles, l'un dans les deux premiers vers, l'autre dans les deux derniers de chaque quatrain, Exemples du début et de la fin d'un pantoum de Leconte de Lisle:
>
> *Voici des perles de Mascate*
> *Pour ton beau col, ô mon amour!*
> *Un sang frais ruisselle, écarlate,*
> *Sur le pont du blême Giaour.*
>
> *Pour ton beau col, ô mon amour,*
> *Pour ta peau ferme, lisse et brune!*
> *Sur le pont du blême Giaour,*
> *Des yeux morts regardent la lune,*
>
> .....
>
> *Rayon de l'aube, astre du soir,*
> *Dans mon coeur ta lumière éclate!*
> *Le Giaour s'enfonce au flot noir!*
> *Voici des perles de Mascate.*

Or, in English:

> Pantoum or Pantoun, masc. noun (a Malay word). A fixed-form poem, borrowed from Malay poetry by the (French)

Romanticists. — Encycl. The pantun was introduced into our poetry by Victor Hugo (*Orientales*) and Théophile Gautier and taken over by Baudelaire (*Harmonie du Soir*) and Leconte de Lisle. It is composed of quatrains with alternate rhymes, the second and fourth verses of which supply the first and third verses of the following. Moreover, the poem develops two parallel themes, one in the first couplet, the other in the second couplet of each quatrain. The last line of the poem repeats the first, as in this pantoum by Leconte de Lisle:

Here are pearls from Muscat,
For thy fair neck, oh my love!
Fresh scarlet blood is streaming
On the deck of the ghastly Giaour.

For thy fair neck, oh my love,
For thy firm skin, smooth and brown!
On the desk of the ghastly Giaour,
Dead eyes are staring at the moon.

.....

Ray of the dawn, evening star,
Thy light is sparkling in my heart!
The Giaour is sinking into the dark waves!
Here are pearls from Muscat.

Let us now consult one of our best modern dictionaries of everyday use, the "*Petit Robert*". This is what it says — I translate:

« Pantoum (pãtum), masc. noun. (1829, a Malay word). A poem of Malay origin, composed of quatrains with alternate rhymes, in which the second and fourth lines are repeated as the first and third lines of the following stanza. *Harmonie du Soir*, by Baudelaire, is a pantoum. »

which is not a very good example indeed, for two reasons at least: one being that the rhyming scheme of this poem is not *abab* but *abba* and the other, that this is probably one of Baudelaire's most conventional and weakest poems.

All this proves at least one thing: our lexicographers, instead of referring to the source literature for a definition of the pantun (which they preferred to call *pantoum*) derived their own definition from the superficial and approximate adaptation made by our Romanticists and some of their followers from one of the various forms assumed by the Malay pantun, the *pantun berkait*. We can see from what precedes that only the outward form was retained (with the additional repetition of the first line at the end of the poem). But the inner organization of the real pantun, as well as the way it "works" poetically, the real rôle played by its two halves, were either unheeded or ignored, or else misunderstood, as is obvious in the second part of the definition given by Larousse. It is then all the more irritating to see the same imposture propagated all the world over by other authors in the English language, who could have read the works of British connoisseurs of Malay literature like Wilkinson and Winstedt before composing notices like the one quoted at the beginning of this chapter or the following, by L.E. Kastner in his ***History of French Versification*** (but what can we say in this case, since this is not a history of Malay versification?!):

> The Pantoum. This form of verse used by the Malays, *characterized by the repetition of each line*, was popularized in France during the Romantic period.

Popularized! The word is really excessive. Moreover, as René Etiemble remarks,[4] « it is not a Malay structure that was made popular in France, only a cheap sort of bazaar orientalism which was successfully made to pass for Malay poetry. » In another passage of the same article, Etiemble also speaks of "cheap exoticism" and adds : « But the Malay *pantun*, on its part, has not anything exotic about itself : it does not speak of *our* birds, of *our* flowers, of *our* trees. The flowers, the birds, the trees that are named in it are those of over there .... »[5]

Besides, our lexicographers — I mean, our present-day ones, those of the "*Larousse*" or the "*Robert*" — could have consulted with profit some of our scholars in Malayan languages, all the more so as the information was already published, to be found, for instance, in the

[4] René Etiemble, in ***Quelques Essais de Littérature Universelle***, p. 183.
[5] *Ibid.* p. 186.

first volume of the History of Literatures, *L'Histoire des Littératures*, in the "Encyclopédie de la Pléiade". There, our late Jeanne Cuisinier (who wrote, among other Malay studies, about the *wayang kulit* of Kelantan) explains that the most current type of pantun must obey strict rules, the strictest being to be composed of four lines, the last two of which have a clear meaning which the first two must suggest. After quoting two well-known pantuns — those beginning with "*kerengga di dalam buluh*" and "*permata jatuh di dalam rumput*" — she observes that there is sometimes no real analogy of meaning but a simple analogy of sounds, as in the following:

Pinggan tak retak
Nasi tak dingin;
Engkau tak hendak
Kami tak ingin.

No crack in the dish,
Not cold is the rice,
On your side no wish,
No desire on mine.

which is, however brief, far more to the point than any of the preceding definitions (although I think that even here there is more than a simple analogy of sounds, as a crack in love can make desire to get "colder"). Denys Lombard's explanation in the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, which I translate here, is brief and clear:

> « The pantun is a short quatrain rhyming ABAB. The idea is expressed in the third and fourth lines, the first two lines containing, on principle, only an allusion, often sibylline, or even sometimes being chosen only for the sake of euphony. [...] Most of the finest pantuns are love poems. »

Denys Lombard also quotes the "*kerengga di dalam buluh*" pantun, of which he gives a good rhyming translation in regular French octosyllabic verse:

Bambou tout empli de fourmis
Flacon d'eau de rose embaumée
Quand le feu d'amour m'investit
Un seul secours, c'est mon Aimée.

Kerengga di dalam buluh
Serahi berisi air mawar;
Sampai hasrat di dalam tubuh,
Tuan seorang jadi penawar.

Red ants inside a bamboo cane,
Rose-water full a long-necked flask,
When burning desire fills my frame,
From her alone the cure I ask.

and this is about all that was ever written in France about the real Malay pantun, together with Etiemble's chapter already mentioned — with the remarkable exception of Fauconnier's book *Malaisie*, quoted in the first chapter, which seems to have been constantly ignored by French scholars.

Actually, the French Romantic poets who became interested in the so-called "pantoum", least of all Victor Hugo, should not bear the entire blame for their misconception: they were most probably not too well informed, as it seems. Even Hugo himself surely never had access to an original pantun in Malay, or else he would have managed to get or write himself a better French translation. But this is certainly not the case and no indication is given by Hugo of where he may have got, or from whom, what has been termed by Etiemble "the first *Pantoum malais* in our literature". This "pantoum" was quoted by the French poet in his final *Notes* to *Les Orientales*, his third poetical work published in 1829 and seems to have been attributed to him rather than considered as a translation — even by Etiemble in his aforesaid article of 1981. This is how the poem reads in French:

Les papillons jouent alentour sur leurs ailes;
Ils volent vers la mer, près de la chaine des rochers.
Mon coeur s'est senti malade dans ma poitrine,
Depuis mes premiers jours jusqu'à l'heure présente.

Ils volent vers la mer, pres de la chaine des rochers ...
Le vautour dirige son essor vers Bandam,
Depuis mes premiers jours jusqu'à l'heure présente,
J'ai admiré bien des jeunes gens.

Le vautour dirige son essor vers Bandam ...
Et laisse tomber de ses plumes à Patani.
J'ai admiré bien des jeunes gens;
Mais nul n'est à comparer à l'objet de mon choix.

Il laisse tomber de ses plumes à Patani ...
Voici deux jeunes pigeons!
Aucun jeune homme ne se peut comparer à celui de mon
[choix,
Habile comme il l'est à toucher le coeur.

For the edification of the reader who has no or little knowledge of French, I shall try and translate these four stanzas as literally as I can:

The butterflies are flying about on their wings;
They fly towards the sea, close to the chain of rocks.
My heart has been feeling sick in my bosom,
Ever since my first days to the present hour.

They fly towards the sea, close to the chain of rocks ...
The vulture directs its flight towards Bandam.
Ever since my first days to the present hour,
Many a youth have I admired.

The vulture directs its flight towards Bandam ...
And lets some of its feathers fall on Patani.
Many a youth have I admired,
But none to be compared with the one I have chosen.

It lets some of its feather fall on Patani ...
Here are two (sic) young pigeons!
No youth is to be compared with the one I have
[chosen,
Clever as he is to touch the heart.

Let it be noted at this point that I am following closely the various stages of my research and discovery of the Malay pantun which, I suspected, was Victor Hugo's model. Thus, the above English translation was written by me even before I could find the

original of Hugo's "pantoum" and its source. For I was convinced that the poem quoted in the "Notes" had not been composed by him. Obviously, it could be nothing else than a translation. There were good reasons for that, I think. First of all, if it had been Hugo's creation, the verses would have been different, he would have instinctively chosen a regular metre — probably the alexandrine in this case, the twelve-syllable verse which was so familiar to him, who wrote thousands of them — and supplied the appropriate set of rhymes. And in any case the style would have been different. To me, it is so awkward that I have always been sure that the text was handed over to him as such, without any possibility for him to compare it with its source and improve it. The only thing Hugo could do was to place it in his final notes as a document illustrating a peculiar type of oriental poetry.

Reading these four stanzas again and translating them when I started writing this chapter, they sounded quite differently to my inner ear from the way they had done before. In the meantime indeed, I had been reading several collections of Malay pantuns — about three thousand as a whole — and in spite of the awkwardness of expression, there could be no doubt about the Malay origin of the poem. But chiefly I was now sure I had already encountered a few elements of Hugo's "pantoum" here or there. There was something decidedly familiar about such phrases as the vulture flying to Bandam — or rather Bandan — or its feathers falling on Patani. So that the next idea was to look for a pantun with a first line beginning with "burung" and ending with "Bandan", if not for a second line ending with "Patani".

In fact, it did not take a long time for me to go through the "Indeks Baris Pertama" at the end of the *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu* published by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Malaysia and to find out what I was looking for, although there was no trace in it of any "burung nasar terbang ke Bandan". Once begun, the quest could not be abandoned, and I tried to figure out what the very first line of the poem could be in Malay. It would most likely begin with "kupu-kupu" ... and there it was, a line in the Index read "*Kupu-kupu terbang melintang*", that of a quatrain which seemed to correspond to the first stanza of the poem quoted by Hugo. Its origin, it said, was Wilkinson and Winstedt's collection, *Pantun Melayu*, 1961, page 30. And there, unmistakably, was the *pantun berkait* quoted by Victor Hugo in 1829:

Kupu-kupu terbang melintang,
Terbang di laut di hujung karang;
Hati di dalam menaruh bimbang
Dari dahulu sampai sekarang.

Terbang di laut di hujung karang,
Burung nasar terbang ke Bandan;
Dari dahulu sampai sekarang,
Banyak muda sudah kupandang.

Burung nasar terbang ke Bandan,
Bulunya lagi jatuh ke Patani;
Banyak muda sudah kupandang,
Tiada sama mudaku ini.

Bulunya jatuh ke Patani,
Dua puluh anak merpati;
Tiada sama mudaku ini,
Sungguh pandai memujuk hati.

Usually, I am not very fond of *pantun berkait*, mainly because they tend to become so to speak mechanical. The longer they grow, the farther astray from the original idea in the first quatrain. But this one is nearly perfect to my taste, not only well-built and formally beautiful, but touching. And it develops one main idea, the evolution towards true love, step by step, in the heart of the speaker.

In the rather faulty and shapeless version found in Hugo's "Notes" the speaker — most unexpectedly, considering the way a girl, especially a Malay girl, is supposed to behave, — is a woman who seems to have been a flirt for a good part of her life, interested in many young men one after another until she found the real one. But this was surely a wrong interpretation, whoever was responsible for it, and I would rather have it this way, in agreement with Winstedt's comment, who just says "*Unique among girls*": a man was like a butterfly for many years, flying from flower to flower, his heart hesitating all the time; but little by little this man's gaze has become as keen as the eyesight of a vulture, who flies high and can see from afar. He may have found love in Patani — lost some of his feathers there — where he could single out the unique one among many fair girls — twenty doves flying about; there is now no other girl like his, she is the mistress of his heart.

Here is my own French version of this poem:

Le papillon mène sa danse
Sur la mer au bout du récif;
Le coeur au fond de moi balance,
Comme hier aujourd'hui rétif.

Sur la mer au bout du récif,
Le vautour vole vers Bandan;
Comme hier aujourd'hui rétif,
J'ai vu plus d'une belle enfant.

Le vautour vole vers Bandan,
Sur Patani tombent ses plumes;
J'ai vu plus d'une belle enfant
Mais comme mon amour, aucune.

Sur Patani tombent ses plumes,
Vingt colombes volent en choeur;
Mais comme mon amour, aucune
N'est habile à flatter le coeur.

Thus, after more than 150 years, we can be sure that Victor Hugo was apprised of a real Malay pantun, albeit in the form of an imperfect translation. But by whom, or by means of what book or document? My research and work regarding this particular aspect of the literary fortune of the Malay pantun in France had reached this point when it occurred to me that if the four quatrains had come to Victor Hugo's knowledge, they must have been published somewhere ***before***, since the pantuns edited by Wilkinson and Winstedt were collected only in the XXth Century — unless some French voyager had put them down in his note-book, had he chanced upon them, which seems quite improbable as in those days, explorers and seafarers were facing dangerous issues and had urgent tasks to fulfil, they must have thought, which left little place for poetry.

Actually, looking for explanations regarding the origin of these quatrains, I found a note, a small one at the very last page of Wilkinson and Winstedt's anthology, where the authors gave reference of their source together with their own English version of the poem: « From Marsden's *Grammar* p. 208. » This was the key to the

mystery, in that *Grammar of the Malayan Language* by William Marsden, who had begun his research in the 1770's before publishing his work in London in 1812. The Library in Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka possesses an original copy of it, but the book is also *available as reprint.*[6] *It gives the full text of the four quatrains in* Jawi script — as an example of the pantun or "Proverbial sonnet" — followed by Marsden's rather awkward translation into English, Hugo's version being a word by word rendering of it in French.

Did Victor Hugo have direct access to Marsden's *Grammar* or even to a copy of his translation ? This seems to be very unlikely as, had the poet translated it himself from the English version, he would surely have made a better job of it, if not in the interpretation (which was not his), at least in the writing. Moreover, he would certainly have mentioned his source. So that I am inclined to believe that somebody — perhaps his friend Ernest Fouinet, thanks to whom he obtained knowledge of many a sample of Oriental poetry — gave him the French version alone, which Hugo of course could not alter.

It would not be worth while quoting Marsden's translation, were it not that it enables us to see how closely it was followed by the author — whoever he was — of the French version. Here it is, as it can be found in his *Grammar*, preceded by the original pantuns in Jawi script:

كوفو٢ تريغ ملنتغ
هات ددالم مناره بمبغ

تريغ دلاوت دهوجغ كارغ
در دهول سمڤي سكارغ

تريغ دلاوت دهوجغ كارغ
در دهول سمڤي سكارغ

بورغ نسور تريغ كبندن
باڤق مود سده كڤندغ

بورغ نسور تريغ كبندن
باڤق مود سده كڤندغ

بولوڠ لاكت جاته كڤتاني
تياد سام مداك اين

بولوڠ جاته كڤتاني
تياد سام مداك اين

دو ڤوله انق مرڤات
سغكه ڤندي ممبوجق هات

[6]Marsden's *Grammar and Dictionary*, see Bibliography.

"Butterflies sport on the wing around,
They fly to the sea by the reef of rocks.
My heart has felt uneasy in my breast,
From former days to the present hour.

They fly to the sea by the reef of rocks.
The vulture wings its flight to Bandan.
From former days to the present hour,
Many youths have I admired.

The vulture wings its flight to Bandan,
Dropping its feathers at Patani.
Many youths have I admired,
But none to compare with my present choice.

His feathers he let fall at Patani.
A score of young pigeons.
No youth can compare with my present choice,
Skilled as he is to touch the heart."

Similarly, it would be useless to point out Marsden's pseudo-poetic phrases such as "sport on the wing" or "wings its flight" or the complicated rendering of "*tiada sama mudaku ini*" as "no youth can compare with my present choice" if they were not responsible for the unnatural, embarrassed expressions of the French version which is supposed to be at the origin of that peculiar literary genre, the "pantoum".

Marsden's version makes it also quite clear that he is responsible for the interpretation of "muda" as "young men" — not girls or women — and "mudaku" as "the young man I love", reversing the meaning of the poem in spite of the evident connotations of images like "kupu-kupu", "burong nasar", etc. in connection with a man speaking of the numerous girls he was in love with before he found the one he really loves. Wilkinson and Winstedt, who hardly ever give any translation in their collection, provide their own version of this particular string of pantuns, presumably in contradistinction to Marsden's. I will quote the first and third stanzas only which show, respectively, how complicated and wordy or, conversely, simple enough at times a translation can be:

Butterflies flutter and flit o'er the bay
Flit and alight on rocks by the sea;
Long, long, yes and today
Fluttering too is the heart of me

.....

To Bandan the vultures fly,
In Patani their feathers fall,
On many a lass have I cast an eye,
Never like this a lass of them all ...

But however stilted in its own way this other English version may appear to be, it is more in keeping with the spirit of the original and the connection, for instance, between the "fluttering" of the heart and that of the butterflies is clearly perceived — perhaps all too clearly revealed. We may wonder why the authors thought it necessary to speak of butterflies or vultures while one of each was enough and nothing in the Malay text advocated a plural, even with "kupu-kupu" which is identical in the singular. We can also notice that "alight on rocks by the sea" is inexact and "long, long, yes and today" a curious way of rendering "dari dahulu sampai sekarang" ... But at least, "muda", "mudaku" are seen as "girls", "my girl", not as boys.

To close this chapter, and chiefly to put a legend to an end, let us go through a rapid survey of the "pantoum" as a "sophisticated" form of XIXth Century French poetry.

It is now clear that Hugo did not write any "pantoum" himself, but was the first and only poet of that time to quote a genuine one, although in a poor translation. We have seen that this translation was certainly not his for evident stylistic reasons, but that anyhow, should he have done it himself, it could have been only from Marsden's English version which it follows very closely. Moreover, this "first pantoum in French literature" did not give any idea of the rhyming system of a Malay pantun, only of the repetition of lines from quatrain to quatrain, which is not a characteristic feature of the pantun, but a mere possible use of it called *pantun berkait*. So that we are entitled to ask ourselves whether Hugo was really the "initiator" or "introducer" of the genre. As far as I can say, there is a "missing link" somewhere. For another question arises: what was the first French pantoum and when did it appear, how long after the publication of *Les Orientales*?

The first poem to be given by its author as a "pantoum" was Théophile Gautier's *Les Papillons* in 1838, nearly ten years later. Here it is:

Les papillons (*pantoum*)

Les papillons couleur de neige
Volent par essaims sur la mer;
Beaux papillons blancs, quand pourrai-je
Prendre le bleu chemin de l'air?

Savez-vous, ô belle des belles,
Ma bayadère aux yeux de jais,
S'ils me pouvaient prêter leurs ailes,
Dites, savez-vous où j'irais?

Sans prendre un seul baiser aux roses
A travers vallons et forêts,
J'irais à vos lèvres mi-closes,
Fleur de mon âme, et j'y mourrais.

What was it that made Gautier call this poem a "pantoum"? Of course, the rhyming scheme is *abab* ... but this was perhaps sheer hazard, as this sort of rhymed quatrain had been used by French poets ever since the middle Ages! There is no repetition of lines as in the "pantun berkait" nor anything in these stanzas bearing any resemblance with a Malay pantun. The only thing that we can perceive is the use of three words present in the one quoted by Hugo: *papillons* (butterflies), *volent* (are flying) and *mer* (sea). This, obviously, does not make a "pantoum", still less a pantun!

The next poem in our literature to be considered as a "pantoum" — although not styled so by its author — did not appear until 1857, i.e. nearly thirty years after *Les Orientales*. It was Baudelaire's *Harmonie du Soir*, rhyming *abba*, with only one feature in common with a pantun : the second and fourth line of a stanza become the first and third of the next, and that is all. Moreover, it is far from ranking among Baudelaire's highest achievements ....

Let us make a pause here and think a while : thirty years after Hugo's note in *Les Orientales* — thirty years! — there was no such thing in French poetry as a form more or less similar to the Malay

pantun, still less a mode of the "pantoum", whatever a "pantoum" might have been: which would tend to prove that Hugo's voluntary or involuntary influence in this respect amounted to nil, or almost nothing. All the more so as it took another twenty years or so for another French poet to produce "pantoums".

This poet was Théodore de Banville, a sort of virtuoso who liked to use the fixed forms of French mediaeval poetry, ballads and rondels, an acrobat of the verse and a champion of the rhyme who was far from devoid of real poetic sensitivity. The "pantoums" he wrote were composed about 1875 and can be said to represent the nearest approach in French poetry to the form and spirit of the Malay pantun, although we can easily perceive in these quatrains the absence of rupture in meaning between their couplets. Here are the first two stanzas and the last of one of them:

Sur les bords de ce flot céleste,
Mille oiseaux chantent querelleurs.
Mon enfant, seul bien qui me reste,
Dors sous ces branches d'arbre en fleurs.

Mille oiseaux chantent querelleurs,
Sur la rivière un cygne glisse,
Dors sous ces branches d'arbre en fleurs,
Ô toi, ma joie et mon délice ....

.....

Je vois des topazes de feu,
Qui chassent tout songe funeste,
Ferme tes yeux de lotus bleu,
Sur les bords de ce flot céleste.

In fact, every first couplet in this poem is directly and narrowly connected with the second, and there is continuity of concept all through it. Nothing can prevent us from seeing « the thousand birds who sing on the banks of the azure stream » — on which, in the second stanza, « a swan is gliding » — in « those blossoming branches of trees under which the child is sleeping » , while in the last stanza the continuity is total: « I can see fiery gems chasing away every ominous dream. Close your eyes of lotus blue, on

the banks of the azure stream. » Such an example clearly shows the fundamental difference between the so-called "pantoum" and a genuine *pantun berkait*, where the apparent (or real) disconnection of *pembayang* and *maksud* always remains as perceptible as in the normal pantun. In fact, this "disconnection" was ignored or misunderstood and, in the best cases, mistaken for the necessity to develop two parallel themes in the poem, one in the first couplet and one in the second of each stanza, as can be observed in the following "Pantoun malais", by Leconte de Lisle (1884) where the second couplet of each stanza, if such a poem had anything in common with a Malay pantun, would be better placed as the first:

Le hinné fleuri teint tes ongles roses,
Tes chevilles d'ambre ont des grelots d'or.
J'entends miauler, dans les nuits moroses,
Le Seigneur rayé, le Roi de Timor.

Tes chevilles d'ambre ont des grelots d'or,
Ta bouche a le goût du miel vert des ruches.
Le Seigneur rayé, le Roi de Timor,
Le voilà qui rôde et tend ses embûches.

.....

Ma lame de cuivre à mon poing flamboie;
Nul n'aura l'amour qui m'était si cher.
Le Royal chasseur a saisi sa proie,
Dix griffes d'acier lui mordent la chair,

Nul n'aura l'amour qui m'était si cher,
Meurs. Un long baiser sur tes lèvres closes.
Dix griffes d'acier lui mordent la chair,
Le hinné fleuri teint tes ongles roses.[7]

[7]Thanks to Mlle M. Jourgetoux who was his lecturer in Jakarta (Fakulti Sastera Universiti Indonesia), I obtained knowlege, in December 1986, of a memoir written by one of her students, Encik Sjahril Nursal, in 1972: "Le pantun malais et son influence sur la poésie francaise du XIXe siècle", from which I have taken most of the quotations of French "pantoums" (from Gautier to Ghil) which I have added to this chapter. This Indonesian student, who must be today a Professor of French somewhere in Indonesia, I imagine, had found the Malay text of Hugo's pantun, but not its original publication and translation in Marsden's *Grammar* (see Bibliography).

The first theme is that of a young man who kills his beloved because she was not faithful to him, while the second is that of a tiger catching its prey, a deer. Of course, the distinction of the two themes is but apparent as they have been cleverly linked and intertwined: the girl and the deer are one victim, the girl's treason can be read in the eyes of the tiger and the latter's cruelty goes into the heart of the young man. Some people may appreciate the formal quality of these verses, but they have hardly anything in common with the Malay pantun.

In the same year 1884, another French poet, Verlaine, wrote a would-be pantun, which he called "Pantoum négligé" – *négligé* because he neglected the "rules": neither the repetitions of lines nor the rhyming scheme are "regular", and the tone of the whole piece is deliberately farcical. In fact, this was sheer mockery on Verlaine's part, who wanted to ridicule the craze of his contemporary Leconte de Lisle for the genre, to him utterly artificial.

Verlaine's humorous lesson did not prevent a belated Symbolist and second-rate poet, René Ghil (1862-1925), from devoting a whole book to what he called "Le Pantoun des Pantouns" (1902), a long poem of 70 pages and 1100 lines divided into 14 songs. René Ghil even affirms in his preface that it « can be considered as the only great French exotic poem » and that « its realization was such that when it appeared in Batavia the Europeans residing in the island were persuaded that the author had lived in the East Indies, whereas he had never left France..." Useless to say that it has very little to do with what had so far been published in France under the name of *pantoum* or *pantoun*, still less with the Malay *pantun*, in spite of its being lavishly interspersed with "Javanese" words. It is supposed to have been inspired by the cosmopolitan character of the 1900 Universal Exhibition in Paris, and to reveal (or to conceal) a "cosmic ambition". A pretentious unreadable rhapsody which is not even worth quoting; its style is characterized by an excess of images, with a view to suggest an impression of strange paradisiac beauty. As for the so-called Javanese words destined to create an atmosphere of intense exoticism, they are for the most part Malay words, with a mixture of Javanese, Sundanese and even Dutch vocabulary, curiously transcribed in "Rumi" script.

The same René Ghil also published "L'Odeur d'Ilang-ilang", « a poem written directly in Javanese » — of which he pretended to have a perfect knowledge — « and translated into French » by him!

Let us quote it as a conclusion to this summary of a rather confusing love story between some French poets and what they believed to be the Malay pantun:[8]

BAOU ILANG-ILANG ...

Baou ilang-ilang soudah-ilang
Saïa soudah mentioum sampé mati
Dekat pelipis saïa iang tenang
pelipis-nia Nona tourout hati

Saïa soudah mentioum sampé mati
Douka dari kasih niang ta kata
Pelipis-nia Nona tourout hati
dengan douwa niawa mendedek-lah

Douka dari kasih niang ta kata
sepaïa sebalou diaoh dekat
Dengan douwa niawa mendedek-lah
dahi Nona dari-mana niat

Sepaïa sebalou diaoh dekat
pelipis-nia Nona tourout hati
Dahi-Nona dari-mana niat
saïa soudah mentioum sampé mati ...

[8] See also "Pages d'Exotisme I" in ARCHIPEL 1, Paris 1971 (see Bibliography), where this poem is quoted.

CHAPTER III

The Pantun as an Original Achievement in World Literature

Whoever sets to write about the Malay pantun nowadays will feel it rather difficult to find something original to say when trying to give a definition of the genre, considering all that has been written and published about it so far. However repetitive the larger part of that literature may appear, every author has contributed a valuable piece of research and information, an enlightening view, an opinion, an assessment or a hypothesis which can still be worth consideration, having been neither infirmed nor confirmed until now for lack of new historical elements, corroborating documents whose discovery, according to specialists, seems to be highly improbable.

We shall see in this chapter and in some of the following ones, that if it is easy to define the form itself of the pantun and its several varieties, things become more difficult when we want to explain how a pantun "works", poetically speaking, or when we look for the origin of the genre as well as for that of the word itself, or even simply try to classify pantuns.

The way a pantun works, for instance, has given rise to a controversy which has never been settled, as will be examined in a special chapter. Concerning the prosody, although a serious study has been carried out and satisfactory rules established, it seems to me that a supplementary effort has to be made to reach an even more precise and comprehensive model of the line structure, of the word and syllable numbers.

In this chapter, I shall try to be as brief as possible in going through technicalities such as "number of lines" and "rhyming

scheme" which determine the outward shape of a pantun together with the number of words and syllables per line.

A pantun is usually a quatrain rhyming *abab*, very often with additional internal rhymes or assonances *cdcd* immediately before the *caesura* which occurs after the second word or "word cluster" of each verse. A line, roughly speaking, usually contains four di- or trisyllabic words with the possible addition of monosyllabic words to groups of two, the total number of syllables varying from seven or eight as a minimum to a maximum of eleven or twelve – but this particular aspect of the form will be analysed in one of the following chapters.

Here is a well-known pantun, with final and internal rhymes:

Layang-layang menyambar buih,
Tetak seruju buang selupat,
Kasih sayang mencari boleh,
Yang setuju jarang mendapat.

The swallows swoop and skim the main,
Sea-holly slash, the bran discard,
'Love' we can get with not much pain,
But unison to find is hard.

Such a quatrain, moreover, shows another internal rhyme, *buang* and *jarang*, on the second syllable of the third word in the second and fourth lines. There can be a few pantuns where each word in the first line rhymes with each word in the third and each in the second line with its counterpart in the fourth. But there are also many of them which are entirely devoid of internal rhymes, however famous they may be, like, for instance:

Permata jatuh di dalam rumput,
Jatuh di rumput bergilang-gilang.
Kasih umpama embun di rumput,
Datang matahari nescaya hilang.

Gems may fall amid the grass,
Yet keep glittering in the sun.
Love's like dew on morning grass,
Bound to vanish with the sun.

Such a well-known pantun is far from being an example of formal perfection: the word "rumput", grass, occurs three times, twice for the rhyme; moreover, the lines of the second couplet are not quite "regular", especially in some versions of the same pantun ....[1]

Some pantuns, however, are composed of two lines only, rhyming *aa*, like the one quoted by Jeanne Cuisinier, mentioned in chapter II, which should in fact read:

Pinggan tak retak, nasi tak dingin;
Engkau tak hendak, kami tak ingin.

No crack in the dish, not cold is the rice,
On your side no wish, no desire on mine.

Some pantuns, on the other hand, may have more than four lines: six for instance, rhyming *abcabc*; eight, rhyming *abcdabcd*, and so on up to sixteen lines, rhyming *abcdefgh/abcdefgh*!

The main defect — or drawback, in truth — of the two-line pantun (some authors would say "the so-called two line pantun,"[2] contesting the appellation) lies in its excessive brevity which, together with the immediate repetition of sounds — like a succession of inner rhymes — tends to convey an impression of epigrammatic, satiric dryness, as can clearly be seen or heard in the example above; while longer pantuns, on the contrary, owing to their rhyming scheme, lose a great deal in sound magic and efficiency on account of the ever-widening gap between two rhyming lines, the distance between them being filled with the various differing sounds of the other lines, so that there is no echo left in us of the final rhyme, even less of the inner ones, when we reach the corresponding second line of a pair:

Rotan sepatah dua patah,
Tarik kerakap batang padi,

---

[1] Hamilton's Malay version of this pantun has an "irregular" third line (see Chapter VI for the "rules"): "*Kasih umpama embun di hujung rumput*", where there is one word too many.

[2] See Mohd. Taib Osman, ***Bunga Rampai : Aspects of Malay Culture***, "Classical Malay Literature : A Brief Survey", p. 34 : « An example of this "simple form", which has been erroneously referred to as a "two-line pantun" by Winstedt, is to be seen in the following : *pinggan tak retak, nasi tak dingin etc.* » and, p.35 : « The so-called *two-line pantun* .... »

Dibawa sultan dari Judah,
Padi yang jangan digempakan,
Kalau gempa antara gugur,
Bila gugur masuk perigi,
Di situ tanamkan pula;

Tuan di Mekah di Madinah.
Naik akhirat batu haji,
Tegak berdiri Rasulullah,
Kami yang jangan dilupakan,
Kalau lupa antara tidur,
Dalam tidur menjadi mimpi,
Jika terbangun diingat pula.[3]

One piece, two pieces of rattan,
Pull the rice-stalk with the weed,
Brought by a sultan of Judah,
The rice which must not be shaken,
If this happens while unripe,
When ripe you go into the well
Where you will plant it again.

Lord of Mecca and Medinah,
On the eternal sacred stone,
Upright stands the Prophet,
Whom we should never forget,
If you forget while asleep,
In sleep will come as a dream,
And 'wake to memory again.

The "drawback" in this case can be summarized in one phrase: the longer the pantun, the weaker the effect.

In fact, it is easy to realize that the four-line pantun is the best-balanced in every respect, which is very likely the reason why it is by far the most widely used, the most popular and numerous, the pantun *par excellence*. In other words, the best form of pantun is the four-

[3] *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu*, DBP 1983, Pengenalan, p. 14. Strangely enough, this fourteen-line pantun sounds very much like a 'mantera' (see Chapter VIII for magic).

verse pantun and, when hearing the word *pantun*,[4] it is the characteristic *quatrain* that immediately comes to mind.

Although the rhyming scheme of the pantun is supposed to be *abab*, some authors have quoted examples of quatrains rhyming *aaaa*, like a *syair* stanza. Prof. Mohd Taib Osman says, for instance: « Ada juga pantun yang rima akhirnya mempunyai sama bunyi ..., misalnya:

Kedondong batang sumpitan,
Batang padi sahaya lurutkan,
Tujuh gunung sembilan lautan,
Kalau tak mati saya turutkan. »

A hog-plum tree and a blow-pipe,
I stripped a rice-stalk from its grain.
Mountains seven and oceans nine,
If not dead I'll do it again.

adding, which is quite true indeed : « Olahan ini tidak begitu indah. »[5]

Overbeck, among others, passed a similar remark, quoting several pantuns apparently rhyming like a *syair* stanza. But such examples are few, and most of them not really convincing. In the first instance, it is true that the final sound is "an", but we can contend that the rhymes are "tan" for the first and third lines, and "urutkan" for the other two so that the rhyming scheme is still *abab*. The first and second quatrains of the *pantun berkait* quoted in Chapter II, as well as the fourth, are also interesting samples of the same apparent exception: "melintang" rhymes with "bimbang" (a) and "karang" with "sekarang" (b); we even have "kupandang" as a rhyme to "Bandan" and, it seems, four rhymes in "i" in the last stanza: but here again the real rhymes are "ni/ni" (a) "ati/ati" (b). Even another quatrain quoted by Prof. Mohd Taib Osman offers two different pairs of rhymes although both in "i": one is simple "i", with

[4] If not otherwise specified, it is the quatrain I mean when I use the word *pantun*. « The *pantun* in its simplest form is a single quatrain complete in itself. » (Winstedt, *Class. Malay Lit.* p. 204). The same idea was expressed by Prof. van Ophuysen (see Note 20 below).

[5] Mohd. Taib Osman, *Warisan Puisi Melayu*. DBP 1986, p. 2. In English : « There are also pantuns whose final rhyme is the same for the four lines... for instance : » and then: « This way of doing is not so beautiful. »

"tampi/nanti" while the other is "adi", with "padi/jadi". It is not frequent to find a pantun in which there is not at least one element of differentiation. In other words, in a great majority of cases, pantuns obey the rule of the *abab* rhyme system. It is interesting to note that some of these quatrains developing one continuous concept all along the four lines can hardly be called pantuns and look much more like *selokas*. Here is, for instance, among others to be found in Wilkinson and Winstedt's *Pantun Melayu*,[6] one about "a man with a cold":

Orang selesema sakit berhingus,
Lubang hidung rasa terkambus;
Ibarat seperti telur kemungkus,
Benci nak pandang rasa cemus.

A man with a cold suffers like a horse
As if his nose with muck was thick;
Like an addled egg he looks, of course
You hate to see him, as he makes you sick.

All this is of the utmost importance for a genre which has been specifically oral for centuries, even though a few pantuns, from time to time, happened to be written down or even printed. It makes them easier to memorize, together with the rhythm, the internal rhymes and the other parallel repetitions of sounds or even, in some cases, of syntactical or idiomatic structures, as we shall see.

R.J. Wilkinson, quoted by R.O. Winstedt, has written that « the sound of the whole of the first line must suggest the sound of the whole of the third and the sound of the whole of the second suggest the whole of the fourth ».[7] Strangely enough, however, « as an illustration of these principles he took the verse:

Permata jatuh di rumput,
Jatuh di rumput gilang;
Kaseh umpama embun di hujung rumput,
Datang matahari hilang. »[8]

[6] *Pantun Melayu*, MPH Ltd Singapura 1961, p. 133, N°933. Several examples of this kind of "pantuns" can be found in this collection.
[7] *Ibid.* Postface, pp. 183-184.
[8] *Ibid.* p. 184.

which is far from being a model in many respects as regards form and sound pattern, not to speak of the irregularity of the lines. Actually, his own rendering of it in English is certainly more in conformity with his own theory than the pantun proposed of which, by the way, we have already encountered as much better version:

I lose a pearl, amid the grass,
It keeps its hue, though low it lies;
I love a girl, but love will pass,
A pearl of dew that slowly dies.[9]

Perfection of form is a matter of appreciation which may vary considerably from one author to the other. For Prof. van Ophuysen, for instance, « sebuah pantun dipandang orang Melayu bagus kalau beberapa perkataan daripada sebuah baris bersajak dengan perkataan daripada sebuah baris yang menjadi pasangannya. Dalam pantun-pantun yang indah-indah, boleh dikatakan segala perkataan pada baris yang ketiga bersajak dengan segala perkataan pada baris yang pertama. Begitu juga halnya baris keempat dan baris yang kedua. » And he gives the example of the following quatrain (a Minangkabau pantun, in fact, or at least with Minangkabau words in it):

Ranggung lantaikanlah di bamban,
Padi dan banto punyo buah,
Tanggung rasaikanlah di badan,
Hati dan mato punyo ulah.

which, he says, « digemari benar oleh orang Melayu. »[10]

But there is always something excessive in this kind of examples. Such pantuns are indeed extremely rare, not typical at all, not even without a flaw since the first and third lines have no caesura, the middle of each being occupied by a four-syllable word!

[9] *Ibid.* p. 184.

[10] ***Pantun Melayu.*** **Balai Pustaka, Jakarta 1984, "Permulaan Kata". p. 19. In English : « A pantun is considered good by Malays if several words in one of the lines (of the first couplet) rhyme with words in the corresponding line of the second. In very beautiful pantuns, you can say that all the words in the third line rhyme with all those in the first, and so is it with the second and fourth lines. » This, he adds, « Malays are really fond of. »**

For Alias Yunos,[11] some of the best-known pantuns are not necessarily perfect in form. He quotes the following one:

Pisang emas dibawa belayar,
Masak sebiji di atas peti;
Hutang emas boleh dibayar,
Hutang budi dibawa mati.

With dates of gold we sail away,
A ripe one on a chest we save.
Our debts of gold we can repay,
A debt of heart we take to the grave.

and gives as a defect the repetition of "emas" in line one and three, proposing as "better" another version of the same pantun in which "pisang emas" is replaced by "buah emas" and the second line by "Dimakan sebiji di Tanjung Jati". But one could object that there still remain two other repetitions in the pantun, those of "dibawa" and "hutang"... Then what could be said of pantuns like the following? Can they be put aside as "bad" pantuns?

Apa guna pasang pelita
Jika tidak dengan sumbunya?
Apa guna bermain mata
Kalau tidak dengan sungguhnya?

---

[11] Alias Yunos, *Pantun Melayu Sastera Ra'ayat*, Penerbitan Federal Berhad 1966, p. 13 "Pantun Termasyhur dan Pantun Indah") : « Ada setengah-setengah ahli bahasa mengatakan bahawa pantun 'pisang emas' ini merupakan pantun termasyhur tetapi tidak termasuk ke dalam golongan pantun-pantun yang indah kerana perkataan 'emas' di dalam kerat pertama pembayang itu diulangi di dalam kerat maksud 'hutang emas' » : « half of our language experts say that the 'pisang emas' pantun is a famous one, but that it cannot be included into the category of beautiful pantuns because the word 'emas' contained in the first line of the "pembayang" is repeated in the "maksud" as 'hutang emas'.

« Untuk menjaga keindahan bahasa di dalam tiap-tiap rangkap pantun supaya menjadi pantun yang indah, banyak peminat pantun bersetuju menghapuskan ulangan sesuatu perkataan yang ada di dalam kerat-kerat pembayang, di dalam kerat-kerat maksud : "Buah nanas etc ..."» : « In order to preserved the beauty of the language for every pantun stanza to be a beautiful one, numerous admirers agree on eliminating the repetition of a word of the *pembayang* in the *maksud* .... »

In my translations, whether English or French, of the "pisang emas" pantun, I have replaced 'bananas' (pisang) with 'dates'. The original word sounds ludicrous in the context, whereas 'dates' is more akin to 'debts' in the two target languages, both in sound and connotations.

Why attempt to light a lamp
If the lamp has not a wick?
Why look at me like a vamp
If it's only for a trick?

Apa kena padiku ini,
Sini sangkut, sana pun goyang?
Apa kena hatiku ini,
Sini sangkut, sana pun sayang?

What has struck this rice of mine,
Here entwined and there all waving?
What has struck this heart of mine,
Here entangled, there all raving?

Kalau padi kata padi
Tidak saya tertampi-tampi.
Kalau jadi, kata jadi,
Tidak saya ternanti-nanti.[12]

If it's paddy you want, say it!
Do not let me winnow in pain.
If it's me you want, say it!
Do not let me wait in vain.

Very few changes occur in these pantuns between the first and second couplets, parallel structures are developed, the words are identical or else very similar in sound. In the second example, the only changes are those of "padi" into "hati" and "goyang" into "sayang" and in the third, of "padi" into "jadi" and "tampi" into "nanti", but these, of course, make all the difference.

This is essential because the analogies in sound and rhyme between the corresponding parts of both couplets — which constitute the first main feature of a pantun — go along with the second feature which is, as Wilkinson expressed it in the same passage as above, that « the first pair of lines should represent a poetic thought with its

[12] In Hamilton's *Malay Pantuns*. N°23, 76 and 31 respectively. See also N°69 ("*Apa guna berkain batik*").

beauty veiled, while the second pair should give the same thought in all its unveiled beauty. »[13]

The phrase is perhaps more poetically true than really accurate, but examplified in an exceptional manner in the three pantuns I have just quoted. Their first couplet really looks like a mirror proffered to the second, like a slightly blurred or altered reflection of it. They differ by a few letters only but, although these merely entail a slight change of words, the images or ideas therein stand in sufficient contrast to create something more than a simple parallel in sound: a real implicit metaphor.

The "mirror effect" between the two halves is, I think, aptly expressed by the Malay terms commonly used for them — the "message" carried by the second couplet being called "maksud", i.e. the purpose, the intention, the meaning of the pantun, while the first two lines, which are supposed to mirror the "maksud", have been called "pembayang maksud" or, shortly, "pembayang" i.e. that which reflects, "bayang" being both a shadow and a reflection, or even an illusion, a mirror and a mirage, so to speak.

Thus the rôle of the "pembayang" can be said to be at the same time to obscure and to enlighten, to veil and to reveal, to hide and to evoke « the message conveyed in the last two lines. »[14] In most pantuns, of course, the sound analogies are far from being so close as in the examples above, but the final rhyme scheme is a must and the general system remains the same.

The theme of the first couplet — a natural phenomenon, a picture of everyday life, or even, as Fauconnier put it, « a still life » — is not necessarily "poetic" in itself. It can form a whole or combine two images which may have no evident connection. However, the meaning of the pantun — but *meaning* is often a misleading term where poetry is concerned, and I would rather use a less squarely defined word if one could be found corresponding to every poetical situation — the meaning, then, or the intention of a pantun depends essentially on the last two lines, in which various ideas can be expressed, chiefly anything belonging to the Malay man or woman's whole scale of emotions, feelings, passions, etc. According to Prof. Mohd. Taib Osman, « the message can be anything from a reflection of an irony of fate in life to an expression of ardent love, or from a serious note of

[13]Winstedt in *Pantun Melayu*, *op. cit.* p. 184

[14]Mohd. Taib Osman, *Bunga Rampai*, *op. cit.* pp. 32 - 33.

advice to a light-hearted teasing. And in conveying the messages, the *pantun* is not always straightforward, but is usually disguised in appropriate imageries. »[15] And its magical effect arises, above all, from the *interaction* of the two halves.

The first couplet often appears to have no apparent link with the second, which, however, sounds like its echo, as we have seen, owing to sound repetitions, analogous articulations of consonants which can be sometimes really complex, to which the Malay language lends itself admirably — to such a point that in some cases we may very well wonder whether the poem represents anything else indeed than a purely formal interplay of assonances, alliterations and rhymes.

In fact, I am inclined to think that the connection, however subtle it may appear, can almost always be felt : associations of ideas, sentiments, images founded on traditional symbols, parallels, implicit comparisons or metaphors, etc. But the link may also happen to remain hidden behind a verbal sequence which is like the shadow of another one and only those who know it can perceive its echo. In such a case, the vibration of the poem is less in the words it is composed of than in those of which it is the blurred reflection. Thus, frustration is aroused in us, which obliges us to listen all the more intently to the pantun as the relationship between *pembayang* and *maksud* seems less evident. This is not the least charm of this form of poetry : to assume the aspect of a riddle, of a mystery, an enigma perhaps, which seizes us firmly not to let us go until we have found the secret lock and opened the casket.

Some scholars contend that no relationship should be sought for between *pembayang* and *maksud*, that the first part has no other purpose than to set up a sound and rhyme pattern for the second couplet, which is the only important, meaningful part of a pantun. But then, may we ask, why a first part, why a sound pattern, why such a complex sound and rhyme system? Why not just a simple rhymed couplet? The issue is significant enough to be examined later on in a special chapter. For the time being, let us take it for certain that there is more to it than a mere system of rhythm, rhyme and assonance.

Not very long ago, while working on this research, I happened to discover a few passages which seemed to me quite relevant in the Introduction to *Stèles*, Victor Segalen's best-known poetical work. Segalen was a French poet of the early XXth century, who spent part

[15] *Ibid.* p. 33.

of his life in China and became quite an accomplished Chinese scholar. The author of the introduction to the critical edition of *Stèles*[16] says somewhere: « The bipartite structure » — characteristic of Segalen's Stèles but also of some kind of Chinese poetry which was a model for him, a sort of mould in which he chose to cast some of his own poetry — « consists in producing in the first part a fact, an anecdote, a custom or tradition borrowed from the Chinese world » (in our case, we should read "the Malay world") « then, without any transition, the second part suggests, either explicitly or implicitly, the allegorical meaning of what has just been said. This of course is done tactfully and delicately enough to give the reader the largest possible liberty of choice. It is up to him to reconnect the two parts and get hold of the tiny fragment of the ineffable which can be seized by the poetic word .... »[17]

Similarly, we can apply to the Malay pantuns the following remark concerning the Chinese epigraphs given by Segalen to each of his Stèles : « They all have it for their task to convey a suggestion of the deeper meaning of the poem. In doing so, Segalen follows one of the most important traditions of Chinese thought, which is fond of quoting proverbs and well-known customs in order to make people understand through allusion what one does not wish to express directly. »[18]

A similar "system" is at work in the Malay pantun, where proverbs or proverbial phrases, now plainly visible, now more subdued or concealed, may be underlying a sentence, sometimes clearly expressed and sometimes veiled, like an echo or a resonance, giving those brief enigmatic poems subtle shades of light and colouring often difficult to grasp for the *profane*, the non-initiated. « The attempt at terseness, simplicity, expressive value, the starkness of syntax [...], everything contributes to bring us nearer the mysterious centre where the imaginary and the real, absence and presence, the inside and the outside mingle into the same unity. To reveal without saying everything and, chiefly, to veil in order better to express »,[18bis] such are, I think, the principal features and virtues of

[16] Victor Segalen, *Stèles*, Edition critique par Henry Bouillier, Mercure de France, Paris 1982 :

[17] *Ibid.* pp. 14-15.

[18] *Ibid.* p. 28

[18bis] *Ibid.* pp. 28 - 29.

the Malay pantun at its best, the peculiar qualities which have made this quatrain, for centuries, one of the most strikingly original poetic forms in the world.

This is precisely why I usually feel more than reluctant regarding the type of pantun known as *pantun berkait* — the one which was rather badly imitated by some French XIXth century poets, as I have shown in the preceding chapter — and which I consider as a minor aspect of this Malay verse, an opinion which, by the way, I share with other authors.

The *pantun berkait*, let us repeat it, is composed of an indefinite number of quatrains connected with each other in the following automatic fashion : the second and fourth verse of the first stanza are repeated as the first and third of the second stanza, and so on to the last one. There are some made up of two quatrains only, but there is no theoretical limit to their number, and anyone can always add one or more new stanzas to a given string of *pantun berkait*.

The collection of pantuns published in Jakarta by Balai Pustaka shows many such sequences of three to about ten quatrains. A really curious exception is *Raja Haji Menyerang Melaka*,[9] which comprises as many as ninety-five — an exception, really, on account of its unusual length (for even "alphabetical pantuns" have only 35 — 34 pantuns + 1 *syair* stanza — while "*Rejang*" do not exceed thirty pantuns) as well as of its object, which is the narration, the title indicates, of Raja Haji's assault against Dutch Melaka in 1784. Winstedt called this string of pantuns "acrobatics in verse" and nothing could be less adapted for a narrative : as can be understood easily, even without reading the poem, after the first quatrain in which the second couplet is devoted to the story itself, the fact that the first couplet of each stanza can only be a *pembayang* and the continuous repetition of lines occurring from stanza to stanza, make it impossible for the narrative to progress by more than a line per quatrain — quite a lengthy process indeed!

Regarding this type of pantun, Prof. van Ophuysen, for whom the real pantun is the single quatrain — « tiap-tiap pantun adalah bererti sendiri » —, has written : « Jikalau ia boleh diumpamakan sebuah bunga bersahaja, tetapi bagus warnanya dan sedap bulunya, maka perkumpulan-perkumpulan pantun yang disebutkan

[9]Quoted in JSBRAS No°22 (1890).

di atas tadi ini ("bertali-tali atau berkait-kait") haruslah dimisalkan karang-karangan daripada bunga-bunga dibuat dan tak sedap. »[20] Bunches of artificial flowers : one could not define them better. More recently, in his *Warisan Puisi Melayu*, Prof. Mohd. Taib Osman wrote, about this type of pantun : « Dengan cara ini (the way a quatrain gets linked with the preceding one), mustahil jikalau bayangan maksud itu dapat dilaksanakan daripada satu bait kepada bait-bait yang disambung dari satu bait ke satu bait yang berikut itu memainkan fungsinya sebagai penyambung. »[21] This is also my opinion. As I have said in the previous chapter, such a succession of pantuns quickly tends to become mechanical. In every new stanza, one inherits two lines from the preceding one, i.e. half the *pembayang* as well as half the *maksud*. However good the original quatrain may have been, the repetition makes it more difficult for the next one to achieve originality and weakens the effect. A similar process can be observed in another sort of *pantun berkait*. I mean the "anak ayam" type : there, the sound patterns are pre-determined automatically and repeatedly by the return of the same phrases — "anak ayam turun sepuluh" (or "sebelas" or any other number to start with) and "mati seekor tinggal sembilan" or any other decreasing number, while the numbers themselves, with the disappearance of one chick after another (as in *Ten Little Niggers*), are responsible for a fixed succession of rhymes. Moreover, the fact that the fourth line of every stanza is repeated as the third in the next, makes this sort of pantun even poorer in contents and more mechanical than the ordinary *pantun berkait*.

This is why the four quatrains quoted by Victor Hugo are exceptionally outstanding indeed : from stanza to stanza, each first couplet is really a *pembayang* to the *maksud* and even the repetitions do not sound empty; everytime a line reappears, it does so with a different or more precise meaning, which was not quite obvious at

[20] *Pantun Melayu*, Balai Pustaka, *op. cit.* p. 18. In English: « Each pantun (quatrain) has an independent meaning .... If it can be compared with a delicate and sweet-smelling natural flower, we must compare the associations of pantuns already referred to ("pantun berkait") with bunches of unpleasant artificial flowers. »

[21] *Op. cit.* p. 10. In English: « In this way (the way a quatrain gets linked with the one that precedes), if the reflection of meaning can be conveyed from one stanza to the stanzas linked together one by one, it is doubtful that it can fulfil a function of connection. »

first. A *pantun berkait* of similar poetic quality can also be found in the Balai Pustaka collection:[22]

Buah berangan atas batu,
Gaharu bercampur dengan cendana.
Jangan tuan kata begitu,
Bukan tak tahu sindir makna.

Gaharu bercampur dengan cendana,
Tetak rotan di atas peti.
Bukan tak tahu sindir makna,
Berbalik perasaan dalam hati.

Tetak rotan di atas peti,
Dimuat wangkang dari Cina.
Berbalik perasaan dalam hati,
Sampailah abang dagang yang hina.

Bermuat wangkang dari Cina,
Wangkang besar kepala merah.
Sampailah abang dagang yang hina,
Tidak menaruh daging dan darah.

[22]Which I translate thus into French:

Des marrons à plat posés sur la pierre
Du santal uni avec du garou
Ne me parle pas de cette manière
De ta moquerie je connais le goût

Du santal uni avec du garou
Sur le coffre un bout de rotin tranché
De ta moquerie je connais le goût
Et du tout au tout mon coeur a changé

Sur le coffre un bout de rotin tranché
A bord de la jonque au ventre profond
Car du tout au tout mon coeur a changé
Il est de retour l'humble vagabond

Sur la grande jonque au ventre profond
La jonque de Chine à proue écarlate
Il est de retour l'humble vagabond
Il ne se sent plus de ta race ingrate.

(19-30 nov. '86)

Chestnuts flat on a stone are laid,
Sandal mixed with eagle wood.
Don't talk to me like this, you maid,
What mean your jibes I know for good.

Sandal mixed with eagle wood,
A stick of rattan on a chest,
What mean your jibes I know for good,
My heart has turned from east to west.

A stick of rattan on a chest,
Carried aboard a Chinese junk,
My heart has turned from east to west,
He's back indeed, the lowly punk!

He came aboard the Chinese junk,
The big junk with its scarlet head.
He's back indeed, the lowly punk!
But yet his love for you is dead.

The whole sequence of quatrains is so closely worked out that it seems practically impossible to isolate any of them without losing much of the meaning. The first one could be accepted as an ordinary pantun and understood as the protestations of a lover who refuses to be an object of mockery on the part of his former beloved. But none of the other three can stand by itself, as each progressively develops the *maksud* of the first: the despised lover no longer accepts to be laughed at, something has changed in his heart after his exile, from which he has just come back with the big Chinese junk, his sentiments are the reverse of what they were before, he is no more "flesh and blood" with her .... Gradually too, the elements of each successive *pembayang* give the dramatic progression a peculiar tonality: familiar at first, with the chestnuts on a stone, but also with an immediate touch of irony in the second verse, where the words "gaharu" and "cendana" carry the unmistakable echo of a proverbial sentence, meaning "pretending not to know": "sudah gaharu cendana pula/sudah tahu bertanya pula". Or, in other words: you look as innocent as a handful of chestnuts on a stone, but don't do as if you did not realize that I am now aware of the mockery that used to be hiding behind your words. Then comes the "tetak rotan" which can

convey the idea of a good caning, perhaps to teach the dame a lesson, while the big "wangkang" comes as a symbol of exile and return of the "humble" traveller, now proud and free again.

As a counter-example, here is a short string of *pantun berkait* in which there seems to be hardly any connection from stanza to stanza:

Panaslah hari tengah hari,
Merpati terbang beratus-ratus.
Jika begini rasanya hati,
Kail tersangkut tali pun putus.

Terbang merpati beratus-ratus,
Seekor hinggap tengah halaman.
Kail tersangkut tali pun putus,
Joran terlepas dari tangan.

Hinggaplah unggas tengah laman,
Ditangkap kucing lalu mati.
Joran terlepas dari tangan,
Apalah daya dengan budi?

But even so it can be seen as an ironic and bitter angling scene near a farmhouse, symbolic of a (sentimental?) situation which does not turn out to be a success — its dramatic progression being reflected step by step in the sequence of events to the pigeon's death:

So very hot at noon today,
In hundreds pigeons fly,
If really you feel that way,
Hook stuck and broken line.

Hundreds of pigeons fly in bands,
One in the yard alights.
Hook stuck and broken line, off hands,
The rod slips off alright.

One fowl amid the yard alights,
Caught by the cat and killed!
Off hands the rod slips loose alright,
What can one do though skilled?

It was not a hazard if I mentioned Chinese poetry in connection with the Malay pantun, or at least some aspects of it common to both: not to say, of course, that the latter descends in direct line from the former, which would be rather difficult to prove anyway, but simply in order to point at a possible relationship or kinship, not surprising in this part of Asia where so many influences converged and mingled.

As a matter of fact, when I first read the passages in the Introduction to Segalen's *Stèles*, (which I quoted in the foreword to my second series of forty pantuns in French translation), I had no other reference than the pantuns themselves and my own impressions in front of what might have been a mere fortuitous resemblance or coincidence. Such similarities are always fruitful, be it only because they can explain a way of thinking not directly accessible to a mind completely or comparatively foreign to it.

Nevertheless, it raises the question of the origins of the Malay pantun, to which the last part of this chapter will be devoted.

In the absence of written documents anterior to the XVIth century, it is impossible to trace it back to its sources with at least a minimum of certainty. All we can find in the older manuscripts available are a few samples of full-fledged pantuns — which means that as a poetic form the earliest pantuns we know of had already achieved perfection, so that we can imagine that the genre came to existence long ago. All the rest is pure conjecture, and I do not think we could do better in this direction than did Overbeck more than sixty years ago unless some older Malay documents (in Pali script, for instance) were discovered, which might bear witness to some previous stages of development and evolution of the pantun. But according to specialists, this is most unlikely.[23]

It will be interesting, at any rate, to follow H. Overbeck in his quest of possible forefathers to the pantun. But a first remark should be made : undoubtedly, the pantun is specifically Malay, to be found only in connection with the Malayan language in its area of origin, i.e. Peninsular Malaya and a good part of Sumatra together with the Riau/Lingga Archipelago. There is no place for it in Javanese literature, for instance, and if there exists a Sundanese "pantun", this word designates "a tale taken from legends or from the history of old

[23]This is, for instance, the opinion of my fellow countryman Henri Chambert-Loir, who told me so in November 1986 when I questioned him about such a possibility.

times, half sung, half recited by the bard", something then, entirely different in form and content. It must be noted, however, that these tales resemble the Malay "penglipur lara" and can be interspersed with blank verse and "sindir",[24] the latter being sometimes very intricate, sometimes rather straightforward like « the following lampoon on divorced women:

Anak kuda susurian
Tikait tali kanchana,
Aya rangda sösörian,
Ngarebut ösi chalana. »

which reads, in Malay:

Anak kuda berbulu tengkok,
Terkait tali kencana.
Ada janda tersenyum-senyum
Merebut isi celana.

The foal has on its neck a mane,
With golden thread 'tis laced.
A widow's there who smiles to gain
That which in pants is placed.

Although this particular verse offers a structure and sound pattern very similar to those of the Malay pantun, there is no conclusive evidence of the existence of pantuns in the neighbouring areas at any time, neither with the Borneo Dayaks, says Overbeck, nor in any part of the Philippines.

But « in the Buddhist literature of Siam and Burma, » Overbeck observes, « Pali verse sometimes comes very near the structure of the pantun ... » « "Dhammapada" or "Way of Truth", a collection of Buddhist verses, contains many quatrains in which the first couplet contains a picture, the meaning of which is applied in the second:

As into a house which is badly thatched
The rain will enter,

[24] H. Overbeck, *The Malay Pantun*, JSBRAS N°85. 1922. p. 5. The quotations in the following pages are from the same article.

Thus into an untrained mind,
The craving will enter. »

Or, still better:

« As a beautiful flower,
Brilliant of hue but yielding no fragrance,[24bis]
Thus is the well-spoken word
Fruitless to him who does not act (accordingly) »

« Without the "as" (*vatha*) and "thus" (*evam*) there would be no difference between these Pali verses and many a Malay pantun. » Overbeck also quotes quatrains from the *Ramayana*, some *selokas* where « the first two lines have a picture or poetic thought whose meaning is applied in the second couplet » without resorting to "as" or "thus"; for instance:

« Raindrops fall upon the lotus,
But unmingling hang apart;
False relations round us gather,
But they blend not heart with heart. »

or some of the stanzas with which « Kalidasa, who lived probably in the fifth century of the Christian era, the greater of the latest Sanskrit poets, has generously interspersed the prose of his dramas », such as:

« Night-blossoms open to the moon,
Day-blossoms to the sun;
A man of honour ever strives,
Another's wife to shun. »

Overbeck remarks that in some quatrains the word "sepantun" is used in place of the "laksana" or "seumpama" of modern times and

---

[24bis] These first two lines are quite similar to those of the first pantun quoted in Chapter V:

Iharat sekuntum bunga dedap,
Rupanya indah tiada berbau ...

Much like the bloom of the erythrine tree,
So fair in shape but with no scent to smell ...

says : « Is it possible that the *seloka*, either with the alternate or the fourfold rhyme, existed long ago and that those quatrains containing a *pantun* or simile in the first two lines have in course of time received the name pantun in contradistinction to the *seloka*, in which the same thought runs through all four lines? » — which occurs, for instance, with a quatrain like the following, although apparently shaped like a pantun:

Jalan-jalan sepanjang jalan,
Singgah-menyinggah di pagar orang;
Pura-pura mencari ayam,
Ekor mata di anak orang.

Along the pathway, now and then,
O'er the fence he pops his head,
Pretending to look for a hen,
Peeping at the girls instead.

If such was the case, the two kinds of quatrains could have gradually differentiated until the twofold structure of the pantun, together with the *abab* rhyming scheme, was firmly established, for centuries until today. « When the *pantun* became popular, the double thought in it possibly caused the alternate rhyme, which is much easier to find. »

Personally, I tend to think that there is more to this type of rhyme than a simple matter of convenience, more than a facility. I would rather say that double thought necessarily implied, or entailed, the use of the alternate rhyme, probably because on the one hand it makes it easier to remember the second part of a quatrain, with its two different rhymes, once you have started with the first (a *must* in oral poetry); chiefly because, on the other hand, in the best cases at least, each line of the first couplet mirrors the corresponding line of the second, i.e. the line bearing the same internal and final rhymes and alliterations; but also surely because such a rhyming scheme — together with the equally alternate system of inner rhymes and assonances — compensates the tendency of the quatrain to split asunder owing to the looseness of connection of its two halves, in tightening the bonds between them : instead of risking dissociation, the poem acquires more cohesion, and possibly a surplus of coher-

ence. In the following pantun, for instance:

Kalau roboh kota Melaka —
Sayang selasih di dalam puan.
Kalau sungguh bagai dikata,
Rasa nak mati di pangku tuan.

Should Malacca fort be destroyed ...
Alas! the basil on the tray;
Should I be told true, not decoyed,
I wish on her lap dead I lay!

the idea of Melaka fort being destroyed mirrors the idea of the beloved (not) speaking the truth, while the second line, with a basil stem — alas, withering — on a tray, reflects the longing to die in her arms. Things are half-said only, though fully understood as much on account of the sound interplay as through the allusive power of some words — "selasih" usually points to "kasih", although not mentioned here — rather than through the actual semantic content of each line.

We are, it seems, completely in the dark as to the origin and original meaning of the word *pantun*. To me, R.O. Winstedt's speculations about it sound rather unconvincing. After declaring: « The origin of the word *pantun* is doubtful. » he gives a first possible origin : « It has been taken for a *krama*-form of the Javanese *pari* [...]: *pari*, it is said, is a synonym for *basa* meaning 'phrase, comparison'. » Then a second: « It has been taken to be a *krama*-form of a Javanese word *parik* from a root *rik* or *rit* meaning 'make, fashion'. » then a third one, which to me seems even more delirious and in complete opposition to the first one at any rate: « Dr. Brandstetter would derive it from an Indonesian root *tun*, that can be traced in old Javanese *tuntun* "thread", *atuntun* 'in lines'. Pampanga *tuntun* 'regular', Tagalog *tonton* 'to speak in a certain order'. And this derivation is supported by the analogy of other Indonesian words which starting from roots meaning 'row, line' come to mean 'words arranged' in prose or in verse, just as in Sundanese *pantun* means 'a long tale with some rythmical passages and chanted to music' and in Malay 'quatrains': *karangan*, the Malay word for 'composition in prose or verse' means primarily 'arrangement of flowers in order'.[25]

[25] R.O. Winstedt, *History of Classical Malay Literature*, *op. cit.* pp. 193 194.

There is no conclusive evidence in any of these three different possible origins, nothing, above all, that could enable Winstedt to write, as he does so peremptorily : « It seems clear, therefore, that the use of the phrase *sepantun* for "like" is secondary and derivative. » while the first one could have led him to an exactly opposite conclusion as well.[25]

Overbeck for his part, as we have seen, asked himself the question : « Is it possible [...] that those quatrains containing a *pantun* or simile in the first two lines have in the course of time received the name *pantun* in contradistinction to the *seloka*, in which the same thought runs through all four lines? »[26]

Of these two conjectures, I would rather favour Overbeck's; for me, his hypothesis has a great merit : it seems to imply a very logical, I should say natural process: a poetical form incorporating a simile derived its name from the word then meaning a simile, "pantun" — which had also produced the word "sepantun" to express comparison. The fact that the word was used with both meanings in an early work like the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and no longer afterwards, seems to me conducive to this supposition rather than to the reverse, but that is about all we can say.

Still according to Overbeck, the old *seloka* stanza may also have differentiated into the *pantun* thanks to the influence of Chinese poetry, as some verses in the Chinese Odes, for instance — the *Shi-King*, XI-VIth centuries B.C. — show the same twofold structure in a four-line stanza, as in the following:

Green is the upper robe,	*Yüan² hsi¹ i¹ hsi¹*
Green with a yellow lining;	*Yüan² i¹ huang² li¹*
My sorrow none can probe,	*Hsin¹ chih¹ yu¹ i³*
Nor can I cease repining.	*He² wei² ch'i² i³.*

Green is the upper robe,	*Yüan² hsi¹ i¹ hsi¹*
The lower garb is yellow;	*Yüan² i¹ huang² shang¹*
My sorrow none can probe,	*Hsin¹ chih¹ yu¹ i³*
Nor any season mellow.	*He² wei² ch'i² wang²*

[25] *Ibid.* p. 194.

[26] **Overbeck**, *op. cit.* pp. 11-12.

Overbeck gives many other examples of such Chinese quatrains and asks the question : « Is it possible that to Chinese influence may be attributed the fact that the connection between the first and last couplet in the Malay *pantun* is often so very loose? » and goes on:

« In the Indian *sloka*, to judge from translation, the rule that the picture given in the first lines must absolutely agree with the thought conveyed in the second line, is always strictly observed. In all Indian verses the picture is quite clear; it is always an obvious illustration of the thought which follows and not merely as in the Malay *pantun* an impressionist sketch, whose connection with the following lines a European mind often fails to understand. In Chinese poetry we have just this very looseness of connection between the picture and the thought it illustrates. A literal translation of course would make this point much clearer than the verses quoted above, but even some of these, translated into Malay, would not be much out of the way in a Pantun. [...] Parallels for the green upper robe and the yellow lower robe could be found in many *pantun*. »[27]

Neither these remarks nor the reference I made earlier in this chapter to a few passages explaining certain aspects of Segalen's *Stèles* in connection with Chinese poetry can be used as irrefutable evidence that the influence of the latter is entirely responsible for the essential characteristic of the Malay pantun, the apparently loose connection between "pembayang" and "maksud". In doing so, I only wanted to quote a text — although not written about the pantun — where the way a pantun "works", poetically speaking, was explained with great accuracy and at the same time, hint at a possible influence. More recently, going through a French anthology of classical Chinese poetry, I could find out definite signs of a community of structure between some Chinese quatrains of very long ago and the "system" at work in Malay pantuns. But this is all I can say. Overbeck himself does not try to prove anything. In fact, as we do not know when the first pantuns were composed, we have no direct or indirect knowledge of the circumstances of their creation nor of the various stages through which the genre had to evolve until it reached the form now familiar to us, we are not entitled to draw any conclusion regarding a definite influence of Indian and Chinese poetry in the making of the Malay pantun.

[27] *Op. cit.* p. 17.

All we can do is to observe evident points of resemblance, striking similarities in form and content, in outside shape and poetical structure, even if, as Overbeck puts it, « the thought of fortuitous coincidence seems hardly satisfactory. »[28]

It seems, however, difficult to conclude with Winstedt that « in the *pantun* Malay literature is almost for the first time original, owing no debt to foreign sources ... »[29] For two objections at least come up immediately: why "almost for the first time" as well as "owing no debts"? Sure enough the Malay pantun is *original* beyond discussion, and this at a level where it can vie with some of the highest achievements in world literature, like the Japanese *haiku* or the European *sonnet*. But this does not mean that it came suddenly out of the blue, and "foreign influences" can be at the source of the most specific and genuine artefacts of any of the human races. The Malay pantun may well be supposed to be the child of the Indian *seloka* and of certain trends in ancient Chinese poetry without ceasing for one second to be highly original.

Moreover, we do not know exactly what was the earliest form of traditional Malay literature and the pantun may well have been one of its most ancient manifestations, as poetry usually appears to be all over the world. So that I would rather put it this way: whatever foreign influences may have conditioned its birth, the pantun has been for centuries the most original poetic form ever created by the Malays; and conclude, this time, *with* R.O. Winstedt : « Nowhere else does it reach so high a level [...] At its best the *pantun* does far more than juggle with verbal assonance, is indeed 'simple, sensuous and passionate' and has the magic of inevitable phrase. »[30]

[28] *Op. cit.* p. 17.
[29] Winstedt, *op. cit.* p. 206.
[30] *Ibid.* pp. 206-207.

CHAPTER IV

Classification: a Drudgery and a Deception

Classification is a problem people inevitably have to face, I suppose, when they want to compile a really large collection of pantuns, as comprehensive, if not exhaustive, as can be. This is the case with *Pantun Melayu* of Balai Pustaka, Jakarta,[1] as well as with the *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu* of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.[2]

The problem is quite different when gathering a selection of two to three hundred, I think, because the editor will probably choose according to his own personal taste among the pantuns which belong to the category most likely to be appreciated by a larger public all over the world: in this case, the current opinion (and mine too) is that the best are to be found among those, numerous indeed, which come under the general heading of "love pantuns". Even an important collection like Wilkinson and Winstedt's,[3] of more than twelve hundred quatrains, contains at least eight hundred belonging to the categories of "love", irrespective of those of the same kind which can be picked up easily here and there among the four hundred and fifty-one gathered under various labels – including such vague ones as "rampai-rampai", "kata-kata sindiran" and others.

« For the arrangement of this collection, the headings of the various sets [...], I alone am responsible », writes R.O. Winstedt in his

[1] *Pantun Melayu*, Balai Pustaka, Jakarta, see Bibliography.
[2] *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu*, DBP, Kuala Lumpur, see Bibliography.
[3] R.J. Wilkinson and R.O. Winstedt, *Pantun Melayu*, see Bibliography.

Postface[4] to what he calls "a medley of rhymes".[5] This proves that although he did not give any explanations about the arrangement itself into a number of themes or motifs, he avoided the problems of classification which he probably judged more advisable to dismiss, as practically impossible to solve.

In the Preface to the Balai Pustaka collection, we can read that « tuan Profesor van Ophuysen mengatakan bahwa susah juga mencerai-ceraikan pantun itu satu-satu jenisnya, sebab banyak kali sebuah pantun boleh dimasukkan ke dalam dua tiga jenis. » It was difficult to classify pantuns category by category because very often a pantun could enter into two or three different ones. Nevertheless, Prof. van Ophuysen thought it was not an impossible task to achieve, and divided pantuns into five categories:

1. Pantun tua,	(ancient)
2. Pantun dagang,	(of the 'exile')
3. Pantun riang,	(cheerful)
4. Pantun nasihat,	(of wisdom)
5. Pantun muda.	(new, recent)

Those in the last section had of course to be excellent. However, according to the anonymous Indonesian editor, this way of classifying pantuns would have left aside too many of them, so he proposed another system:[6]

1. Pantun anak-anak,	(for or about children)
2. Pantun orang muda,	(for young people)
3. Pantun orang tua.	(for old people)

The first class, he said, should be divided into two sections, in accordance with the feelings of either joy or sadness prevailing with children, namely into "pantun bersukacita" and "pantun berdukacita". But it seems rather difficult to understand what a well-known pantun like the following, for instance, which could be accepted as a

[4] *Ibid.* p. 203.
[5] *Ibid.* p. 204.
[6] *Op. cit.* pp. 21-22.

"pantun nasihat" or a "pantun orang tua", has to do in the former section:

Pisang emas bawa belayar,
Masak sebiji di atas peti.
Hutang emas boleh dibayar,
Hutang budi dibawa mati.[7]

With dates of gold we sail away
A ripe one on a chest we save.
Our debts of gold we can repay,
A debt of heart we take to the grave.

whereas most pantuns in the latter can hardly be termed "pantuns for children", being rather "pantuns about the fate of unhappy children", as is visible in the following examples (I am quoting the *maksud* only):

Nasi dingin air bermalam,
Itu makanan anak sekolah,

Cold rice, stale water,
Such is the schoolboy's food.

or:

Bonda mati bapa berjalan,
Melarat anak tinggal seorang,

Mum's dead and Dad is gone away,
Alone remains the forlorn child.

or:

Di mana hati takkan rusuh,
Bonda hilang bapa berbini,

How will you not be upset
When Mum is dead and Dad remarried?

[7] *Ibid.* No 26, p. 30.

or:

Meskipun menangis berhari-hari
Tidak siapa datang memujuk,

Although he cries for days and days,
No one comes to fondle him.

or:

Daripada tinggal dengan bonda tiri, (not a good line,
Baiklah hidup sebatang kara, see Chapter VI)

Since I stayed with my step-mother,
I had better live alone.

etc.[8]

The second class, still according to the editor, was by far the more numerous, and concerned chiefly young people. It had to be divided into three main sections:

1. Pantun dagang atau pantun nasib (pantuns of the "exile" or of fate);
2. Pantun muda (which sounds rather vague);
3. Pantun jenaka (farcical).

Pantuns belonging to the first section, he said, « dinyanyikan oleh orang muda-muda yang tinggal di negeri orang, jika ia teringat akan negeri tempat tumpah darahnya atau akan nasibnya yang malang yang tidak seperti untung orang lain. Tetapi biasa juga dinyanyikan oleh anak-anak muda yang duduk di negerinya sendiri, apabila ia memisahkan dirinya ada di negeri orang atau jika dinyanyikan dalam perjamuan » : they are sung by the young man who lives in a foreign country when reminded of the place where he was born or of his unlucky fate, different from that of others. But they can also usually be sung by the young people who stay in his own

[8] *Ibid.* respectively, N°45, 51, 57, 59 and 82, pp. 33-38.

country when, away from it, he is in a foreign place, or again sung at a banquet:[9]

Bernyanyi bukan kerana riang,
Badan tersedar pada untungnya. (N°216)

He's not singing because he's merry,
His body's aware of his destiny.[10]

Pantuns belonging to the second section — which is that of the young man in love (still according to the editor) — can be said to be at the centre of all pantuns : « bolehlah dikatakan pusat segala pantun » . Similarly, the majority of the other pantuns revolve around this centre: « kebanyakan pantun lain-lain berkeliling itulah tempatnya. » This second section can be divided into four sub-sections:

a. Pantun berkenalan, to get acquainted, for courtship;
b. Pantun berkasih-kasihan, for those who love each other;
c. Pantun berceraian, for those who part from each other;
d. Pantun berhiba hati, of the broken heart.

"Pantun berkenalan" can be said to be pantuns "to open the way" ("pantun pembuka jalan") and therefore must be used with great care, either to be accepted or rejected by the opposite party. If the introduction is successful, the seed thus sown can become a big tree — « bolehlah biji yang ditanam itu menjadi pohon yang besar. »

The Indonesian collection gives more than four hundred "pantun berkenalan" where we can find, among the best-known, the following ones:

Bunga melur kembang sekaki,
Mari dibungkus dengan kertas.
Di dalam telur lagi dinanti,
Inikan pula sudah menetas. (512)

[9] *Ibid.* p. 22.
[10] *Ibid.* p. 61.

A solitary jasmine flower,
Let's wrap it up in paper fast.
Inside the shell until this hour,
I see you're fully hatched at last!

or:

Burung nuri terbang ke Padang,
Bulunya jatuh ke Patani.
Banyak muda sudah kupandang,
Tiada sama mudaku ini.

Bulunya jatuh ke Patani,
Dua puluh anak merpati.
Tiada sama mudaku ini,
Sungguh pandai memujuk hati. (522-3)

Towards Padang a love-bird flies,
On Patani its feathers fall.
I've seen many a youthful lass,
But such as my love none at all.

On Patani its feathers fall,
Twenty young pigeons start.
But such as my love none at all
Knows how to soothe the heart.

or else:

Jika tiada kerana bulan,
Masakan bintang timur tinggi?
Jika tiada kerana tuan,
Masakan abang datang ke mari? (524)

If not because of the moon,
Why does Venus rise in space?
If not because you'll come soon,
Why should I come to this place?

As for the second section — pantuns for those in love — says the editor, they need no further explanations : « Jika datang waktunya,

tiap-tiap orang takkan tidak pandai memakainya » (When the right time comes, everyone cannot but know how to make use of them).

The collection comprises a little more than three hundred pantuns in this category out of the eleven hundred totalled by the whole section, in which "pantun berceraian" and "pantun berhiba hati" are just as numerous ... which would tend to prove that the situations and occasions involved are more numerous before and after love, and that happy love has not much to say or needs but few words for it.

We can find among the best in category b:

Kalau tuan jalan ke hulu,
Carikan saya bunga kemboja.
Kalau tuan mati dahulu,
Nantikan saya di pintu syurga. (901)

If you sail upstream, my love,
The honey flower find for me.
If you die the first, my love,
At heaven's portal wait for me.

or:

Belayar kapal bertimbang harus,
Patah kemudi sepanjang pantai.
Tuan laksana cindai halus,
Alah membeli menang memakai. (909)

Along the shore our boat we sail,
With broken helm against the flow.
You're like the finest silken veil,
A loss to buy, a win to show.

Pantun in section c are supposed to be sung, or written in a letter given to the beloved when saying goodbye, such as, for instance:

Petang ini malam Jumaat,
Pasang pelita atas peti,
Pukul bantal panggil semangat,
Minta bertemu dalam mimpi. (1100)

Muslim Sabbath eve tonight,
So light a candle on the chest.
Pat your pillow, call a sprite,
So that we meet in dreamland best.

Usually, parting time is suggested by showing how sad you are, standing side by side so as not to see each other's faces, because they will no longer shine as bright with joy as before.

Pantuns in section d are meant to express sadness because you were not granted a request by your beloved or because he or she was not faithful to his or her promise. Such pantuns usually contain regrets, reproaches and even sometimes sarcasms or menaces, as clearly appears in the "pantun berkait" quoted in Chapter III:

Buah berangan atas batu,
Gaharu bercampur dengan cendana.
Jangan tuan kata begitu,
Bukan tak tahu sindir makna.

Gaharu bercampur etc. (1219 22)

(For translation, see Chapter II and its notes)[11]

As for "pantun jenaka", their purpose is to make people laugh, and therefore, says the editor, « kerap kali bahasanya dan isinya juga kurang halus » (Their language and content is often less refined). Their themes are varied and range, for instance, from sheer jokes to ridiculous behaviours — or behaviours considered ridiculous in traditional Malay society, like old men marrying young girls or young men marrying old women:

Alangkah elok barang ini,
Terbuat daripada gading.
Alangkah elok orang ini,
Pinggangnya genting bagai ketiding. (1364)

[11] *Ibid.* p. 195. See also Chapter III, note N°22.

Such a piece of art this is,
In ivory finely cut,
Such a handsome man he is,
His waist's as thin as a butt.

— to impossible or absurd things like a bepowdered cat:

Sakit perut sebab tertawa,
Melihat kucing duduk berbedak. (1386)

Writhing in pain so much he laughed
At seeing a cat powdering her nose.

or a fish climbing up a tree, as can be found in this caricature of the first stanza of the "pantun berkait" quoted by Victor Hugo (see Chapter I[1]):

Kupu-kupu terbang melintang,
Hinggap menghisap bunga layu.
Hati di dalam menaruh bimbang,
Melihat ikan memanjat kayu. (1390)

A butterfly is flying athwart,
Alights, a withered flower to breathe.
I feel uncertain in my heart
At seeing a fish climb up a tree.

"Pantun orang tua", the old man's pantuns, contain almost always an instruction : a piece of advice, a lesson or a parable, sometimes allusions or satire. They come under three headings: "nasihat/adat/agama" — advice, tradition, religion. Here is one in the first section, which in fact could be placed in the third as well:

Baik-baik berlayar malam,
Arus deras karangnya tajam.
Cari-cari malim yang faham,
Di situ banyak kapal tenggelam. (1434)

Be careful when you sail by night,
Reefs are sharp and currents strong.
There, for lack of a pilot's light
Many a good ship has gone wrong.

The editor of the *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu* considers that there are three ways of classifying pantuns : from the point of view of their **audience**, from the point of view of their **form** and according to their **themes**.

In the first case, pantuns are always classified according to the age of those whom they are destined for. Thus, three kinds of audiences are usually distinguished: children, adults and old people. The following pantun, for instance, is a pantun for children:

Timang tinggi-tinggi
Sampai cucur atap,
Belum tumbuh gigi,
Pandai baca kitab.[12]

Toss him up high,
Up to the eaves,
Not a tooth yet,
Books he can read.

Such pantuns are sung by mothers and grand-mothers while cuddling their children or grand-children in order to develop in them the spirit of physical life — vitality or *semangat* for them to become energetic, enterprising, so that they can quickly learn walking, talking etc.:

Oh bulan, di mana bintang?
Sudah terlindung di kayu ara;
Oh sayang, di mana bujang?
Bujang jadi orang perkasa.[13]

[12] *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu*, p. 23. See a slightly different version in Chapter VIII. (from Alias Yunos, *op. cit.* p 3).
[13] *Alias Yunos, op. cit.* p. 3.

Oh the moon where are the stars?
They are hidden in the fig-tree;
Oh my love where is the lad?
A courageous man already.

Unlike those referred to here above in the *anak-anak* section of the Balai Pustaka collection, these are real pantun **for** childern.

At the other end, so to speak, there are pantuns of didactic and moralizing character which would surely be recited or sung by old people only. For instance:

Cahaya redup menyegar padi,
Ayam berkokok mengirai tuah.
Jikalau hidup tidak berbudi,
Umpama pokok tidak berbuah.[14]

The dimmer light refreshes the rice,
The happy cock will shake and crow.
For lack of kindness life's not nice,
'Tis like a tree where fruit don't grow.

The subdued evening light is in keeping with old age as well as the maxim contained in the *maksud*. And the category of pantuns for elderly people — supposedly full of wisdom — is not too difficult to distinguish, although we could remark that such pantuns, in fact, are meant for children and younger people while usually issued from the mouth of elders.

In between, we could find a large variety of pantuns to be used only by adolescents and adults, so that a classification such as "for children", "for adults" and "for old people" would finally come to no purpose. For when does one cease to be a child — and what kind of a child? — to become an adolescent, or an adolescent to become an adult? Or where are the limits, considering one's way of thinking and stage of personal intellectual development, between these categories? Where could a pantun like the following be classified, according to such a system?

Pinggan tak retak, nasi tak dingin,
Engkau tak hendak, kami tak ingin.[15]

---

[14] ***Kumpulan Pantun Melayu***, p. 24.
[15] *Ibid.* p. 90, N°342. But why in the section "Pantun Jenaka"?

No crack in the dish, not cold is the rice,
On your part no wish, no desire on mine.

Could it not just as well suit a baby who refuses to eat its rice as two friends, or two lovers, whose relationship is getting colder because something between them got cracked and is virtually broken?

Thus, another method of classification was required, which perhaps could be based on form, for instance. Because quatrains are the more numerous, a first distinction should be made between four-line pantuns and pantuns having fewer or more than four lines. The former would have to be divided into independent, free quatrains and the various kinds of pantun berkait ("pantun berkait" properly speaking, alphabet pantuns, "days-of-the-week" pantuns, "anak ayam" pantuns, "rejang", etc.); whereas the others would be sorted as two-line pantuns, six-line pantuns, and so on and so forth to sixteen-line pantuns. Such a classification would naturally raise no particular problems, but what would be the use of such a system — except, perhaps, as a sort of subclassification within another system, as in the *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu*, for instance?

Therefore, the last possibility is that of a classification according to **themes** or subject matter. But what is a theme in general? Can a given theme, as a broad category, be said to be the subject of a pantun? Is not **love**, for instance, too vast a subject to be considered as one theme? Or shall we, in order to be less vague, less indefinite, divide the theme of "love" into a number of sub-themes, every sub-theme into an infinity of motifs? And do the same with death, religion, with all the other themes ? That would of course be impossible or absurd: a classification eventually classifying nothing owing to an excess of classes.

As a matter of fact, the theme of each separate stanza is not always very clearly defined, it can even be really ambiguous, liable to several contradictory interpretations, or two different themes can be mingled in the same pantun. So that the word "theme" should designate a concept broad enough to house a sufficient number of pantuns without being liable to constant reinterpretation, and at the same time precise enough for the system to achieve usefulness and efficiency.

Quite conscious of these problems, the editor of the ***Kumpulan Pantun Melayu*** has adopted a classification system by themes with eleven categories — the last one being divided into four sections:

1. Pantuns concerning tradition and customs ("adat dan resam manusia"): it includes, for instance, the following quatrain:

Pertama teluk kedua pantai,
Ketiga dengan jamban dahulu;
Pertama elok kedua pandai,
Ketiga baik bangsa penghulu. (84)

First the bay and then the strand,
Third the river toilet of yore.
First beautiful, then deft of hand,
Third and better still, highborn.

Now, I think this pantun cannot be fully understood independently from another one which normally precedes it and forms with it a "pantun berkait", to be found in Wilkinson and Winstedt's *Pantun Melayu*, N°65/66, page 11, under the title JODOH SEJATI, a proper bride:

Pilih-pilih tempat mandi,
Pertama teluk kedua pantai,
Pilih-pilih tempat menjadi,
Pertama elok kedua pandai. (791)

Choose well the place for a swim,
First the bay and then the strand,
Choose well your bride, not for a whim,
First beautiful, then deft of hand.

This pantun, however, is not to be found in the same category, but under the heading of "nasihat dan pendidikan" (N°791). All right! But then, why not also the other one? Where does the boundary run through between "adat" and "nasihat"? Is not "nasihat", by the way, in direct relationship with "adat"?

2. Pantuns about religion and belief ("agama dan kepercayaan"): many of those listed here belong to this category but some more doubtfully, like this one, for instance:

Hendak mandi marilah mandi,
Sementara ada timba upih.
Hendak mati marilah mati,
Sementara ada kain putih. (146)

You want to bathe, then bathe, come on.
While a palm dipper you can get!
You want to die, then die, come on.
While a white sheet there is yet.

And what to say of the following?

Ambil tulis tuliskan surat,
Mari ditulis di atas batu;
Dari dunia sampai akhirat,
Badan dua menjadi satu. (136)

Take a pen and write a letter,
Come, let's write it on a stone,
From this world unto a better,
Bodies twain, henceforth, are one.
(A.W.H.)

Why should it be listed in this category? Because of the word "akhirat"? Is it not most evidently a "love pantun"? Does it not mean that "the bodies of the two lovers are one for ever"? Should not this pantun be listed in Section 11(b) below?

3. The third category groups pantuns about sense and kindness ("budi"): the famous "pisang emas" pantun about "hutang budi" (259) is certainly in the right place here, together with several of its variants and many others. But why in this section the following quatrain, which is again undoubtedly a love pantun?

Tuan Haji berbaju jubah,
Sembahyang subuh di haluan perahu;
Hati saya tidak berubah,
Hati tuan siapa tahu? (250)

The Haji wears a long white robe,
For his morning prayer in the bows.
My heart loves you still, you can probe,
But your heart, my love, who knows?

4. Amusing pantuns ("pantun jenaka dan permainan"): these might seem rather easily identifiable, as we have already seen. But

why should we find the well-known "Pinggan tak retak" two-line (or four-line) pantun listed under this heading? Is it not really much more than an amusing pantun? Is it not subtly ironic rather than funny? And as I said before, should it not be placed among love pantuns, in section 11 (c) or(d)? And the following one:

Sakit kaki ditikam jeruju,
Jeruju ada di dalam paya;
Sakit hati memandang susu,
Susu ada di dalam kebaya. (541)

Sore is my foot, pricked by a pest:
Sea-holly, in the swamp it grows.
Sore is my heart, watching her breasts,
Her breasts alive beneath her blouse.

What is funny or farcical about this quatrain? Or is it meant to be "naughty"? I would also have placed it in the category of "love pantuns". As for the next two ones, two variations on the theme that youth will make mistakes and still has to learn a lot about life and be shown the way, was not their right place in the "nasihat dan pendidikan" section?

Buah cempedak di luar pagar,
Ambil budak sambil berlari.
Saya budak baharu belajar,
Kalau salah tak simpan di hati. (523)

A jackfruit hung outside the fence,
A boy took it and ran away.
I've just started learning, hence,
Should I err, tell me right away.

or:

Buah cempedak di luar pagar,
Ambil galah tolong jolokkan;
Saya budak baharu belajar,
Mana yang salah tolong tunjukkan. (543)

Jackfruit hang outside the fence,
Take a pole and knock them low.
I have just started learning, hence,
When I'm wrong please let me know.

5. Then come riddles ("teka-teki") like the following, the answer of which is *kuih lemang*, « glutinous rice cooked with coconut milk in a green bamboo line with banana leaf »:

Beras ladang sulung tahun,
Malam-malam masak nasi;
Dalam batang ada daun,
Dalam daun ada isi. (589)

Grain from the field, first of the year,
We cook rice far into the night.
Inside a cane a leaf, my dear,
Within the leaf, guess, a delight.

6. Pantuns about heroes and heroism ("kepahlawanan"): this category also seems to have elastic boundaries. What to think of this pantun, for instance:

Apa guna kepuk di ladang,
Kalau tidak berisi padi.
Apa guna berambut panjang,
Kalau tidak berani mati? (608)

Why these baskets in the field
If in it no rice has grown?
Why this long and flowing beard,
If you can't face the unknown?

and of two more which are almost alike, with the exception of "buat apa" or "kenapa" instead of "apa guna"? Has fear of death anything to do with heroism alone in particular? Is long hair (or beard) the exclusive characteristic of a hero? Sure enough, these pantuns were found in *Raja Donan* or *Hikayat Awang Sulung Merah Muda*, but they can be read simply as "nasihat" anyway: what's the use of having long hair like a wise man if one is afraid of death however? ... And

what have the following pantuns to do with heroism?

Pisau raut dua tiga,
Letak di peti dalam perahu;
Dalam laut boleh diduga,
Dalam hati siapa tahu? (625)

A whittling knife or two or three
Inside the boat, left on a chest.
We can sound the depth of the sea,
But that of the heart who can test?

and:

Kalau mengail di lubuk dangkal,
Dapat ikan penuh seraga;
Kalau kail panjang sejengkal,
Jangan laut hendak diduga. (637)

To these shallows go for fish,
A basketful of them you'll get.
Sound the sea if so you wish,
Save if your line is one span wet.

and, usually sung by a mother to her child, the one already mentioned above, ending with the line "Bujang jadi orang perkasa"? "Keperkasaan" is undoubtedly one of the qualities of a hero, but every grown-up has to face life with courage – every child, too without being for so much "a hero".

7. Education and ethics ("pendidikan dan nasihat"): as I said about category 1, the following pantun is certainly well-placed here:

Pilih-pilih tempat mandi.
Pertama teluk kedua pantai,
Etc ... (791) (See above, same chapter)

but is not the following one much more a "cinta yang gagal" pantun — love that fails — than one with a moral precept, something like a lover's complaint?

Tuan ketam padi pulut,
Saya ketam padi jawi;
Tuan berkata sedap di mulut,
Saya mendengar sakit hati. (818)

You're reaping glutinous rice,
I'm reaping common grain,
The words on your lips sound nice,
I listen to them in pain.

8. Proverbs and enumerations ("peribahasa dan perbilangan"): this category also seems to be imprecise enough to accommodate pantuns which could or ought to have been placed elsewhere. For instance:

Padi muda jangan dilurut,
Kalau dilurut pecah batang;
Hati muda jangan diturut,
Kalau diturut salah datang. (858)

Young and tender rice don't touch,
For if you do, you'll see, it breaks.
Youthful heart don't follow too much,
For if you do, there come mistakes.

sounds much more like a moral precept than like a proverb. The following one expresses the same idea as a slightly different pantun classified in the "kepahlawanan" section. Here is the *maksud* of the latter:

Gajah mati meninggalkan tulang,
Manusia mati meninggalkan nama. (629)

When dead, an elephant leaves its bones,
A man who dies, his name remains.

and the *maksud* of the former:

Harimau mati meninggalkan belang,
Manusia mati meninggalkan nama. (856)

When dead a tiger leaves its stripes,
Etc.

Actually, many pantuns classified in some other category could also be placed in this one or the following, i.e.:

9. Similes and metaphors — "kias dan ibarat" — for the simple reason that there is hardly a pantun which does not contain either a proverb, a proverbial phrase or a metaphor, either implicit or explicit, as inherent in its own nature. So much so that examples abound and the discussion would be endless. The following pantun comes under this heading:

Bintang tujuh tinggal enam,
Jatuh sebiji di Majapahit;
Hilanglah sepuh tampaklah senam,
Itulah tanda emas tak baik. (1000)

Six stars remain where seven shone,
On Majapahit one fell to earth.
The metal's seen when the gilt is gone,
A sign your gold had little worth.

A variant of this pantun, different however to the point of saying exactly the reverse, an ironical parody, no doubt, can be found in the next category — wandering and voyage — where it does not seem to have much to do:

Bintang tujuh tinggal enam,
Jatuh satu ke Gunung Daik;
Bercahayalah sepuh hilang senam,
Itulah tanda emas yang baik. (1178)

Six stars remain where seven shone,
On Mount Daik one fell of old.
The gilt will shine when the metal's gone,
Showing how perfect is the gold.

In Wilkinson and Winstedt's *Pantun Melayu*, the former of these pantuns is listed with another two dozen under the heading "hutang budi dibawa mati" or "kind hearts are more than coronets" and it is true that, negatively speaking, this is a good place for it. As a metaphor, it can be deemed perhaps a little too obscure and for my part I prefer the version given by Hamilton in his *Malay Pantuns*.

where the *maksud* reads, without all those useless *lah*'s, under the title "spurious metal":

Hilang sepuh nampak senam,
Baharu tahu tuan tak baik. (16)

(Literally)
Gone the gilt one sees the base,
Then (only) I know you're not good.

A difficult task indeed, to classify pantuns, as can be seen again in the next and final categories — because their meaning is not always obvious, and people, as a matter of course, may differ in their interpretations.

10. Wandering and voyage ("kembara dan perantauan"): many of the pantuns listed in this category could be said to belong to one of the following sections, *separation*, like this one for instance:

Batang selasih permainan budak,
Berdaun sehelai dimakan kuda;
Bercerai kasih bertalak tidak,
Seribu tahun kembali juga. (1180)

Sweet basil leaf chewed by a horse,
The child had plucked a stem to play.
We part, my love, but not divorce:
Expect me still a hundred years away.

I have an impression that such a section should have been devoted, more precisely, to fate, destiny ("nasib, untung"). Thus, a pantun like the following would have been at its place in it, together with many of the "dagang" type, while many others could have been suitably assigned to section 11(d), "perpisahan":

Lipat kain bersimpul pulih,
Mari ditaruh luan perahu;
Tempat main boleh dipilih,
Tempat jatuh siapa yang tahu? (1355)

Fold your cloth and knot it loose,
Put it in the bows below.
Your ground for play you can choose,
But where we'll fall who may know?

11. Love ("percintaan"), by far the most numerous category, is subdivided into the following sections:

(a) : Meeting and coming of love ("pertemuan dan permulaan cinta"), for instance:

Perahu baharu temberang pun baharu,
Baharu sekali masuk Melaka;
Abang baharu adik pun baharu,
Baharu sekali kenal biasa. (1403)

Both ship and shrouds alike were new,
The only time Malacca's port we made.
Both you and I alike were new,
The only time together we played.

as well as its "rural" version, "*Lembu baharu kereta baharu*" (1574): "Oxen and cart alike were new". But why should these two successive "Apa guna" pantuns be found in the same section? First:

Apa guna bermain mata,
Kalau tidak dengan sungguhnya? (1413)

Why look at me like a vamp,
If it's only for a trick?

which would have been placed more judiciously in section 11(c) "cinta yang gagal" — then:

Apa guna hatiku ini,
Sini sangkut sana pun sayang? (1414)

What use is this heart of mine?
Here entangled, there in love?

In the second one, the phrase "apa guna" is misleading, as inap-

propriate, and there exists another version (in Hamilton's collection) beginning with "Apa kena", an expression more adequate, it seems to me, to the situation of a man who does not understand exactly what has *struck* his heart. The parallel with the *padi* field is beautiful:

Apa kena padiku ini,
Sini sangkut sana pun goyang?
Apa kena hatiku ini,
Sini sangkut sana pun sayang?

What has struck this rice of mine,
Here entwined and there all waving?
What has struck this heart of mine,
Here entangled, there all raving?

and as such, the pantun would be in the right place here.

We can also notice that one of the pantuns of this section:

Dua tiga kucing berlari,
Mana nak sama si kucing belang;
Dua tiga boleh kucari,
Mana nak sama adik seorang. (1455)

Two cats, three cats run away,
With the striped one which can vie?
Two girls, three girls woo I may,
Which of them with you can vie?

reappears in:

(b): Successful love — ("cinta yang berjaya") — in approximately the same version:

Banyak-banyak kucing berlari,
Etc ... (1608)

Many many cats run away,
Etc.

"Banyak-banyak" instead of "dua tiga", and "dicari" instead of

"kucari" being the only difference, can "permulaan cinta" become "cinta yang berjaya" only because of an increased number of cats ...? Of course, excellent pantuns like the following can be found in this section, like:

Di mana kuang bertelur?
Di atas lata, di ruang batu;
Di mana abang nak tidur?
Di atas dada, di ruang susu. (1635)

Where does the argus build its nest?
Between two rocks, the fall above.
My love, where do you wish to rest?
Between your breasts always, my love.

or:

Anak beruk di kayu rendang,
Turun mandi di dalam paya.
Hodoh buruk di mata orang,
Cantik manis di mata saya. (1659)

Young monkey for a bathe descends
To the swamp from a shady tree.
Plain, ugly in the eyes of friends,
Beauty and sweetness she's to me.

But it is surprising to find such a pantun as the following under the same heading:

Kalau padi katalah padi,
Jangan saya tertampi-tampi;
Kalau jadi katalah jadi,
Jangan saya ternanti-nanti. (1685)

If it's paddy you want, say it!
Do not let me winnow in pain.
If it's me you want, say it!
Do not let me wait in vain.

Does it not express doubt, hesitation as well as impatience on the part of the lover who is not assured of the other's love? Surprising also to find these two in the same section, as none of them sounds like the expression of victorious love:

Belayar masuk Kuala Kedah,
Patah tiang timpa kemudi.
Sekuntum bunga terlalu indah,
Sekalian kumbang asyik berahi. (1754)

Into Kuala Kedah we fare,
With fallen mast our helm to break.
A single flower-bud, so fair,
All the bees go mad for her sake.

and:

Layang-layang terbang melayang,
Jatuh ke laut disambar jerung;
Siapa kata saya tak sayang?
Kalau bunga rasa nak kendong. (1761)

A swallow skimming seas in flight,
Ah, should she fall, a shark would tear!
I, not love? Who said I might?
Ah, were the rose for me to wear!

(c): Love that fails — ("cinta yang gagal") — ... one of the best pantuns among so many good ones:

Permata jatuh di dalam rumput,
Jatuh di rumput gilang-gemilang;
Kasih umpama embun di rumput,
Datang matahari nescaya hilang. (1918)

Gems may fall amid the grass,
Yet keep glittering in the sun.
Love's like dew on morning grass,
Bound to vanish in the sun.

(d): Separation and rupture ("perpisahan dan perceraian")

Many choices could be discussed concerning these last two sections as well, and from a general point of view, it is clear enough already that this classification could be criticized easily — but which is not? According to its author himself, it is general and there is nothing absolute about it; it remains open to criticism and discussion. « Satu-satu pantun itu — he says — bukanlah tetap temanya, kerana setiap pantun boleh memasuki beberapa tema sekaligus » : the theme of a given pantun is not fixed and assured, because each pantun can contain several themes at a time. « Misalnya, tema percintaan boleh dipadankan ke dalam tema budi atau tema perpisahan dan perceraian dalam tema besar percintaan. Sering pula boleh disesuaikan ke dalam tema kembara dan perantauan » : for instance, the theme of love can be correlated with that of kindness or that of separation be part of the more general theme of love. It can also very often be in connection with the theme of wandering or voyage. It would then be unfair to insist too much on details, and we should rather acknowledge that in spite of its shortcomings, this kind of classification was the only possible one.

Most of the discrepancies I have pointed out could probably have been avoided, some would probably have to be discussed, and the system of classification is certainly not responsible for them. And chiefly, although they seem to take a large space in this chapter, it should be emphasized that they concern a relatively small number of pantuns out of several thousands, and two different collections in fact.

Moreover, if I have mentioned them, it was above all to show how difficult, always risky, often arbitrary and questionable it is to classify poetry and literature in general, where every poem is a particular case; it was also a way of giving an idea of the versatility of the pantun, of the ability of this brief poetic form, in spite of its fixed features, to convey so many different shades of meaning in the fields of emotion, feeling, thought, irony, satire, etc.

Finally, in practising this type of positive criticism, we can draw the attention of the reader to other aspects of the pantun which have certainly contributed to its continuous success through centuries, I mean its large interpretability and the aptitude of many of these poems to suit various occasions and individual situations.

Another drawback of the system adopted in the *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu* — although personally I do not care very much for this

type of pantuns — was to leave aside the various kinds of "pantun berkait" (while the main defect of the Balai Pustaka collection, conversely, is probably to include too many of them). It would have been interesting to quote at least a few good ones, such as the one proposed earlier in this chapter or the one in Marsden's *Grammar* noted by Victor Hugo — three stanzas of which can be found scattered in different sections of the *Kumpulan*. It is also regrettable not to find in this collection any example of a complete 'anak ayam' pantun, while some *isolated* stanzas of this type can be picked up here and there, which makes their *pembayang* scheme look even more arbitrary. But no system is perfect anyway, the author himself, I repeat it, was quite aware of this.

This is probably why R.O. Winstedt did not really classify his own collection, *Pantun Melayu*, although it comprises more than twelve hundred pantuns — grouping them in various numbers and fashions under many different headings giving — or trying to give — both in Malay and English, an idea of the many shades of amorous feelings, emotions, states of mind, etc. expressed in them; precise enough to direct the reader's mind towards a correct (or likely) interpretation of every separate pantun; supple enough, or vague enough, not to impose too stiff a frame on his poetic imagination and understanding.

Such a procedure, however, is not as simple and problem-free as might be deemed. Winstedt's headings can be very precise in quite a few cases, and cover only a limited number of pantuns — occasionally one or two and very often no more than three or four. Occasionally also, though more rarely, these can be "pantun berkait", like the four stanzas quoted by Hugo in *Les Orientales*. The great tree of love, among other main themes, divides and subdivides into a number of boughs and twigs, all with their proper denominations — for example: The coming of love (*Datangnya cinta*), Ruined at the core (*Ditebuk tupai*), The prowling thief (*Mencari mangsa*), Wilful youth (*Hati muda*), The flirts (*Mata keranjang*), Jealousy (*Cemburu*), Love's diplomacy (*Minta sirih sekapur*), Love's symbol (*Lambang asmara*), Plighted to another, The girl, A proper bride, The match-making, Love in a rice-field, Love and poverty, etc. etc.

In all these cases the heading corresponds to the subject of one, two, three pantuns — sometimes, only to one of them precisely, more vaguely to the others. There is no special order, it seems, the arrangement of the collection being only a matter of taste, association

of ideas, it may have come up quite haphazardly. But there are also a number of cases where Winstedt has put together one or two dozen pantuns or many more under such vague headings as "*Kata-kata sindiran, Rampai-rampai* (six dozen) *Ribut dalam cawan, Hutang budi, Pantun balas-berbalas* (eight dozen), *Kias dan ibarat* (six dozen), *Lovers, An intrigue* (!), etc."

As a matter of fact he seems to have, long before the authors of the *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu*, been facing the same problem: there are so many pantuns, each with its particular shade of meaning, that the categories tend to be all the more imprecise as they try to accommodate a greater number of them. Shorter collections, like Hamilton's, on the contrary, not even reaching two hundred quatrains, can go so far as to give each separate pantun a sort of title. Going through the list of these "titles" in both Winstedt's and Hamilton's anthologies can give an idea of the rich variety of motifs that can be found even in a comparatively reduced set. About ninety pantuns only out of Hamilton's choice are to be found among Winstedt's 1251. Let us examine seventy-five of them and compare the titles or headings under which they appear in both collections :

	HAMILTON		WINSTEDT
1.	Reality of dreams	484.	Lover's fears
2.	Illusion of dreams	486.	Lover's fears
6.	Spiritual reunion	333.	Dreams
7.	Lure of presence (?)	84.	Love the lode-star
8.	First encounter	1221.	"rampai-rampai"
10.	Love's awakening	618.	Flower-like girl
12.	Beauty enamours	609.	Honeysuckle and bee
13.	Flowers and bees	614.	Honeysuckle and bee
14.	Love's challenge	224.	"Lovers"
15.	Love's bonds	169.	Love's protestant
16.	Maidenly awareness	714.	The loves of the birds
17.	Love at sight	270.	"an intrigue" (?)
18.	Love's commencement	4.	The coming of love
19.	Enchantment of smiles	215.	"lovers"
20.	A striking coiffure	421.	My love's tresses
24.	A reviving influence	233.	"lovers"
25.	Falling in fancy	31.	Wilful youth

26.	Love is blind	145.	"...to me excellent"
27.	Headstrong love	36.	Wilful youth
28.	Love triumphs	390.	Meeting at night (?)
30.	An impatient lover	228.	"lovers"
31.	Dalliance denounced	344.	The lover's prayer
33.	Love's poison	244.	"lovers"
34.	Heart's delight	245.	"lovers"
35.	A lovesick person	225.	"lovers"
38.	Music for moods	105.	The cares of love
30.	A well-guarded maiden	269.	"an intrigue"
40.	A precious flower	1250.	"rampai-rampai"
41.	Unattainable fruits	268.	"an intrigue"
42.	A hopeless love	324.	Unrequited love
43.	An immutable troth	198.	"Till a'the sea gang dry"
44.	Impermanence of love	483.	Fleeting love
45.	Doubt dispelled	176.	Love's sincerity
47.	Eternal remembrance	434.	Lover's vows
53.	Surpassing love	450.	"a lover's vows"
54.	Love's immolation	121.	Sick unto death of love
56.	Self-surrender	455.	"a lover's vows"
57.	Complete surrender	78.	Affinity
58.	Predestined union	197.	"Till a'the sea gang dry"
59.	Marriage everlasting	456.	"a lover's vows"
62.	In death united	693.	"ave atque vale" (?)
66.	The ideal maiden	216.	"lovers"
69.	The perfect wife	657.	Jealous love
72.	A matrimonial tie	236.	"lovers"
73.	Brunettes preferred	141.	putih kuning apa gunanya
74.	for temperament	140.	putih kuning apa gunanya
75.	Roving eyes	955.	Mesalliance (???)
81.	Love's pillow	425.	Were she in my arms!
82.	Love's playfulness	406.	Kisses
83.	Illicit love	592.	Love's selfishness
89.	Natural inclinations	1127.	Each after his own kind
90.	Dangerous courses	889.	"balas-membalas"
94.	Unrealised expectations	314.	The discomfitted lover
95.	Fair but false	783.	"a battle of similes"
96.	Superficial love	447.	"a lover's vows"
98.	Surface calm	529.	"bermadu" (?)
99.	Divided affections	510.	"bermadu" (?)

100.	A deceitful tongue	1239.	"rampai-rampai"
102.	Spurious metal	1046.	"hutang budi" (?)
104.	A hopeless wreck	586.	Love's shipwreck
105.	Resignation to refusal	513.	"bermadu" (?)
107.	Definite divorcement	523.	"bermadu"
108.	A final break	666.	The divorce of love
109.	A past love	662.	the divorce of love
114.	Playthings of fate	1218.	"rampai-rampai"
115.	Ineluctable fate	570.	Love among the islands (!)
117.	Hopeful reliance	108.	Hope
122.	Emptiness of wealth	1124.	"jangan tamak"
129.	Base ingratitude	595.	Love's selfishness
129.	Lifelong gratitude	1031.	"hutang budi ..."
130.	Remembrance of favours	571.	Love among the islands!
133.	Song by request	637.	A lover's quarrel
137.	A feckless feline	1133.	When the cat is away
146.	Fortitude of love	1133.	When the cat is away
147.	Enforced farewell	563.	Lover's parting

Coincidence, of course, can be observed as the case may be: "love's commencement = the coming of love", for instance; or "a striking coiffure = my love's tresses"; "a hopeless love = unrequited love"; "impermanence of love = fleeting love"; "doubt dispelled = love's sincerity"; "unrealised expectations = the discomfitted lover", etc.

But what to think of Winstedt's heading "affinity" for the following pantun, aptly entitled "complete surrender" by Hamilton, for instance:

Tiup api panggang tilan,
Anak raja pulang menjala.
Hidup mati di tangan tuan,
Adik tidak banyak bicara.

Fan the fire and roast the fish,
The prince is back from netting strands.
I have not much to say or wish,
My life and death are in your hands.

Or of "jealous love" for this one, labelled "the perfect wife" by

Hamilton:

Apa guna berkain batik
Kalau tidak dengan sucinya?
Apa guna berbini cantik
Kalau tidak dengan budinya?

What use is batik in life
If it be not neat and clean?
What use is a pretty wife
If her heart is hard and mean?

Or of this other one, where Hamilton's title "roving eyes" unaccountably becomes "mesalliance" with Winstedt:

Jalan-jalan, sepanjang jalan,
Singgah-menyinggah di pagar orang,
Pura-pura mencari ayam,
Ekor mata di anak orang.

Along the pathway, now and then,
O'er the fence he pops his head,
Pretending to look for a hen,
But peeping at girls instead.

Hamilton is certainly not a hundred per cent safe in his interpretations — but who is? For instance, "dalliance denounced" (31:344) can be misinterpreted as he makes use of the archaic meaning of the word — tarrying, dilly-dallying — whereas in the context it could be understood as flirtation; but Winstedt's "the lover's prayer" is not quite appropriate either. "Lure of presence" is also an ambiguous denomination for the well-known pantun "Jikalau tidak kerana bintang" and "Maidenly awareness" not quite convincing for the one ending with:

Tahan racik burung tak masuk,
Burung biasa makan di tangan. (16:714)

Set the snare, the bird recoils,
Wont to being fed by hand.

Going through these comparative lists may appear somewhat tedious, especially in the absence of the pantuns themselves, and the

reader should of course refer to them. But it shows one thing at any rate, or even two: on the one hand, to give every pantun a special title or label is certainly a more precise way of identification than classification into large categories under general headings; especially, it is more enlightening to the foreign reader who is not aware of the symbolic, metaphorical, proverbial or allusive "double meanings" underlying apparently innocent-looking expressions; even though these may not be devoid of poetic power in themselves, part of the intention, of the *maksud*, can escape the attention, the perception of the reader who has not been made receptive to it. In the case of Hamilton's comparatively limited choice of **good** well-known stock pantuns, these titles and special notes at the end of the book make it easier for the otherwise unprepared reader to appreciate the subtle implications of each quatrain more fully, if not entirely .... Irrespective, of course, of misinterpretations on the editor's part.

On the other hand, it is clear that even a connoisseur like Winstedt was not able to maintain an equal standard of precision in the headings of his collection. One may wonder why he took pains to attribute titles to isolated pantuns or relatively precise denominations to small groups of two or three and at the same time list dozens of them under such vague headings as "rampai-rampai", "a battle of similes" and "rival singers", or even totally or partly irrelevant as "love among the islands", "bermadu" or "an intrigue", etc. as we have seen. Although composed for the most part of interesting pantuns, his collection is rather disappointing from the point of view of interpretation. And the comparison undoubtedly turns out to the advantage of Hamilton's in this case (quite apart, of course, from the indiscutable interest and richness of Winstedt's and other larger collections of pantuns as a treasury of priceless heritage in the poetry of the world).

These are only anthologies, even the *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu* with its more than two thousand quatrains. And yet the problem of classification has not yet been solved. It will certainly take several volumes to gather **all the pantuns** that have been collected to this day, which will make the problem still more difficult. Can thematics be a convenient and suitable basis for classification ? The answer to this question would imply first of all that a complete survey of pantun thematics was made — which is far from being the case — a huge task actually.

CHAPTER V

The Eternal Controversy

« There is a peculiarity of the pantun, Prof. Mohd. Taib Osman wrote, which has been the subject of an unending discussion amongst scholars of Malay. This concerns the connection between the first two lines and the last two lines of a quatrain. Some scholars maintain that the first two lines are suggestive of the message conveyed in the last two; but others are of the opinion that there is no relevance of the first two lines to the message conveyed in the last two except to provide the rhyming scheme. It would be a long discourse to go into such a discussion; but suffice it to say that the most important part of the *pantun* is the last two lines which convey the actual message. »[1]

We could reply to this last assertion — however true it may be to a certain extent — that the *whole* "message" of a poem really consists of much more than is actually said, what Prof. Mohd. Taib Osman calls "the actual message". Whoever cares for poetry will know that its full power takes its source beyond expression, between the lines or between the words, as the saying is, in what Baudelaire called "correspondances" — by means of the mysterious aura, or subtle exhalation, emanating from the various interplays of words: images, similes, metaphors, symbols, hidden meanings, associations of connotations often invisible at first sight, harmonies and harmonics, etc. — all that makes for a highly vibrating whole rather than a flat statement. If such were the message — I mean reduced to its literality — there would be one love poem only: "I love you".

Moreover, a pantun reduced to its "maksud" is no longer a

[1] *Bunga Rampai*, *op. cit.* p. 32.

pantun, although many a second couplet can very well stand alone, like, for instance:

Terbakar kampung kelihatan asap,
Terbakar hati siapakah tahu?

When a village burns you can see the smoke,
If a heart's on fire, who can tell?

but this is mainly because these two lines contain an antithesis, a negative analogy, so to speak, a comparison revolving around the idea of "terbakar" and establishing a difference that goes beyond what is actually expressed: explicitly, you can see a house or village on fire, whereas no smoke arises from a burning heart; implicit is the idea that it burns more deeply, as a more painful and unbearable disaster. The same implicit message is perceptible in the "maksud" of another famous pantun:

Karam di laut boleh ditimba,
Karam di hati bilakan sudah?

A ship that sinks you can bale,
A heart that sinks, when will it end?

Nevertheless, facing these lines alone, without the couplet that should precede them, we are conscious that something is missing. To some extent, each of them sounds more like a sort of proverb or proverbial saying than like a poem. Something is lacking, which we shall try to define further on, but can feel immediately when reading the four lines of the first of the above pantuns:

Ibarat sekuntum bunga dedap,
Rupa indah tiada berbau;
Terbakar kampung kelihatan asap,
Terbakar hati siapakah tahu?

Much like the bloom of the erythrine tree,
So fair in shape but with no scent to smell,
Thus, when a village burns, smoke you can see,
But if a heart's on fire, who can tell?

Let us complete now the second one:

Pisau raut hilang di rimba,
Pakaian anak raja di Jeddah.
Karam di laut boleh di timba,
Karam di hati bilakan sudah?

A knife lost in the wooded vale,
A king's son in Jeddah wore it.
A ship that's sinking you can bale,
A heart's wreck, there's no end to it.

The relationship between the two parts is less evident this time. Some people will say there is none at all. I shall retort that it is not true, however subtle – far-fetched perhaps – the link may be: symbolically, something was lost, something precious (for concretely, in everyday life, a whittling knife is a precious tool for the rural Malay), which announces or reflects a moral or sentimental loss. To Jeddah are linked connotations of pilgrimage, with a long voyage by sea and risks of shipwreck ....

This is why the discussion is worthwhile, I think. In fact all scholars are right, whether they maintain that the "pembayang" does not mirror anything, is a mere jingle, a simple sound and rhyming pattern, or are of the opinion that it is a suggestion or a reflection, however veiled, of the more evident substance of the "maksud". They are right simply because those who develop extreme opinions in this regard only propose as examples, among thousands of pantuns, such as support their thesis — right, then, but only partly, or partially. The truth, actually, is much more mitigated and must be sought beyond the arbitrary limits of their contradictory opinions.

Let us go through a few of them. This is what Hans Overbeck worte in 1922:[2]

> I once went through my collection of *pantun* with a clever Malay munshi from Sumatra and learned something about the meaning of the second lines, but very little of their connection with the first pair. The munshi indeed declared the first couplets to be meaningless, and observing

[2] *The Malay Pantun, op. cit.* p.p. 17 18.

my apparent incredulity, pointed triumphantly to the passage in the "Pelayaran Abdullah":

« *Ada pun jalan segala pantun itu empat-empat mistar adanya; bermula mistar yang di atas dua itu, tiada ertinya, melainkan iaitu menjadi pasangannya sahaja; maka yang dua mistar di bawah, itulah yang ada bererti, adanya.* »

Menjadi pasangannya the munshi declared to mean that they were only there "to carry the rhyme". Undoubtedly there is a grain of truth in Abdullah's statement, at least as far as modern Malays and *pantuns* are concerned. A glance over the quatrains of "Pantun Melayu"[3] will show that the principle of assonance is frequently dispensed with, and as regards the "veiled and unveiled thought" I would venture to add the "compulsion of rhyme" to the long list of explanations enumerated by Dr. Winstedt to solve the difficulties of the European student when he meets with an apparently meaningless first pair of lines.

"Out of a big repertory of old-world verses the singer chooses one suitable for the purpose or possibly invents a new verse or changes and adapts an old". "Favorite quatrains have undergone a little Odyssey of adventure up and down the Malay Archipelago".[4] The real meaning of a *Pantun* lies in the second couplet; what the singer wants to say , he expresses in the second couplet, and apparently the second couplet lingers in the memory of the Malay much stronger than the first. When hearing extemporised *pantun*, I have often noticed that the singer has fixed in his mind only the last couplet and improvises the first simply to get the ryhme, without paying attention to principles of assonance and veiled thought. If he finds in his momentary surroundings or occupation a motive for the rhyme he needs, he will seize it at once. Again any adept in *pantun* has at his command a large number of rhyme equivalents which will enable him to construct at a moment's notice the first couplet that gives the rhyme for the second, and even to do it in a neat style, giving a nice little picture, which however has hardly any inner connection with the thought expressed

[3] Wilkinson and Winstedt's collection of pantuns (see Bibliography).
[4] *Ibid.* p. 199, lines 1-3 and 29-30 respectively

in the second couplet. Sometimes he simply alters a stock-phrase just to get at the rhyme. The choice of fruits put by the extemporiser into a *puan* or *dulang* very often seems to be determined solely by the rhyme, and so too the use of stock-phrases *dari ... belayar ke ...*, *orang ... pulang ke ...*; *kalau tuan pergi ke ... carikan sahaya ...*."

Undoubtedly most of this is true — I should even say all is true as regards a certain type of pantuns only, the proportion of which in the whole treasury of pantuns is certainly not so high as it seems. Of the two pantuns quoted above, for instance, it is clear that the first couplet of the second is liable to appear as having no connection at all with its second couplet; but which is more, it does not bring in much in the way of sound structures, apart from the rhymes and one inner rhyme .... But, as I said, there can be more it than meets the eye at first sight.

In his *Warisan Puisi Melayu*,[5] Prof. Mohd. Taib Osman has tried to encompass the question which he had put aside, as we have seen, in an earlier and shorter work: « Persoalan sama ada ada atau tidak hubungan antara "pembayang maksud" dan "maksud" pantun telah mendapat perhatian sarjana-sarjana dari kalangan orang Belanda dan Inggeris yang pernah mengkaji pantun Melayu .... »
« The question whether there is a link or not between the first and second couplets of a pantun has been examined by the Dutch and British scholars who have studied the Malay pantun » — he writes,[6] giving then the examples of one or two pantuns, which I shall mention further on, and the opinions of various scholars about them, like Prof. Pijnappel and van Ophuysen, as well as Dr. Winstedt, before exposing his own: « Pada pendapat saya, ada pantun yang dua baris pertamanya benar-benar merupakan "pembayang maksud", tetapi bukan semua pantun dapat dikatakan sedemikian. » — i.e. in his opiñion, « there are pantuns whose first two lines really represent a "pembayang maksud", but all pantuns cannot be said to be so. » He then discusses several pantuns, whether "serious" or "farcical", where it is clear that there is a connection other than mere analogy of sound between their two parts and in which the "pembayang" really prepares us to receive the message conveyed by the "maksud". Here is

[5] *Op. cit.* See Chapter III above.
[6] *Ibid.* p. 5.

one of the most interesting examples he proposes:

Apa digulai orang di ladang,
Pucuk kacang bersela-sela.
Apakah untung anak dagang,
Hari petang tangga berhela.

What does this man cook in the field?
A dish of bean-sprouts far too small,
What does a wanderer's fortune yield?
House ladders hauled in at nightfall.

About the first two lines, he asks the following question: « Adakah maksud ini dibayangkan oleh dua baris yang pertama? » and replies: « Saya kira terpulang kepada tanggapan kita sendiri. Umpamanya kita boleh berhujah dengan mengatakan bahawa suasana berdagang itu dibayangkan pada orang di ladang memasak gulai. Selalunya orang menggulai di rumah atau di dapur, dan tidakkah menggulai di ladang seperti orang berdagang juga? Dan gambaran "pucuk kacang bersela-sela" boleh juga dihujahkan sebagai sesuatu yang tidak tetap, iaitu tidak menggambarkan satu kebulatan. Dan tidakkah gambaran ini membayangkan gambaran anak dagang yang tidak berpangkalan tetapi beralih-alih duduknya di rantau orang? » « Is there any meaning reflected in the first two lines? » he asks; and replies: « I think it depends on our own reaction. For instance, to support this opinion, we can say that the image of a wanderer's life in a foreign country is reflected in the man who is cooking in the middle of a field. Do not people cook in their houses or their kitchens usually, not in a field like this wanderer? Then, the image of the rare beansprouts can also be put forward as something not specific, i.e. not representing anything common to all. And does not this image reflect that of the exile who has nowhere to stay but keeps changing place in a foreign land? »[7]

In other words, in a case like this, Prof. Mohd. Taib Osman leaves it to each and everyone's imagination to decide whether there is a connection or not — or rather, because it is not a matter of logic, to feel it or not. As we shall see, this is probably the case with many pantuns, but modern poetry should have accustomed us to this kind

[7] *Ibid.* p. 8.

of special reception which has very little to do with the prosaic or rational use of language. And Prof. Mohd. Taib Osman adds justly: « Saya kira perkara seperti ini dapat dibincangkan tanpa satu keputusan yang muktamad. Walau bagaimanapun, adalah sesuatu yang menarik untuk memperhatikan hubungan antara kedua bahagian pantun itu ...» : « I think such a question can be discussed without ever coming to any final conclusion. Howbeit, it is interesting to examine the connection between the two halves of a pantun ... »[8] He really has no objection to this idea, he says, because there are pantuns whose first couplet reflects the "maksud" of their last two lines. « Tetapi, » he pursues, « banyak pula pantun yang dengan apa cara tanggapan kita pun, kita tidak dapat melihat adanya hubungan pemikiran antara pembayang maksud dengan maksud. » : « But there are also numerous pantuns in which, whatever our reaction may be, we cannot detect any connection of thought between "pembayang maksud" and "maksud"[9] Often, he goes on, we find the same "maksud" mirrored by different "pembayang". He could also have objected that there exist identical "pembayang" with different "maksud", which, in my opinion, is not a valid argument against the possible existence of a link between them, as I will try to show further on.

It seems in fact as if Prof. Mohd. Taib Osman's opinion was better expressed in the following passage : « Saya lebih cenderung mengatakan bahawa hubungan antara dua baris pertama dan dua baris penghabisan ***merupakan sesuatu yang teknikal***: pertama dari segi bentuk pantun itu dan kedua dari segi pemakaian pantun itu dalam masyarakat. Dari segi yang pertama, dua baris pertama itu mengemukakan unsur rima bagi dua baris penghabisan. Unsur rima ini penting, kerana salah satu ukuran pantun yang baik ialah rimanya tidak sumbang. Dari segi yang kedua pula, pantun itu adalah satu corak komunikasi yang berseni. Apabila kita berpantun, seperti berbalas-balas pantun, kita berkomunikasi dengan cara khusus, dan berbeza daripada komunikasi sehari-hari. Ukuran seni bagi komunikasi dengan pantun ialah: maksudnya tepat kena pada situasi atau tujuan kita berpantun itu, dan cara menyampaikan maksud itu berkias dengan indahnya. Oleh kerana kedua syarat ini mesti dipenuhi, iaitu syarat bentuk dan syarat penggunaannya, maka terdapat

[8] *Ibid.* p. 8.
[9] *Ibid.* p. 9.

ahli-ahli pantun menggunakan formula-formula tertentu, terutama dalam menyediakan dua baris pertama... » or, in other words: « I am more inclined to say that the connection between the first two lines and the final ones ***represents something technical***: firstly, from the point of view of the pantun form itself, secondly regarding the use of pantuns in Malay society. From the former of these points of view, the first two lines bring forth to the final ones the element of the rhyme. This element is essential, as one of the criteria for a good pantun is good rhymes. From the latter, the pantun is an artistic form of communication. When we create or use pantuns, when we exchange pantuns, for instance, we communicate in a particular fashion, different from everyday communication. The artistic criterium when we communicate by means of pantuns is this: its meaning should fit the situation or our purpose exactly, and the way of conveying this meaning should be allusive and beautiful. As these two conditions must be fulfilled, regarding form and social use, there are people who, when composing pantuns, employ certain formulas, especially in the arrangement of the first two lines ... » [10] Some of these are well-known: "kalau tuan pergi ke ..., kirim saya (or: belikan, pesan, carilah saya) ..." ("If you go to ... my love, bring me...") or, for instance, "bunga ... di dalam ..." or "di atas ...", or again "buah ... buah ..., Ketiga dengan buah ..." (such or such flower or fruit on this or that) etc. etc. But to me this is not convincing either and we shall see clearly enough that the poetical connection between the two couplets of a pantun does not really depend on the fact that an original picture or, on the contrary, a stock-phrase is being used.

It will be interesting to note, before going on, what Prof. Mohd. Taib Osman writes in this respect concerning the "pantun berkait": « Dalam jenis pantun ini, baris kedua dan baris keempat dalam bait pantun yang pertama diulangi dalam bait berikutnya sebagai baris pertama dan ketiga. ***Dengan cara ini, mustahil jikalau bayangan maksud itu dapat dilaksanakan daripada satu bait kepada bait-bait yang berikutnya***. Maka itu pada hemat saya, apa yang berlaku ialah baris-baris yang disambung dari satu bait ke satu bait yang berikut itu memainkan fungsinya sebagai penyambung: baris kedua yang diulang sebagai baris pertama dalam bait berikutnya mengemukakan unsur rima, sementara baris keempat yang diulang sebagai baris ketiga dalam bait yang berikutan itu berlaku sebagai penyambung

[10] *Ibid.* p. 9.

maksud. » or: « In this sort of pantun, the second and fourth line of the first quatrain is repeated in the following one as the first and third lines. In this way, we cannot believe that the reflection of the idea can be brought forth from one quatrain to the quatrains which follow. This is why, in my opinion, what happens is that the lines which are resumed from one quatrain to another play the part of a connection: the second line, repeated as the first in the next stanza brings forth the element of the rhyme, while the fourth, repeated as the third, acts as a connection of meaning. »[11] This corresponds exactly to what can be found in the two *pantun berkait* I have quoted in the preceding chapters, although there is much more than that in them (as the successive first couplets bear not only the sound element but also create a real continuity of symbolic parallel meanings in the "pembayang") but not, I think, in so many of this type, where only the "penyambung bunyi dan rima" — the connection of sound and rhyme is present.

There exist pantuns whose two parts have been molten together and cast into one single continuous concept, so that they could be said to be no longer pantuns but simple quatrains assuming the outward form of a pantun in sound organization, rhyme and rhythmic pattern, like the following — a delicious vignette of kampung life, already quoted before:

Jalan-jalan sepanjang jalan,
Singgah-menyinggah di pagar orang,
Pura-pura mencari ayam,
Ekor mata di anak orang.

Along the pathway, now and then,
O'er the fence he pops his head,
Pretending to look for a hen,
But peeping at girls instead.

The link between "pembayang" and "maksud" is no problem here of course, but this is rather rare. More frequent are those where the connection is so obvious that it could lead to mere platitude. The following, where the parallel is more than evident, remains within the

[11] *Ibid*, p. 10.

limits of poetical efficiency only because the second couplet's meaning is veiled in its expression —:

Pilih-pilih tempat mandi,
Esa teluk, kedua pantai;
Pilih-pilih tempat menjadi,
Esa elok, kedua pandai.

Choose well the spot where you would lave, for a swim,
First a bay and then the strand.
Choose well the maiden whom you crave,
First for looks, then deft of hand.

(A.W.H.)

whereas this one:

Baik-baik belayar malam,
Arus deras, karangnya tajam;
Kalau tidak malim yang faham,
Di situ banyak kapal yang tenggelam.

Be careful when you sail by night,
Reefs are sharp and currents strong,
There, for lack of a pilot's light,
Many a good ship has gone wrong.

can be read as one continuous practical piece of advice for sailors or fishermen, where the connection is then quite clear, and at the same time, with a second meaning, as a moral precept: how to conduct one's life so as to avoid the reefs of evil, thanks to the double acception of "malim" as "boat pilot" and "religious guide".

On the other hand, it is true again that there are panturns which seem to offer no connection between their two halves, where the first two lines ring like mere jingles, not conducive to any particular poetic vibration other than echoing sounds in the best cases. Examples would be numerous, but even before quoting any of them, we should ask ourselves a few questions, take a few glaring facts into account instead of ignoring them and also put once and for all a few repeatedly uttered statements back into their right place — that of the exceptions which confirm the rule.

The most important of these questions will be, perhaps: Where, in fact, in what kind of pantuns do these "meaningless" *pembayang* occur? I should say, most of the time in **nursery rhymes**, or their equivalent — such pantuns as have been classified in some anthologies as "pantun anak-anak", or as "pantun jenaka", such as:

Satu dua tiga empat
Lima enam tujuh lapan;
Anak ikan sudah lompat,
Jatuh balik atas papan.

One and two and three and four,
Five and six and seven and eight!
Little fish will jump and soar,
To fall back into the plate!

(on to the chopping board, in fact!) where it would be rather difficult indeed to give a satisfactory interpretation of the first two lines in connection with the rest — lines which could not be termed "pembayang" as they really reflect nothing, as no particular meaning, or beauty, lies there beneath! Not because these lines contain only figures, for even figures, as the case may be, according to the way they are used, can even afford some sort of symbolic meaning. R.O. Winstedt quotes the following pantun proffered by van Ophuysen as an objection to those who believe that there is always a connection between the two halves of a pantun:

Satu dua tiga enam,
Satu dan enam jadi tujuh;
Buah delima yang ditanam
Buah berangan hanya tumbuh.

One and two and three are six,
One and six are seven, I said,
Pomegranate seed in earth I fix,
But get a chestnut tree instead!

First of all, this does not prove anything: every pantun is a separate entity, an independent poem, and it has never been stated anywhere that both halves had to be related in meaning, whether

closely or loosely. Considering the number of existing pantuns, a pantun like this one is a very particular case, not to say an exception. Winstedt, besides, replies with "another quatrain of almost identical sentiment":[12]

Satu tangan bilangan lima,
Dua tangan bilangan sepuluh:
Sahaya bertanam biji delima,
Apa sebab peria tumbuh?

One hand is fingers five indeed,
Two, fingers ten, I bet.
Why, having sowed pomegranate seed,
Gourds bitter do I get?

One hand is five and two hands amount to ten: a gardener is counting his plants, but to his surprise, finds that a gourd has grown where he had sowed a seed of pomegranate. And the same explanation can be applied to the preceding pantun as well, the only difference being that the gardener counts his plants one by one from one to seven until he discovers what has happened — or, similarly, to this other pantun:

Satu dua tiga empat,
Lima enam tujuh setengah:
Berapa tinggi tupai melompat,
Sekali-sekali jatuh ke tanah.

One and two and three and four,
Five, six, seven, half of eight.
However high the squirrel may soar,
To earth he falls, or soon or late.

In this case, it is not difficult to imagine that the figures represent the squirrel's successive leaps, "setengah" standing for a "half jump", perhaps the ultimate bound that fails. Howbeit, as a Frenchman, I cannot help thinking of our popular children's rhymes called "comptines" precisely because one "counts" in them and their rhyming pattern is based on the sounds of figures, as in the following:

[12] *Classical Malay Literature*, *op. cit.* p. 200.

Un, deux, trois,	*One, two, three,*
Je vais au bois;	*To the wood I flee;*
Quatre, cinq, six,	*Four, five, six,*
Cueillir des cerises;	*To gather cherries;*
Sept, huit, neuf,	*Seven, eight, nine,*
Dans mon panier neuf;	*In new basket mine;*
Dix, onze, douze,	*Ten, eleven, twelve,*
Elles sont toutes rouges.	*They're all red.*

In addition to the fact that "Un, deux, trois" is often a way of starting a race, usually followed by "partez" — go! — this regular enumeration of figures introduces not only a rhyme pattern but also a dynamic rhythm, and I am sure there is something similar in the use of figures in the aforesaid pantuns, together with a set of varied rhymes.

In the same way, the "anak ayam" series of "pantun berkait" can be considered as "comptines": it would be difficult to find in them any other connection between first and second couplet than in sound and rhyme pattern, nor any other role for this type of "pembayang" than that of supplying a species of dynamic impulse to the whole succession of quatrains. It is probable that such a system was primarily devised for nursery rhymes or children in general, but was then used for more "serious" pantuns as well.[13] Of course, you can hook up whatever "maksud" you like to this sort of "pembayang" which does not reflect anything, with only one new line, the fourth, in every stanza, until the death of the last chick forces you to stop. Useless to emphasize the purely mechanical character of such a system, which certainly does not help to create a really poetic atmosphere. We can find the same defect, although to a lesser degree, in the ordinary "pantun berkait", with a tendency to artificial succession that increases with the number of quatrains — but also, as I have shown, with remarkable exceptions.

The question of the relevance of "pembayang" to "maksud" is different — and really interesting — with pantuns of the following type:

Layang-layang di atas bukit,
Kayu tengar dari seberang;
Cinta sayang bukan sedikit,
Racun penawar tuan seorang.

[13] See for instance "Pantun Nasihat" N°1411-1419, pp. 225-226 in *Pantun Melayu*, Balai Pustaka, *op. cit.*

Above the hill the swallows sweep,
Tall mangroves from the other shore.
My love's no little thing to keep,
Poison and cure, you're both, and more!

Swallows over the hill, the mangrove on the other bank or on the far-off shore ... What do they have to do with this man's love, which is "no little thing", or with the beloved who is "both the poison and the cure"? Nothing of course, but as much as have to do, perhaps, with our feelings, sentiments, states of mind, etc. the elements of the scenery which surrounds us or the various objects on which we may look precisely when such thoughts, the conscience of feeling this or that way, joy or suffering, dispair or anxiety, do befall us. The boy or girl who feels paralysed by his or her passion may envy the freedom of sweeping swallows in the sky; the mangrove down there, the muddy lowlands where it grows, its entangled vegetation and slimy amphibious creatures may well be the image of the lover's present stuck-up condition. Does not the implicit opposition of swampy lowlands to sky or hill reflect the twofold aspect of the lover's *soul-state* and of what his love represents for him — poison and cure, hell and heaven?

Other models of this type may refer to a few objects in a room, to a house or a garden, some place in the forest or on the beach, to various fruits or trees, or else to some historical event or incident of everyday life, etc: the question of the connection between the two couplets, of the possible **poetical relationship** between them, can receive the same sort of answer, i.e. can be interpreted according to our own individual imagination and sensitivity — the best way being **not** to think about it and leave the language to act for itself. Those who feel that they cannot be satisfied with what they deem to be the passive acceptance of "no meaning" if not of "nonsense" should never forget that these elements of still life (which often constitute the "pembayang") are to be considered at least as a circumstance, the immediate environment within which the poetic thought came to life, and that you cannot sever it from them.

I think it useful to repeat here what I quoted from Fauconnier's book in Chapter I : « The two first lines of a pantun [...] are only a preparation for the idea that is to develop in the succeeding ones. They create the atmosphere without the crudity of metaphor. [...] So short a poem should be read slowly as a still life should be looked at for a long while. Indeed it is a still life [...] The last two lines reveal the

soul-state of the picture... » These few lines are essential to me. Nothing could cast a brighter light on the profound relationship which can be felt in almost every well-inspired pantun between its two couplets, nor do it as briefly. I remember them everytime I have to read and "understand" a new pantun or try again to find out what has long escaped my attention. And they bid me to keep quiet, to listen and look without any pre-conceived ideas, to be open to anything that may rise slowly from between the lines, words or sounds of the poem.

But we still have to examine a few cases where different problems are raised by that relationship. One is the question of historical allusions; another is the fact that some words or what they stand for (fruit, plant, etc.) may have a symbolic value, or that their sounds evoke other words of similar resonance not necessarily expressed in the pantun, carrying the true though hidden meaning; another yet, that a proverb, or part of it, or simply an allusion to it may be present in the pantun, whether in the first or the second half, and projects or diffuses its light, usually subdued, on the whole picture.

The first case seems to be by far the rarest.

As a matter of fact, I have seldom read a book about pantuns without finding in it the inevitable everlasting omnipresent "telur itik dari Senggora", even in Alias Yunos' study, *Pantun Melayu Sastera Ra'ayat*.[14] From Pijnappel to Winstedt and Prof. Mohd. Taib Osman, hardly anyone has forgotten to mention it and to give his own explanation. But the pantun is interesting in many respects: first of all because it is one of the oldest pantuns ever recorded, as it was found in one of the manuscripts of *Sejarah Melayu* (1612):

---

[14] *Op. cit.* pp. 14-15. But the "telur itik" pantun is not quoted by the author in connection with the "pembayang/maksud" issue. « Maksud si pemantun mengarang pantun ini ialah menggambarkan suatu peristiwa sejarah. Oleh demikian, tidaklah dia menggunakan perkataan-perkataan yang elok bunyinya untuk nyanyian Dendang Sayang. Perkataan-perkataan 'dilangkahi', 'darahnya titik' agak kaku, tidak sesuai dengan irama Dendang Sayang atau Serampang Dua Belas. » : « The intention of the author in composing this pantun was to illustrate a historical episode. That is why he did not make use of words the sounds of which would be beautiful enough for singing at Dendang Sayang sessions (*a*). Words like 'dilangkahi', 'darahnya titik' are rather rough, not fitting the rhythm of Dendang Sayang or Serampang Dua Belas (*b*). »

(a): where alternate love songs are sung by young men and women, an occasion for social entertainment.
(b): also Serampang Laut, a type of dance and the tune.

Telur itik dari Senggora,
Pandan terletak dilangkahi;
Darahnya titik di Singapura,
Badannya terhantar di Langkawi.

(Literally:
A duck's egg from Senggora,
A spread pandanus mat tread upon,
His blood dripping in Singapura,
His body disposed of in Langkawi.)

secondly because it is not self-explanatory; there is a historical allusion in it, or rather an allusion to an anecdote which cannot be understood without reference to the *Sejarah Melayu* itself, where it is said: « Now there was a man of Pasai called Tun Jana Khatib .... As he was walking past the palace of the Raja of Singapura, the queen was looking out of the window and Tun Jana Khatib saw her. Now there was a betel-palm growing beside the palace, and Tun Jana Khatib cast a spell on it and it turned into two palms. And when Paduka Sri Maharaja saw what had happened he was very angry and said, "That's the sort of man Tun Jana Khatib is! No sooner does he know that the queen is looking at him than he shews his powers!" And the king ordered him to be put to death. So [he] was taken to the place of execution... And when [he] was stabbed by the executioner, his blood dripped to the ground, though his body was spirited to Langkawi. »[15] But this story throws light on the "maksud" only. And the "pembayang", in fact, is not "historical", but composed of two main elements, "telur itik" and "pandan": « Ducks' eggs, » Winstedt notes,[16] « (that are often given to hens to hatch) typify the friendless rolling stone and fragility; fronds of screw-pine laid before one typify the white soft screw-pine mats found in Malay houses and which it is discourteous to tread with shod feet; typifies, therefore, by extension, a fair woman who flings herself down before a lover but whose advances he ought to meet with the utmost tact. »[17] In other words,

[15] Sejarah Melayu, '*Malay Annals*', translated by C.C. Brown, (see Bibliography), pp. 39-40.

[16] *Classical Malay Literature*, *op. cit.* pp. 199 - 200.

[17] Winstedt give exactly the same comment about this pantun in *Pantun Melayu*, *op. cit.* p. 194.

the above pantun should be read as a very dense summary of Tun Jana Khatib's story, more or less as follows:

A rolling stone from Senggora
Trod on a mat laid before him;
His blood was shed in Singapura,
In Langkawi they buried him.

But the first two lines are all the more a real "pembayang" as the idea of the great distance between the man's grave and the place of his death is mirrored in it, « as Senggora was far-off and a pandanus frond at a man's feet is near » : « yang dimaksud hanya jauhnya saja. Sebalikannya pandan yang terletak terlalu berdekatan dengan kita [...] menerangkan antara yang dekat » i.e. « what is meant is distance only. Conversely, the spread pandanus mat is quite near [...], it reveals that which is close at hand, » according to Pijnappel who, it seems, had not discovered the allusion to the episode reported in the *Malay Annals*.[18]

This is perhaps a long development for an example which is not typical at all of the category I wanted to discuss, rather quite the reverse, in fact, since it is the "maksud", here, that is historical. But its advantage, irrespective of its peculiar rarity, was to show how difficult the elucidation of a pantun can be at times, and put the reader on his guard against such hasty conclusions as "nonsense", "rigmarole", etc. or simply irrelevance.

Usually, historical allusions are very vague and not determining as such. Suffice it to quote a few pairs of first lines of this kind to be convinced of it:

Zaman berperang Raja Burma,
Peluru sampai di pucuk kayu.

Fighting the Burmese raja's power,
To tree-tops our shots would fly.

The only important element here is the bullets flying as high as tree tops — which could have happened in any other war — and the only question arising concerns the connection: what can war and bullets

[18] *Pantun Melayu*, Balai Pustaka, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

have to do with the next two lines:

Seekor kumbang menyeri bunga,
Kumbang terbang bunga pun layu.

A bee was drinking from a flower,
The bee is gone, the flower's dry.

if not, perhaps, that the bullets fly buzzing like bees to where flowers are in the jungle (tree tops) and that war is the destructive act par excellence and its evocation casts its gloom over the deflowering and withering of a girl by the irresponsible bumblebee of a body .... Although we could also detect in this warlike "pembayang" something like a boy's unavowed feeling of triumph over a conquered (and ruined) girl. Here are two more examples of "historical" first lines:

Singapura negeri baharu,
Tuan Raffles menjadi raja;

A city new is Singapore, 'tis true,
And Raffles was her king, forsooth.

or:

Pulau Pinang bandaraya baharu,
Kapten Light menjadi syahbandar;

Pulau Pinang, its town is new,
Her harbour-master is Captain Light.

which offer no difficulties in themselves. As for their relationship or connection with the second half of their respective pantuns, it is a simple question of personal sensitivity to poetic subtle associations occurring when the two different sets of elements are put into contact. In the first case, the "maksud" reads:

Bunga melur, cempaka biru,
Kembang sekuntum di mulut naga.

My jasmine sweet! My frangipani blue!
Sole flower bud 'neath the dragon's tooth.

and Singapore, the lion's city — or the dragon's, here — had something new and extraordinary about her which may correspond to the rare qualities of the beloved — "my blue frangipani flower" — as well as with the awesome guardian symbolized by the fabulous beast. In the second case, the second couplet reads as follows:

Jangan dikenang zaman dahulu,
Duduk mengalir si air mata.

The olden times do not review,
Or else you'll burst into tears outright.

and there again the connection is evident between the foundation of Penang, as creating a new state of things which put a long happy past to an end, and the end of some happy days of love never to return, which must not be recalled, lest it should make one feel miserable.

"Geographical" first lines can be treated in the same way as those with historical reference : as always, it is the symbolic effect of their elements which should be taken into consideration:

Tampak api di Tanjung Tuan,
Kuala Linggi bakaunya rendah.
Harap hati kepadamu tuan,
Langit yang tinggi dipandang rendah.

The Cape Rachado lighthouse sends its beam,
Mangroves are low on Linggi shore,
For you, my love, hope in my heart will gleam,
The sky once high, looks close once more.

Here, hope lights up in the heart of the one in love like the lighthouse at Cape Rachado, and the sky — love's paradise — seems now nearer. Or also : far away is the lighthouse high on the cape, and I am stuck up in the mud of the Linggi estuary mangrove; but now the light is on, hope is in my heart and my beloved not far away ... « The unobtainable is brought within measurable distance. » (Hamilton)[19]

Pulau Pandan jauh ke tengah,
Gunung Daik bercabang tiga,
Hancur badan dikandung tanah,
Budi yang baik dikenang juga.

[19]Hamilton, *Malay Pantuns*, *op. cit.*, pp. 71 and 101.

Far out at sea the Isle of Pandan lies,
Nearby the peaks of Daik are three,
In earth's womb the mouldering body lies,
Yet kindness will remembered be.

Less evident is this one, whose "pembayang" has been often used with other "maksud". But we can say that just as the island lies far away at sea, far from our memories is the dead body mouldering in the grave, whereas his good deeds are vividly remembered, just as the triple mountain is visible.

Relevance of "pembayang" to "maksud" should not raise so many questions with a certain type of pantuns comparatively frequent, where first and second couplets follow closely parallel tracks in syntactical structure, sounds, rhymes and meaning — to the point, at times, as I showed in Chapter III, that both can be identical with the exception of a few letters. Quite a few are well-known and even famous, like those beginning with "Apa guna pasang pelita", "Dari mana punai melayang" or the following one, among many others:

Jikalau tidak kerana bintang,
Masakan bulan terbit tinggi?
Jikalau tidak kerana abang,
Masakan saya datang ke mari?

If not because of stars above,
Why does the moon rise up so high?
If not because of you, my love,
Why should I ever venture nigh?

The general meaning is very clear, although it is not true — thinking in objective, scientific terms — that the moon climbs high in the sky because of the stars. But the idea that it is attracted by their beauty is full of poetic force — it is a cosmic image which emphasizes the attraction of the girl to her beloved. In the case of the lamp without a wick, the parallel in syntactic structure and close word sounds is also very effective — with a pungent note of irony mixed up with the disappointment of the lover who was lured by a mere twinkle of an eye ....

More difficult, on the contrary, more uncertain for foreign readers, not to say young modern Malaysians who may be losing

trace or memory of a long tradition, can be pantuns containing one or several symbols, or in which one of the phrases is understandable only as reflecting and at the same time concealing, as behind a veil which only the initiated can pierce, another phrase carrying the real meaning, allusion or intention: because short of realizing this, short of reading the real words beneath, the whole pantun can remain a dead letter — impossible to read or hear otherwise than as nonsense and rigmarole. As the Malays are not prone to nonsense, if not to irony and sarcasm — which is perceptible when it occurs — it would be generally imprudent to jump to hasty conclusions and decree that such or such pantun does not make sense. The first and foremost aim of a poem, let us repeat it, is not "to make sense" in the ordinary acception of the phrase, but to carry the essential emotive charge that will make us feel and react to the poem, not necessarily — this should be emphasized — like the man who composed it, who may have been unaware of the effect produced by his words on another person — whose sensitivity can be very different according to time and country of origin (mine, for instance, as a XXth Century Frenchman's, which has been trained to various types and trends of ancient and modern poetry.)

« The inner meaning of the *pantun* is as hard even for the Malay to unravel as, say, the inner meaning of much of Browning's poetry. » says R.O. Winstedt in his Postface to *Pantun Melayu*,[20] in which he quotes a good many of the hidden phrases I have just alluded to. One of them lies in the first couplet of the following pantun:

Kota Pahang dimakan api,
Antara Jati dengan Bentan;
Bukan kularang kamu berlaki,
Bukan begitu perjanjian.

Fire's destroyed the Pahang Fort
Halfway 'tween Bentam and Jati,
I won't forbid you to consort,
But other were we pledged to be.

« A fort consumed by fire, » he comments,[21] « a girl difficult of

[20] Winstedt, *op. cit.* p. 183.
[21] *Ibid.* p. 189.

access consumed by desire – these to a Malay are close parallels. 'Between *Jati* and *Bentan*' has no geographical foundation but at once suggests *antara hati dengan jantung*, 'between heart and liver', a phrase symbolizing the very house of passion. »

Pantuns where the word 'selasih' — the sweet basil plant — occurs somewhere in the first couplet and 'kasih', love, or 'kekasih', sweetheart, in the corresponding place of the second, are numerous indeed, to such an extent that as soon as we read 'selasih' we think 'kasih' or 'kekasih' and expect to find it in the other half of the quatrain, though it may not be there, not be pronounced at all, as in the following one:

Kalau roboh kota Melaka —
Sayang selasih di dalam puan:
Kalau sungguh bagai dikata,
Rasa nak mati di pangku tuan.

How subtly allusive! Even the first phrase remains unfinished, it seems : for what is the connection between the fort and the basil plant on the tray? And, even more hidden, if possible, is the connection between the two apparently disconnected elements and the second part of the poem, which runs: "If that is the truth, what she says, I feel like dying on her lap."

Should Melaka fort be destroyed —
Alas! the basil on a tray:
Should I be told true, not decoyed,
I wish on her lap dead I lay!

Although *kekasih* is absent, it is present as its reflection in *selasih*, so that we can read something like: "If the fort falls — if this girl is conquered — if her words of love are true — then like this stem of basil on the tray — I feel I'd die in her arms."

I shall not insist on this aspect of the pantun, although these images, echoes, symbols, hidden phrases, proverbs ,double meanings etc.. which play a major rôle in the secret interaction between "pembayang" and "maksud", would deserve a special chapter. Our problem here — should we forget, carried away by all those subtleties — was only that of the controverted relevance of first to second couplets, regarding which it would be about time to come to conclusions.

Between the pantuns in which there is evidently no relationship in meaning from one couplet to the other — a small minority in fact — and those where the link, on the contrary, or even the continuity of thought, is only too obvious — also a minority — we find a large number of pantuns, among the best, characterized by the existence of a really perceptible though not always immediate, often subtle or mysterious connection, which contributes mostly to the special charm of this poetic genre.

Here, I would like to add one last and not unimportant remark: however remote its relationship with the "maksud" may appear, however subtle or even invisible sometimes, the fact is that the first couplet is there and forms *with the second a complete unit which cannot be broken easily*. Thanks to sound "correspondences" and rhymes, the two halves cling, often very closely, to each other. The "pembayang" of one given pantun may well seem absolutely irrelevant; if we suppress it the pantun ceases to be what it is, its meaning, in fact, its poetical effect is altered.

Moreover, we cannot just ignore this "pembayang". Consciously or not, we are influenced by it — even though we may feel baffled, irritated, on account of its real or apparent irrelevance! We can also find the same "maksud" with two different "pembayang" (or vice-versa), which may sound irrelevant in both cases : but in spite of that, we feel we are in the presence of two pantuns, each of which will have on us a particular effect, a specific influence. And a very strong one, for a simple good reason : most of the time, the first couplet is *a picture of concrete reality*, a "still life" or a village scene, in touch with everyday life, and we cannot get rid of it easily. It will influence us all the more vividly and deeply as we hear or read it first. It prepares us, some way or other, to the hearing or reading of what follows, the idea, the intention, the feeling, which can be more or less imprecise, uncertain or wavering, usually abstract, but set up against a very clear, precise, even realistic background. And though it baffles every kind of logic — but once again poetry has its own "logic": not that of scientific rationalization — it will produce on us, in spite of us, some sort of poetic effect.

This, I think, is the ultimate reply that can be given to put to an end, once and for all, this useless quarrel or controversy. « One of the functions of the mind, wrote the French writer Julien Gracq, consists among other things to beget plausible passages indefinitely from one form to another. It is an inexhaustible *binding material*. It is a long

time, moreover, since the cinema taught us that the eye does not do anything else with pictures. The mind produces coherence *endlessly*. »[22] And I cannot help thinking of one of the assets of modern Western poetry. What was called the "surrealistic image" by André Breton and the French Surrealists about fifty years ago and signed the death sentence, so to speak, of the old images and metaphors. It was expressed in Reverdy's famous formula: « The farther from each other in reality the terms put into touch, the finer the image. »[23]

A similar process now takes place when we read pantuns. Although they were a purely oral form of poetry at the beginning and for many a century, however purely "technical" the first couplet of some of them may have been on the moment of their creation, our mind is working actively to produce the "missing links" and the modern pantun lover does his best, in his own fashion, to connect "pembayang" with "maksud".

[22]Julien Gracq, *Lettrines*, Jose Corti, Paris 1967, pp. 40-41. For "*endlessly*", the French text says, literally: "*as far as the eye can reach*".

[23]Reverdy's formula as quoted by Julien Gracq in *Lettrines* p. 41.

CHAPTER VI

Words, Syllables, Rhythm, Music
(*The 'Rules' of Pantun Prosody*)

It is a well-known fact that "rules" come very seldom before the masterpieces which are supposed to have "followed" them. A genuine masterpiece usually creates its own rules or rather builds up its own form on the spur of the creative impulse and in the course of its creation. Even if it sticks to the existing rules as a whole it will either apply them in an original way for its own particular purpose or even transform them by giving them a twist here and there. So that even a genius like Mozart, who seems to have made the best use of an inherited musical model and brought it to perfection rather than created a really new one, did not actually leave music in the same state where he had found it in his early years. Though apparently not a revolutionist, some of his works were already far ahead of the finishing XVIIIth Century and his Piano Concerto in C minor, for example, sounds more Beethovenian than Beethoven's own first or second ... Rules, then, always come afterwards, as a result of the study of masterpieces, and concern the prentice only, or the second-rate artist.

Although the Malay pantun seems to have reached perfection at an unknown and early stage, to remain such for centuries, there is no trace in the writings of the past of any such theoretical texts as could be termed "rules of composition and prosody of the pantun". Only the work of comparatively recent scholars has drawn these from the observation of existing pantuns. In other words, the pantun itself had been its own moel for centuries without the necessity of theorization.

Anyhow, if it is true that much has been written in modern times about the various aspects of the pantun evoked in the preceding chapters, very little has been said about its prosody apart from a relatively recent study by Phillip L. Thomas.[1]

Even a devoted specialist like Winstedt does not seem to have written a single line on the question. Most Malay scholars, when they do say something about it, are just as discreet and remain rather vague. Za'ba, for instance, as quoted in the Introduction to the *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu*,[2] simply states: « Sukatan bunyi hendaklah ada sekurang-kurangnya delapan bunyi dalam tiap-tiap sekerat dan lebih-lebihnya dua belas. Di antara dua sempadan ini sebaik-baiknya sembilan atau sepuluh pada sekerat. » In other words, according to him, the number of syllables varies from eight to twelve but is mostly of nine or ten per line. No mention is made here, however, of any requisite number of words — which, following the traditional theory, should be four — nor of what may cause or control the variations in the number of syllables, nor of the existence and place of a *caesura*.

In his first article[3] based on the study, in particular, of the first 210 pantuns of Wilkinson and Winstedt's collection, *Pantun Melayu*, Thomas summarized the "traditional theory" in the following way: « What the basis of *syair* and *pantun* prosody is, however, has not yet been satisfactorily shown. The handbooks make two assertions about the nature of syair and pantun lines, but these claims are vague and often incorrect. C.Hooykaas, for example, has claimed that every line has four words and that the line must have from eight to eleven or twelve syllables. The unsatisfactory nature of his definition is suggested by the term "eleven or twelve syllables", for the extent of possibilities given argues that the basis for the line is still unknown. It is also clear that these two rules are not independent, because without affixation Malay words are predominantly disyllabic. To write a four-word line with two monosyllables and no affixation would be difficult, if not impossible, because of the few monosyllabic words in Malay. A four-word line with one affixed word and one monosyllabic word already satisfies the rule of having eight to twelve syllables. Generally, any other combination of four words will satisfy this rule

[1] Philip L. Thomas, *Syair and Pantun Prosody*, in INDONESIA, 27 April 1979, pp. 52-63 and, especially: *Long and Short Pantun Lines*, in RIMA, 14, 1980, pp. 23-39.

[2] *Op. cit.* p. 21.

[3] *Syair and Pantun Prosody*, *op. cit.*

as it is equally difficult to write lines where all words are multiplely affixed. Because of the linguistic character of the Malay language, the second rule, then, is a natural result of the first. As a definition, it is not useful for articulating the prosody of syair and pantun lines. »[4]

This quotation may be long, but it has the advantage of encompassing the whole problem and directing our steps towards greater precision, as it obliges us to reply to the following question: what are "words"?

Thanks to his analysis, Thomas is able to set up « two provisional rules : (I) words consist of a root word, its attached pronouns and affixes according to the current system of word division; and (II) reduplicated words fill the positions of two words. »[5]

This second rule, nevertheless, suffering a few exceptions, distinction has to be made between real reduplicated words like "terkibar-kibar" or "sehari-hari" and words like "masing-masing", which does not exist in simple form, or "bunyi-bunyian" meaning orchestra, which (at least in syair stanzas) has to be counted as a one-word position. As concerns monosyllabic words, Thomas « suggests the next rule : (III) monosyllables do not fill a word position; rather, they join with an adjacent word to form *a word cluster*. »[6]

Thus, lines like the following:

Tidur / tak hendak // makan / tak mahu
Terbang / di laut // di hujung / karang

are not to be considered as six-word lines but as "four-word (or cluster)" lines.

We can derive from what precedes that words in pantun lines — for the lines to be correct — should not be "multiplely affixed". Actually, most words in pantun lines are:

– either disyllabic	: *padi*, *kuda*, *bulat*, *etc.*
– or trisyllabic	: *berangan*, *berembang*, *halaman*, *tenggelam*, *etc* (far less numerous than disyllabics)
– or disyllabic + prefix:	*memandang*, *tersimpan*. etc.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 52.
[5] *Ibid.* p. 55
[6] *Ibid.* p. 56.

disyllabic + suffix: *turunkan, rancangan, etc.*
- disyllabic + attached pronoun or particle:
before (proclitic) : *kupandang, dimakan,*
- after (enclitic) : *mudaku, bulunya, marilah ...*
or "clusters" composed of:
1 mono + 1 disyllabic : *ke bandang, nak peluk, tak retak, di lubuk, dan malam, yang lain,*
- or vice-versa : *adik pun, hati nan, kanan pun, etc.*

However, words of four syllables or more can be found in pantun lines and some of them — most of them probably — do not appear like exceptions to the "rules".

Four-syllable words can be:
either single words like *laksamana,*
or compounds like *matahari, bagaimana, Bayuwangi, Singapura, rajawali,* etc.

They can also be affixed words or clusters but, in this case, they do not seem to fit so well into the attempted theory and belong, I think, to exceptions which have to be accounted for differently or accepted as such, as will be seen hereafter. These are, for instance *bergandingan* (288-C), *berpandangan* (289-D), *digelusuk* (283-C), *digelusang* (281-C) etc. or clusters like *ke kerombong* (290-B), *tak faedah* (285-C), *di Permatang* (271-B), etc. which evidently cannot, like "matahari", "lama-lama" and others be cut into two clearly distinct positions marked by a slight accent on each second syllable. We shall see later that the question of stressed syllables cannot be understood without taking into account the way they are delivered orally.

Five-syllable words or clusters usually consist of **reduplicated words + affix or particle**, in which case they occupy without problem, either before or after the caesura, two positions in a pantun line, of 2 + 3 syllables or 3 + 2, like: *jentu-berjentu, sehari-hari, terciap-ciap, di alur-alur* .... Anyhow, there can also be exceptional words in this category, like *dipelajari* (727), with the additional problem that in the example quoted it occupies one single position with its five syllables. These are puzzling exceptions, which will be examined further on.

« The pantun form, » Thomas says, « offers two advantages for analysis which are not as strongly present in the *syair*. First, the caesura is much more obvious due to the frequent placement of noun

and verb phrases wholly on one or the other side of the caesura. Second, the internal rhyme of pre-caesural syllables is helpful for indicating on which side the "missing" word in a three-word line is to be found. Only when two parallel lines » — the first and the third, for instance — « are apparently short by one word does this second characteristic fail us. »[7]

For indeed pantuns offer the non-negligible "exception" of the three-word or three-cluster line. In fact, the proportion of short lines is such – more than 5% in WWPM[8] – that they have to be considered not as exceptions but as a regular variant, all the more so as:

a. they tend to occur much more frequently in the first couplet, and there, furthermore, as the first line : out of 270 occurrences in WWPM, 148 are first lines, 20 only are fourth lines. For example:

Selasih // di tepi / tubir (447)

b. they appear in many cases in combination with another such line in the same couplet or in the rhyming position (103 out of 270);

c. they satisfy the minimum requirement of seven syllables per line, though actually most lines of this type have eight syllables (3/3/2 for about 50% of them, 3/3/3, 2/3/3, 3/2/2/, 2/3/2, and 2/2/3);

d. in most cases (more than 90%), the caesura is placed immediately after the first trisyllabic word or cluster, for example:

Di pasang // empat / penjuru (724)

Thus, the prosodic structure of the pantun line, whether composed of four or three words or word-clusters is now clearly visible, according to Phillips Thomas. If we follow this pattern, we find that:

1. there is a maximum of two "positions" on each side of the caesura, each position being composed of two to three syllables;

2. a two-syllable position is usually occupied by a disyllabic root-word, while a three-syllable position is filled either by a three-syllabic word or a cluster (see above);

3. four-syllable words can fill two positions, on either side of the caesura.

---

[7] *Ibid.* p. 59.

[8] WWPM for "Wilkinson and Winstedt, *Pantun Melayu*". For percentages, see Thomas, "*Long and Short Pantun Lines*" p. 27.

Therefore, the fundamental rhythm of four-position lines — which can be termed the basic rhythm of the pantun since they comprise nearly 95% of pantun lines — is given by the simplest of them all, composed of four disyllabic words (2/2//2/2), like the following:

Tuan / ketam // padi / pulut,
Saya / ketam // padi / jawi, (508)

Then, between the eight-syllable and the twelve-syllable lines, every combination of two and three-syllable four positions is possible, which, with the existence of three-position lines of seven to nine syllables, contributes to give the pantun its infinite variety of rhythm. Here are examples of all the possible combinations in four-position lines:

A. Eight and nine syllable lines:

2/2/2/2 : *Beras / ladang // sulung / tahun*
2/2/2/3 : *Patah / tiang // timpa / kemudi*
2/2/3/2 : *Rumah / besar // digoncang / bayu*
2/3/2/2 : *Tuan / laksana // timun / dendang*
3/2/2/2 : *Belayar / masuk // Kuala / Kedah*

B. Ten syllable lines:

2/2/3/3 : *Patah / pasak // di dalam / kemudi*
2/3/2/3 : *Tuan / laksana // bunga / di bukit*
3/2/2/3 : *Alangkah / karut // tuan / berkata*
3/2/3/2 : *Sekuntum / bunga // terlalu / indah*
3/3/2/2 : *Terlangsung / perahu // boleh / balik*
Keluar / berjalan // hari / malam
2/3/3/2 : *Tuan / laksana // cempedak / mambung*

C. Eleven syllable lines:

2/3/3/3 : *Nanti / merayap // ke pintu / belakang*
3/2/3/3 : *Perahu / buruk // ditampal / gegala*
3/3/2/3 : *Ibarat / seperti // telur / kemungkus*
3/3/3/2 : *Adinda / seorang // yang baik / raksi*

D. Twelve syllable lines:

3/3/3/3 : *Ingatan / tak tetap // akalnya / periap*
Peluru / petunang // peluru / berjampi
Di sana / tersangkut // di situ / berhenti

All these can be said to be regular lines. Some are very numerous, especially those beginning with a disyllabic unit, while those beginning with 3/3// are rather difficult to find, particularly 3/3//2/2, perhaps because they run counter to the normal movement of pantun lines towards their "climax"[9] i.e. a greater number of syllables – which tends to occur predominantly towards the end.

Something rather striking, incidentally, should be mentioned here: while looking for an example of the 3/3/2/2 pattern in WWPM, where they are very few, nearly everytime I caught sight of a line beginning with 3/3/, it was a three-position line of the most frequent type: 3//3/2. This, perhaps, could be analysed as showing that the impulse, the rhythmic "élan" of the pantun line has been "exhausted" by the production of the first two three-syllable units, so that it stops when reaching a total of eight syllables. This sort of search, through a great number of pantuns, over a thousand, and the reiteration of the same occurrence, I think, should tend to prove it, especially as I always sought for them not with the eyes only but aloud, I mean, reading aloud each line beginning with trisyllabic words or clusters.

Up to this point, Thomas's theory is nearly a hundred per cent satisfactory, and certainly of a precision which was never attained before. Anyhow, it leaves aside some embarrassing exceptions. First of all the 18 "long lines" found by Thomas himself, extracted by means of a computerized programme out of the 5004 contained in WWPM, i.e. 0.4% only of the total. The problem about them is not that they are too long because exceeding the prescribed maximum of twelve syllables — since most of them have ten or eleven — but because they contain five and even six units instead of four. Here they are:

1.	*Hari / senja // ayam / naik serun*	*26-C*
2.	*Masak / mari // dengan / pati – santan*	*148-B*
3.	*Apa / guna // raja – kecil / muda?*	*506-C*
4.	*Setahun / belayar // tiga – bulan / sampai*	*937-D*
5.	*Akal / sebagai // makan / nasi – lecek*	*937-D*
6.	*Orang – tua / bongkok // menggelisah / gaduh*	*942-C*
7.	*Orang tua / nyanyuk // hendak / bertunang*	*978-C*
8.	*Pokok / pisang // boleh – tuan / tebang*	*1017-C*

[9] See Gabriel Altmann and Robert Stukovsky, The Climax in Malay Pantun, "*Asian and African Studies*" I (1965).

9.	*Kalau / usul-asal // tiada / baik*	*1044-C*
10.	*Air – laut / berkocak // nampak / pinar*	*1055-C*
11.	*Jahat / bertabur // suku – duit / tidak*	*1071-C*
12.	*Tujuh – kali / sintuk // sekali / tak lepas*	*1072-D*
13.	*Hujung sarat tersimpan sudah berlabuh (?)*	*1087-C*
14.	*Lain makan / nangka // lain kena / getah*	*1092-C*
15.	*Bukan / tebu // boleh tuan / gigit*	
16.	*Kena / air – masin // nampak / senam*	*1130-B*
17.	*Air – tawar / kena // masin / tidak*	*1136-D*
18.	*Sungai / Genuk // sungai / (e)mak – Dulang*	*1198-A*

Thomas considers the possibility « that there are errors in Wilkinson and Winstedt's transcription of the lines, » but does his best to eliminate a maximum of these exceptions:

1) in accepting compound words as single units in pantun lines: *pati santan, raja kecil, tiga bulan, nasi lecek, orang tua, usul asal, air laut, suku duit, tujuh kali, air masin, air tawar*; but this, in itself, leaves the number of syllables unchanged;

2) more convincingly, in taking into account the « alternative short form » of the two words *sudah/dah* and *emak/mak* as well as « the ambiguity of whether vowel sequences are diphthongs, vowels plus glides or separate vowels » in the following words: *naik – tua – tuan air – laut – duit – lain*. Uttered as one syllable, these nine words make it possible to consider eleven of the problematic lines as "regular" : lines N°1 – 6 (on the condition that *menggelisah* — which Thomas seems to ignore here — be pronounced *mengg'lisah*) – 7 – 8 10 – 11 – 14 – 15 – 16 – 17 – 18. But lines N°2 3 – 4 – 5 – 9 – 12 are left with their compounds and line N°13, even with *dah*, remains just as unmanageable, unless *berlabuh* is slurred into something like *b'labuh* — which would give the line the 2/2//3/3 structure.

I wonder if Thomas is really entitled to conclude so to speak triumphantly, anyhow : « After these two emendations, all long lines are of the predominating four position variety. »

There is certainly more to it than seems to have caught his attention. I personally have used no computer programme, but have come across many more irregular lines in the same WWPM and of a different type than those he mentions. Here are a few of them:

Sudah / nasib // permintaan[4] / badan	*570-C*
Bagaimana //jong[1] / nak lalu	*869-C*
Bagaimana // akan / membunuhnya[4]	*309-C*

Tiba / di kuala // pecah / perahunya[4] *313-A*
Sampai / di kepala[4] *// pecah / baunya 313-C*
Kedapatan[4] */ budi // burung / murai 698-D*
Petua / guru // kalau / dipelajari[5] *727-C*
Berjumpalah[4] */ buku // dengan / ruas 1103-D*
Bengkok / tergolohok[4] *// jahit / tak tentu 1075-D*

where we can see four-syllable units appear, and even one five-syllable unit (with thirteen syllables in the line) or on the contrary a one-syllable unit, as "nak" forms a cluster with "lalu", not with "jong", where we are supposed to have two or three syllables according to what we may assume to be the general rule. The second of these lines would be quite regular if we had a word like "wang-kang" in the place of "jong", or if "jong" were followed by a word like "itu". "Bagaimana jong itu nak lalu" would be quite a correct four-position line. But the line as it is should be added to the list below, where we can find very disturbing lines, too:

1. Jangan diadu berpandangan (288)
2. Pucuk menyulai ke selama (283)
3. Jangan digelosok gelusang (283)
4. Ikan sesak ke berombong (290)
5. Laksana jong bergandingan (288)
6. Tak faedah bermain di Permatang (285)
7. Duduk berjuntai di Permatang (271)
etc.

First of all they cannot be regular four-position lines, as it is not possible to consider words or clusters like "berpandangan", "ke selama", "digelosok", "ke berombong", "bergandingan", "tak faedah" or "di Permatang" as occupying two positions: there is no place in them where they could be cut asunder like "bagaimana" or "matahari", for instance. Moreover, "digelosok" would be astride the caesura. Therefore, we are obliged to consider these lines as three-position lines – but then we shall have some positions occupied ***by four syllables***, as can be seen in:

Jangan / diadu // berpandangan
Pucuk / menyulai // ke selama
Jangan / digelosok // gelusang, etc.

If we summarize the situation, we find then:

1. A large majority of four-position pantun lines with all the combinations of two and three syllables as described above.

2. A meaningful minority of three-position lines, with all the combinations of two and three syllables as well.

3. Exceptions to this general rule, very few in percentage, in fact, where a position can be occupied by four or even five syllables, which is also the case for some of the exceptions mentioned by Phillip Thomas (where positions are occupied by double words "pati santan", "raja kecil", "tiga bulan", etc.) Now, these exceptions can be explained or we can say that they can be included as normal, although quite rare, in the "rules" if we think of the originally oral nature of the pantun and take into account what Thomas called "the style of delivery".

In a passage of his latest study, he says that « one possibility is that the style of delivery in the earlier part of this century » - when WWPM was collected - « was identical to one still present in the 1970s. In this style the last couplet is delivered as one long, continuous utterance whereas the first two lines are spoken more slowly and are followed by a brief pause. It is thus easier to slip in an extra word without sounding forced to the practiced ear, particularly if it appears in the quickly delivered first line of the second couple. »[10]

We may regret Thomas did not go further than this simple hypothesis in his study of pantun prosody. Maybe his experience had not been decisive enough to enable him to draw clearer conclusions and go to the end of his research, which was not very far away, as a simple though essential supplement to the theory exposed and discussed in this chapter. My own experience in this respect is probably different from his, but the important thing is that although it occurred before I read his articles and before I wrote anything about the question, we both came to similar conclusions. I may have expressed a few reserves here and there, mainly about the treatment of exceptions, but I am in complete agreement with him about the rules exposed in his study. Only one thing remains to be done: to integrate these rules into a complete theory including the "phonic" element, if not entirely based on it, which I would prefer to call "the music of the pantun".

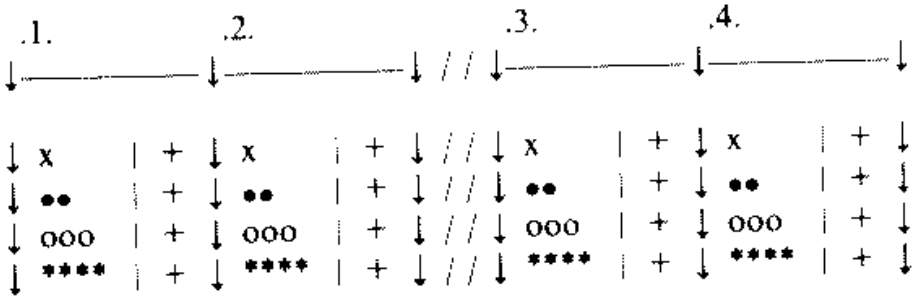
I have recorded hundreds of pantuns directly from the mouth of

[10] *Long and Short Pantun Lines*, *op. cit.* p. 29.

Terengganu *pemantun* and also from the RTM programme called "*Berbalas Pantun*", and listened to them attentively over and over again. For what had struck me from the very beginning was the way pantun lines were delivered in general, whether sung or spoken — their peculiar rhythm.

I remember my reaction had been immediate, perhaps because I have a musical ear : it sounded obvious to me that they were built following a specific pattern, what I have called above **the basic rhythm of the pantun**, the easier to catch as, at that time, I could hardly understand them orally, which made me even more sensitive to the music itself, the characteristic melody with its beats and intonations: **four sections of roughly equal length of time,** like musical bars, each with a binary structure so to speak, first a weaker, then a stronger half.

The weaker half, non-accented, is usually filled by one or two syllables (× or •• in the graphs below), the stronger half only by one (+), with a slight stress as in French (possibilities a. and b. in the graph below). Whatever the number of syllables in the "weak" part of each "bar", its duration is more or less the same — just as two semiquavers (••) are played in the same lapse of time as one quaver (×). Likewise, possible exceptions can be explained as "triplets" (ooo) or "demisemiquavers" (****), as in c. and d. hereunder:



1., 2., 3., 4., are the units of a pantun line;
// indicates the *caesura*.

Ex. a. Tu - an / ke - tam // pa - di / pu - lut
× + / × + // × + / × +

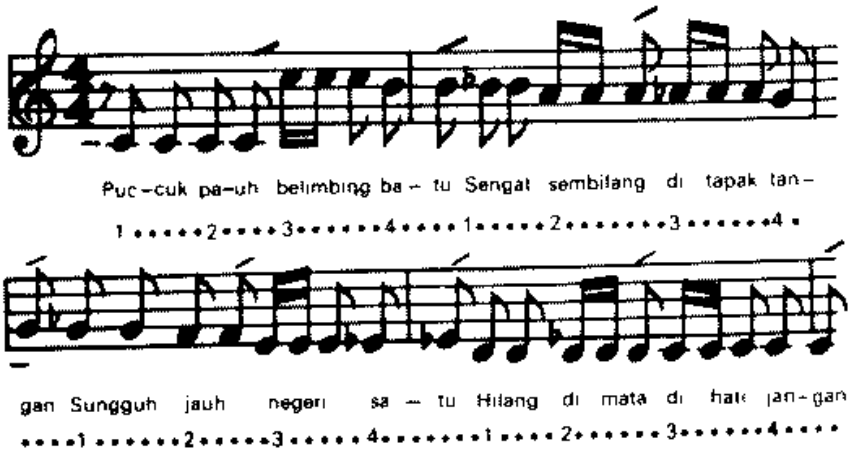
b. Alang-kah / ka - rut // tu - an / berka-ta
• • + / × + // × + / • • +

c. Beng-kok / tergelo-hok // ja - nit / tak ten-tu
× + / o o o + // × + / • • +

d. Petu-a / gu-ru // kala-u / dipelajari
•• + / × + // •• + / * * * * +

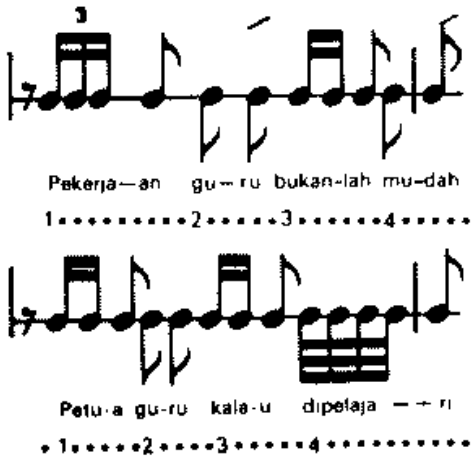
Thus, if a long word like "dipelajari" happens to fill one position, its first four syllables are uttered like "demisemiquavers", in not much more time as "gu-" in "guru" or "petu-" in "petua", and the whole word in about the same time as a shorter one like "tuan" or "bengkok". And the whole pantun, roughly, is delivered on the same rhythm as four musical bars of 4/4 in quavers.[11]

[11]Here is, in musical transcription, the simple, monotonous tune, abruptly ascending by one octave, then chromatically descending line after line down to the original tone again, on which one of the Hulu Dungun *pemantun* used to sing her pantuns:



In this fashion, we can clearly see the four musical 4/4 bars occupied by the four lines of a pantun and the position of the four "iambic" or "anapaestic" units of each line with respect to the musical notation.

In the same way, here are two other lines, one with a "triplet", the second one with a group of four "semidemiquavers":



The diagram, of course, as appears in these examples, indicates only the possibility for any position to be filled by two or three syllables usually, four or five exceptionally, according to models a. and b. or c. and d.; it does not mean that a pantun line could be, even exceptionally, entirely composed of c. or d. units.

Three-position lines can be dealt with exactly in the same way, with three of the possible units above instead of four, the *caesura* occuring after the first or second unit.

Here are a few examples of c. or d. units at the beginning of a line — they come from the *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu*.

With four positions:

789–C Pekerjaan / guru // bukanlah / mudah
o o o + / + × // • • + / + ×

790–A Dikenali / sebagai // Kuala / Betah
o oo + / o o o + // •• + / + ×

790–C Perbuatan / demikian // padahnya / susah
o o o + / o o o + // • • + / × +

With three positions:

77–D Membaikinya // sukar / sekali
• • • • + // × + / • •+

963–D Bersembunyi // di tengah / orang
o o o + // •• + / × +

Or after the *caesura*, with four positions:

741–C Jangan / selalu // berharapkan / orang
× + / •• + // o oo + / × +

1888–D Kalau / turut // susah / berpanjangan
• • + / × + // × + / o o o +

With three positions:

812–A Ranggung // lantaikanlah / dibemban
× + // • • • • + / • • +

963–B Berkeris // serupanya / pedang
• •+ // o o o+ / × +

Lines like the following could be considered as having three positions only (four for the first if uttered "di-am-di-am"):

785–B Diam-diam / pintu // laks(a)mana
× + / × + // o (o) o +

785–D Perkasa / lagi // bijaksana
• • + / × + // o o o +

And what to think of this pair of lines? Are they also three-position ones? In my opinion, the first one cannot be accepted either as a three- or four-position line (it sounds as if there were only two):

1906–B Menumilang // diturunkan
× +/× + // o o o +
o o o+ // o o o +

1906–D Tuan / seorang // dipohonkan
× + / •• + // o o o +

As concerns the problem of monosyllabic "bars", either the monosyllabic word (which cannot be a particle, of course), is clearly detached and "lengthened" or followed by a pause (a "rest" which completes the "bar") or the four-position line is in fact a three-position one, as in the following example:

Jong / lalu // pulau / bertanya (4-pos).
Jong lalu // pulau / bertanya (3-pos).

But this one could not be considered as a four-position line, as it cannot be "cut" in the following manner:

Laksa / na jong // berban / dingan

and should be:

Laksana / jong // berbandingan,
• •+ / ++ // o o o +

the first three syllables of the last word being slurred as a "triplet" in a musical bar.

As a piece of curiosity before closing this chapter, here is a three-position six-syllable line from the same collection:

1879–B Esok // hari Isnin,

another exception to confirm the rule.

The irruption of four or five syllables into a position never occurs more than once or twice in a line in any of the pantuns I know, and very rarely in fact, as we have seen. Very seldom, too, in the pantuns I had the opportunity to record in Hulu Dungun from the mouth of old or elderly *pemantun*.

It seems to be quite a different thing with some of those I could listen to on RTM ("*Berbalas Pantun*") from the mouth of younger people. The "pembayang" is usually "correct", perhaps because it has been borrowed from one stock-pantun or another; but the "maksud" in many cases, probably because the modern *pemantun* need too many words to express their thoughts, especially as they have to extemporize, tends to become a hurriedly delivered accumulation of "exceptions". But such slips in prosody, for sure, represent serious breaches of tradition and are usually so far from the established usage that they do not have to be taken into account in the above theory.

CHAPTER VII

Body and Soul:
The Pantun as an Expression of Malay Civilization

A pantun is a universe in a nutshell. It always contains more in its brevity than it actually utters. Each separate pantun can be compared to one of the many islets of an archipelago : although it looks like an isolated dot on the surface of the sea, it is part, together with the other islets, of one submerged continent whose higher summits only peek out. Similarly, though each of them exists as an independent entity, pantuns communicate in an underlying context which is the traditional world of Malays, still to be met with and observed in kampungs here and there, in spite of the fact that in many places, not only in cities, Malaya, now Malaysia, has experienced more radical changes in the past fifty years than in the previous twenty centuries.

When I began translating pantuns into French I thought that some sort of introduction would be required when they were published, a few pages of basic information about the main features of this specific form of popular poetry. I soon realized, supposing I did not see it clearly before, that a longer, more detailed essay would have to be written, until I got convinced, finally, that it was necessary to go through as complete a study as possible, implying of course a good deal of reading, but also ethnological research and field work, not to speak of a minimum geographical and historical as well as botanical and zoological knowledge, together with notions of all sorts about human activities, way of life, social relations, ceremonies, etc. In other words, it seemed difficult to appreciate all the impli-

cations of pantuns, even less to begin to translate them, without getting deeply involved in the civilization and culture of Malays.

This may perhaps sound like a matter of course, but in fact, the pantun is as much a possible field of study for Malay civilization as Malay civilization a prerequisite for the study of the pantun. In my own case, I certainly had some knowledge of the former before I started reading pantuns, but getting familiar with these certainly helped to increase it greatly.

There is nothing simpler than a pantun apparently, as we have seen — in its elements at least, if not in a meaning: the first couplet usually creates a sort of background for the ideas, feelings, emotions of all kinds which are going to be expressed or suggested in the second. It is true, as again has been already discussed, that the relationship between the two halves is often far from evident. But the fact remains that the background set up and the atmosphere created by the first two lines, in their concreteness, are in direct connection with the physical life of Malays such as it was for centuries, mostly in agricultural and fishing areas, while the content of the second half, of a more abstract nature, expresses the specific character of the Malay mind and sensitivity.

Should we analyse the first two lines of a very large repertory of quatrains, we could cover the whole field of Malay traditional everyday life in its familiar surroundings with a good many allusions to historical or legendary events, to religion as well (its outward forms or circumstances), to the various races and more or less temporary occupants of the country, etc.

It is clear, to begin with, that some pantuns, with their particular settings, bear testimony to their regional origin, according as they appeared among populations of the coastal areas — sailors or fishermen — as, for instance, in the following couplets:

Perahu baharu, temberang pun baharu,
Baharu sekali masuk Melaka.

Both ship and shrouds alike were new,
The only time in Malacca we berthed.

or:

Kalau tuan pergi ke Kedah,
Singgah semalam di Kuala Muda.

If ever you go to Kedah,
Put up for a night at Kuala Muda.

or:

Orang mengail di lubuk Bulang,
Apa umpannya? Kulit duku.

People fish in Bulang's deep
With what for baits? Skins of duku.

or:

Orang belayar lautan Ambon,
Patah tiang dengan kemudi.

On Amboyna's seas they toiled
With broken mast and helm.

whereas such line as:

Tujuh hari dalam hutan,
Air tak minum, nasi tak makan.

Full seven days inside the jungle,
With neither food nor drink.

or:

Di mana kuang bertelur?
Di atas lata, di ruang batu.

Where does the argus build its nest?
Above the fall, between two rocks.

or else:

Kalau tuan mudik ke hulu,
Carikan saya bunga kemboja.

If you sail your boat upstream,
Seek for me the honey bloom.

etc. seem to indicate that the pantuns they come from first appeared, very likely, among populations of more definitely rural areas, not to say mountainous, even if pantuns of different geographical origins may ultimately have been heard and collected all over the country in more recent times.

These elements of human geography can be even more precisely in connection with actions, incidents, occupations specific to people who live as fisherman and sailors, for instance:

Belayar masuk Kuala Kedah
Patah tiang timpa kemudi.

Into Kuala Kedah we fare
With fallen mast our helm to break.

or:

Patah pasak di dalam kemudi,
Patah di ruang bunga kiambang,

The rudder axle is broken,
Broken in the hayacinth pool.

or:

Belayar kapal bertimbang arus,
Patah kemudi sepanjang pantai.

Sailing our ship against the flow,
With broken mast along the shore.

or else:

Kapal belayar ke Pulau Pinang,
Singgah berlabuh di hujung tanjung.

Towards Penang our ship we sailed,
And by its cape our anchor cast.

as well as:

Baik-baik belayar malam,
Arus deras, karangnya tajam.

Careful when sailing in the night,
Strong the current, sharp the reef!

whereas the following refer to a decidedly more rural life:

Burung pipit terbang ke bukit,
Tempat orang menanam pala.

The sparrow flies towards the hill,
Where people nutmegs used to plant.

or:

Padi muda jangan dilurut,
Kalau dilurut pecah batang.

Young rice do not hold and press,
Lest the frail stalk you should break.

or:

Anak pelanduk di luar pagar,
Sayang patah sebelah kakinya.

A young mouse-deer outside the fence,
Alas, one of his legs is broken!

or:

Tengah hari masuk ke hutan,
Potong rumput di tepi perigi.

Round noon I get into the woods,
To mow some grass beside the well.

or again:

Apa kena padiku ini,
Sini sangkut, sana pun goyang?

What has struck this rice of mine,
Here badly matted, there all waving?

as well as:

Penatlah saya menanam padi,
Nanas juga ditanam orang.

Tired I am of planting rice,
While others pineapple grow.

etc. etc

Numberless and perhaps better examples could be drawn from a larger number of pantuns, but this is enough already to realize how deeply immersed in the Malay people's ancestral way of life we can feel after reading and analysing a few hundreds of them.

First of all, we soon discover that the vocabulary to be found in the first two lines is the basic vocabulary of these people's everyday life, not in the least any special learned or so-called "poetic" lingo. Names of, for instance:

— ANIMALS: *kerbau, beruk, pelanduk, tupai, lembu, buaya, biawak, harimau, singa*, etc. (buffalo, monkey, mouse-deer, squirrel, cow, iguana, tiger, lion, etc.)

— FISH: *ikan todak, tilan, setoka, temenung, jerung, gelama, sembilang*, etc. (sword-fish, spiny eel, ray, "temenung", shark, "Corvina", catfish, etc.)

— SEAFOOD: *kepiting, ketam, kerang, lokan, teritip, udang*, etc. (crabs, cockles, clams, barnacles, shrimps and prawns, etc.)

— BIRDS: *layang-layang, punai, tekukur, merpati, pipit, hangau, gagak, jelatik, merak, murai, kuang, pucung, pungguk, ayam, itik, angsa, rajawali*, etc. (swallow, green pigeon, dove,

common pigeon, sparrow, egret, crow, Java sparrow, peacock, magpie robin, argus pheasant, grey heron, owl, hen, duck, goose, kite, etc.)

— FRUITS: *nyiur, delima, rumbia, nangka, berangan, rambai, rambutan, limau manis, duku, bidara, pinang, limau purut, limau lelang, asam kandis, asam gelugur, asam rembunia, asam keranji, pisang emas, cempedak, ara, pauh, nanas, manggis, durian, pala,* etc. (coconut, pomegranate, sago, jackfruit, chestnut, and various local fruit with no English denomination, banana, champeden, fig, mango, pineapple, mangosteen, durian, nutmeg, etc.)

— VEGETABLS and PLANTS: *timun, petola, padi, lada, jagung, serai; paku, rumput, melur, jeruju, kayu tengar, kemboja, pokok kekabu, nipah, selasih, pokok terap, pokok mengkudu,* etc. (cucumber, snake gourd, paddy, pepper, corn, lemon-grass; fern, grass, jasmine, sea-holly, mangrove, frangipani, cotton-tree, nipa palm, sweet basil, bark-cloth tree, Morinda shrub, etc.)

Identical lists could be drawn up for common objects like "*peti, puan, dulang, lilin, pelita, tikar, bantal*" (chest, betel caddy or metal bowl, tray, candle, lamp, mat, pillow) etc., for places like "*paya, hutan, bendang, tanjung, kuala, pantai, rantau, bukit*" (swamp, jungle, rice-field, cape, estuary or confluence, beach, stretch of shore, hill) etc.

The analysis of other parts of speech like verbs would point to the same pronounced concreteness, the same character of customary, daily use.

Thus, before playing the part of an implicit metaphor or "correspondence", the image, the setting, the background created by the first couplet of a pantun is always a fragment of a larger set — scene or scenery — familiar to any man or woman, together with typical characters like:

Tuan Haji memakai jubah,
Singgah sembahyang di dalam lorong.

The Haji wears a long white robe,
Halting in the lane for prayer.

some of them being as vividly depicted as this one:

Jalan-jalan, sepanjang jalan,
Singgah-menyinggah di pagar orang;
Pura-pura mencari ayam,
Ekor mata di anak orang.

Along the pathway, now and then,
O'er the fence he pops his head;
Pretending to look for a hen,
Peeping at the girls instead.

situations – either historical:

Zaman berperang Raja Burma,
Peluru sampai di pucuk kayu.

Fighting the Burmese raja's power
To tree tops our shots would fly.

or:

Pulau Pinang bandaraya baharu,
Kapten Light menjadi syahbandar.

Pulau Pinang, its town is new,
And Captain Light her harbour-master.

or:

Singapura negeri baharu,
Tuan Raffles menjadi raja.

A city new is Singapore
And Raffles is her king.

or present:

Kelip-kelip api di dusun,
Anak Keling bergelang kaca.

Lights a-twinkle in the orchard,
The Tamil girl glass bangles wears.

circumstances:

Guruh berbunyi sayup-sayup,
Orang di bumi semua bimbang.

Thunder's rumbling in the distance,
All men on earth are feeling anxious.

or:

Tinggi-tinggi si matahari,
Anak kerbau mati tertambat.

High above now is the sun,
The tethered buffalo calf is dying.

(as these animals do not perspire and suffer considerably from the heat, they have to wallow in water up to their horns and muzzle during the hot hours of the day) — or again:

Hendak hujan, hujan sekali,
Boleh saya berkajang kain.

Rain will fall, then let it pour,
Under my loincloth will I shelter.

peculiar habits – regarding food:

Tekukur digulai lemak,
Selasih di bawah batang.

Doves in sauce are savory,
Beneath the tree sweet basil grows.

or:

Apa lauk nasi rendam?
Sayur petola dinihari.

What goes with sodden rice, apart
From snake-gourd at the dawn of day?
(A.W.H.)

("nasi rendam" is rice left overnight in water) or:

Kepiting, ketam kepiting,
Sehari-hari merendang lada.

Crabs and crabs, soft-shelled rock crabs,
With peppers daily roasted.

or again:

Malam ini merendang jagung,
Malam esok merendang serai.

Tonight it's maize that people roast,
Tomorrow night it's lemon-grass.

— or household items and decoration:

Bunga rampai di dalam puan,
Bunga selasih di dalam peti.

Mixed petals and leaves in a bowl,
Sweet basil in a box.

or:

Buah jering di atas para.

A pod of jering on the shelf.

("jering" : a type of tree with evil-smelling fruit in hard black pods, which can be eaten as "ulam", i.e. raw with rice; "para": a rack on which crockery is left to drip and dry after washing, a typical kitchen outfit of the Malay traditional house) or:

Buah sauh dalam keranjang.

Sapodillas in a basket.

or:

Dian tiga, lilin pun tiga,
Tanglong tergantung rumah laksamana.

Three tapers and three candles too,
With lanterns hung in the sea-lord's house.

— or village life:

Orang duduk di muka pintu,
Ambil pisau memotong nanas.

People sitting on their doorsteps,
Take their knives and pineapple slice.

or:

Belah-belung bunyi malam,
Bunyi di atas bumbung penghulu.

Strange noisy insects at night,
On the roof of the headman's house.

etc.

A few words suffice to create a vivid picture — a still life, as Fauconnier would say, or a familiar scene most of the time — as there is nothing vague or abstract about them but chiefly because they carry about themselves the rich flavour of reality — implicit though ever present where language and life coincide.

There is no gap, no "intellectual" disruption between words and things or beings, they cling to each other in the minds of the *pemantun* as well as of the people who listen to him. For them, the language of pantuns contains the very substance and essence of their life, of what their life — I do not mean their separate individual lives, but their common life — used to be still recently, deeply engraved in the Malay mind as part of their collective memory.

When drawing up the lists above, my purpose was not only to examplify my statement by showing, for instance, how large a

number of very precise denominations, specific of Malay kampung life, could be found in a comparatively limited treasury of pantuns. I had it also in mind to put together into their various categories the separate elements of the old traditional life scattered in these couplets, of the ancestral environment : the tropical rain forest, with the generosity of Nature who has provided so many sorts of fruits, vegetables, animals, etc. not only to be eaten as such but to be made better through the work and ingenuity of man, as well as the seas and rivers with their fish, etc.

In other words, making so to speak a roll-call of all these words, I wanted to check the identity and the concrete presence of each of them, making sure that they were to me more than mere script or sound, in order to understand the similes, to grasp the connotations, the hidden meanings and underlying symbols better. I had not lost sight of the fact that, as Fauconnier puts it in his novel, « it is the play on words, the equivocations, the tenuous allusions, that constitute [the] special charm [of pantuns] for the Malays. One must have lived a long while among them to catch the various connotations of each word beside its literal sense ....»[1]

This is why it was necessary that these words should become for me the real fruits, vegetables, trees, birds, persons or places they stand for — necessary to look for them on the market place or in shops, in kampung orchards as well as in the jungle or along the roads, on riversides as well as on the sea-shore — necessary that I should become familiar with a traditional Malay house inside and outside, for instance, in order to fully appreciate such a simple image as:

Pasang lilin di atas peti

Light a candle on the chest

or:

Buah jering di atas para

A pod of jering on the rack

[1] H. Fouconnier, *The Soul of Malaya*, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

or:

Rumah baharu cantik dialas,
Alasan hebat kerawang berbunga;

New house so pretty and well-built,
Foundations strong and flower patterns.

— necessary to know that such houses are always built on stilts, to hear the mooing of cows or the cackle of hens just below, to find it particularly painful on the first night to sleep in one of their nearly bare rooms with only a thin mat and a pillow on the hard floor boards, in order to understand directly, with my whole body, couplets like the following:

Sakit kaki ditikam tunggul,
Tunggul kecil di bawah rumah.

Sore is my foot, hurt by a stump,
A little stump below the house.

or:

Rumah kecil tiang seribu,
Rumah gedang terpanggung.

A small house on a hundred stilts,
A large one like a stage.

or:

Bentang tikar, tidur tidak,
Saya biasa tidur di pangku.

My mat unrolled, I cannot sleep,
Accustomed to sleep in your arms.

While the first couplet of a pantun can always be considered as an independant image — which actually can be used in different quatrains sometimes — the second, because it is set against what I

have called the background created by the first, can hardly be dissociated from it. In fact, the two couplets are as inseparable as the terms of a metaphor once the pantun has been composed, to be finally established, as the case may be, and consecrated by tradition as a good pantun (or rejected and forgotten), passing from mouth to ear for generations — I should say, inseparable as body and soul.

For if the first couplet usually refers to the physical life and environment of Malays, to their material circumstances, the second is most of the time in close connection with their social, intellectual, affective and spiritual life.

This is where the Malay soul finds its truest expression — in popular wisdom, for instance, which appears in proverbs or proverbial sayings like:

Hati muda jangan diturut,
Kalau diturut salah datang.

Youthful heart don't follow too much,
For if you do, there come mistakes.

or:

Berapa tinggi tupai melompat,
Sekali-sekali jatuh ke tanah.

However high the squirrel may soar,
To earth he falls, or soon or late.

or:

Hutang emas boleh dibayar,
Hutang budi dibawa mati.

Our debts of gold we can repay,
A debt of heart we take to the grave.

or:

Sesal dahulu pendapatan,
Sesal kemudian apa gunanya?

Early regret can be a gain,
But too late, what is it good for?

as well as in humour:

Apa guna pasang pelita
Jika tidak dengan sumbunya?
Apa guna bermain mata,
Kalau tidak dengan sungguhnya?

Why attempt to light a lamp
If the lamp has not a wick?
Why look at me like a vamp
If it's only for a trick ?

— in its taste for riddles:

Dalam batang ada daun,
Dalam daun ada isi.

Inside the cane a leaf,
Within the leaf, something.

or jokes:

Mata juling serong melihat,
Jauh bertentang tidak tahu.

Squinting eyes do look aslant,
If they face from far I do not know.

— in its religious feelings:

Bagaimana Nabi kasihkan umat,
Begitulah saya kasihkan tuan.

Just as the Prophet loved his people,
So my mistress do I love.

or:

Hajat hati tak hendak bercerai,
Kehendak Allah siapalah tahu?

Never to part, such is my heart's desire,
But God's will, who can know?

or:

Sudahlah nasib permintaan badan,
Kita di bawah kehendak Allah.

Alas that is the body's fate,
Under the will of God we live.

or else:

Harta dunia jangan ditamak,
Kalau mati tidak mengikut.

The goods of this world do not covet,
For when you die they will not follow.

as well as in its pangs of amorous passion:

Sakit hati memandang susu,
Susu ada di dalam kebaya.

Sore is my heart, watching her breasts,
Her breasts alive beneath her blouse.

or of love, from its coming — whether gradual :

Dari mana datang sayang?
Dari mata turun ke hati.

And love, whence does it come?
From the eyes into the heart.

— or sudden:

Bukan mati kerana racun,
Mati dijeling ekor mata.

Not by poison was I killed,
But the stranger's sidelong glance.

to its fulfilment:

Di mana tempat kita berjanji?
Di dalam kelambu di atas tilam.

Where were we pledged to each other?
On the couch below the curtains.

and to estrangement:

Tengah sedap mata memandang,
Datang Allah diceraínya.

Whilst eyes with pleasure dwelt on you,
Came God, and parted us asunder.
(A.W.H.)

or:

Mulut manis kepada saya,
Hati kasih pada yang lain.

Sweet words on your lips for me,
But your heart is for another.

and to separation:

Sakit sungguh bercerai main,
Makan berkuah air mata.

Painful, true, to part for lovers,
Their food is salted with tears.

or:

Putus benang boleh disambung,
Patah arang sudah sekali.

A broken thread again you'll tie,
But broken charcoal can't be mended.

Examples would be tremendously numerous in this field, and I shall not insist. It is a well-known fact that a majority of pantuns deal with the multiple aspects of what is called love even when it is mere lust or turns to detestation and hatred. But the use of pantuns on various occasions in society in opposition to its individual and more "secret" use is also an expression of Malay civilization in itself. And to some extent, the chances of survival of the pantun in society not as a memory of the past but as a living form of expression lie much more likely, it seems to me, in its present use as words for modern popular songs than in more or less artificial revivals in the shape of radio broadcasts like "Berbalas Pantun",[2] for instance. While today's *penyair* or *penyajak* seem to have deliberately turned their backs to it as a means of poetic expression, which is quite understandable in terms of "modernity", the pantun can remain widely used as words for songs, just as the melodies of popular songs are still following the tonal system in spite of the existence of atonal and dodecaphonic music for more than sixty years.

Pantuns were traditionally used for centuries and still are, in some places, though less frequently for marriage proposals, as well as betrothal and wedding ceremonies and other functions, whether official or private. Even today, persons are often expected to insert pantuns into their speeches and not so long ago, the Malaysian Press reported the success achieved by the State Assemblyman for Langkawi when he delivered his whole lengthy address in the form of so-called "pantuns"[3] (actually, his quatrains were more like *syair* stanzas but what counts here was that everyone called them pantuns

[2]Thus, on Sunday 30th November, 1986, between the "pemantun" of RTM, Kota Baharu and a club of firemen from Kelantan.

[3]« Kedah representative Ismail Yaakob held the audience spellbound for 25 minutes with delightful "pantuns", » said *The New Strait Times* of Friday September 19th, 1986. And the *Berita Harian* of the same day : « Pantun wakil Kedah gegarkan dewan: ... Wakil Umno Kedah, Encik Ismail Yaakob, menyampaikan ucapannya

and that the Honorable Assemblyman expressed criticism by means of *sindir*, which made it more palatable to the audience).

« Quatrains are bandied between boy and girl, between the parents of the bride and the parents of the groom, at betrothals and weddings, between dancer and he partner, »[4] writes Winstedt. A good part of Alias Yunos's book *Pantun Melayu Sastera Ra'ayat*[5] is devoted to the various occasions and ceremonies at which pantuns are or were used by the different parties to deliver messages indirectly, especially when expressing discontent, disappointment or anger, irony or sheer mockery, or when talking of confidential matters. The use of pantuns makes it possible for the parties concerned to express their feelings politely, even when the reply means to be sarcastic or ironical. There would be thousands of examples of this way of behaving in the respect of tradition.

Pantuns were also sung as an entertainment, to make merry, to chase away care and sadness, at Ronggeng meetings, for instance, which were popular festivals with hired singer-dancers. « Out of a big repertory, writes Winstedt, the singers choose quatrains associated by custom or, if they are clever, change and adapt old verses or invent new... »[6] a scene in Fouconnier's book *The Soul of Malaya* illustrates this last point : « Nothing could be less seductive than such dancing

---

secara berpantun dan berseloka. » Here are the first two "pantuns" (out fo forty-seven):

Nama saya masih tak berubah
Ismail bin Yaakob macam tahun sudah
Bahagian Jerlun Langkawi dalam Negeri Kedah
Negeri jelapang padi tapi penduduknya masih susah

Tiap-tiap hari di jeti Kuah Pulau Langkawi
Siap dengan ayak zaman akar tok ranjang besi
Akar ini kalu dok amal petang dan pagi
Dia tak kira umur, silap-silap kena tambah satu lagi.

My name is still the same, Ismail bin Yaakob,
As it has been all these past years,
Of Jerlun, Langkawi, in the State of Kedah,
"Rice bowl" country, but its people still destitute.

Everyday in the Island, at Kuah Jetty, etc.

[4] *Classical Malay Laiterature, op. cit.* p. 205.
[5] ***Op. cit.* (see Bibliography).**
[6] *Classical Malay Literature, op. cit.* p. 205.

girls. Jerking their forearms, they moved across the stage in stilted poses. Meanwhile the young men of the village hesitated to face these choreographic stars. The first few were haled on to the platform by the *penghulu*'s eldest son. But that encouraged the rest, and soon [...] the performance began to liven up. From time to time the shrill voice of one of the women could be heard uttering a couplet. For want of beauty, they have cultivated their minds, and they know by heart hundreds of epigrams with which they tease the dancers...»[1]

Among other occasions, Alias Yunos mentions such social gatherings as "*Mandi Safar*" like those which were held in Melaka (a ritual bath which took place on the last Wednesday of the month of Safar — the second of the Muslim year — as a protection against various misfortunes and calamities like earthquakes, big floods or drought), "*Dendang Sayang*" or love-songs performed by two singers who exchange pantuns following the rhythm of a certain music, or "*Serampang Dua Belas*" ("*Serampang Laut*"), a mixture of songs and dances. He also expatiates on the use of pantuns in traditional Malay society in connection with marriage proposals, betrothals, weddings and other private or official ceremonies. Actually, the social use of pantuns alone would deserve a whole study, and much more than the limited space of this chapter.

The existence itself of the pantun for centuries — as the most popular and widespread mode of poetic expression, among other forms — has been the obvious evidence of the Malay people's intellectual and artistic life, of their sense of beauty (the beauty of common, humble things, in everyday life), of their sensitiveness in general : an anonymous and oral form of poetry, original to the point that it is not to be found anywhere else on Earth, and only in a rather restricted area of the vast expanse of seas, islands and peninsulas known as "the Malay world"; a form of poetry that is not the

[1] H. Fauconnier, *op.cit.*, pp. 164-165. The whole scene is interesting in this respect (pp. 164-169). For instance: « The women, surprised at first, soon showed that they knew all about an art whose subtleties they had disdained to display to uncomprehending eyes. They were delighted. Art and kindness can transfigure everything, and they became almost graceful. In courteous stanzas they addressed the dancers as princes of the line of Sang Sapurba, as Argus pheasants, as green beetles; and the brothers countered, using the same rhymes, with compliments to houris and flasks of perfume. The audience applauded vigorously. But Smail having put a trifle of irony into one of his replies, a sharp couplet designated him a duck trying to crow; this he parried with an allusion to a hen that would never lay an egg. After a few skirmishes in this style, the women took offence, stopped dancing and sat down. «

apanage of a few learned men only, but the common heritage of the people.

On the occasion of the field-work in which I took part in the rural areas of Hulu Dungun, Terengganu, after hearing a good deal of unrecorded pantuns from the mouth of some of the last old men and women who can still remember them today — people who could not even sign their names — I noticed (as I have said) how close the lines of pantuns, their structure, usual rhythm and intonations were to the sentence patterns and rhythms of my companions and the village people's usual turns of speech and — I discovered later on — so many commercial or political slogans. This, I think, made me feel even more vividly than any intellectual study so far how vital the pantun has been to the Malays until recently as the essential vehicle of their traditional culture and the most familiar and commonly shared expression of their civilization.

This chapter is only an outline of the study which could be made of the pantun as an expression of Malay civilization. The more comprehensive work I have in mind — "Malay civilization as seen through its poetic expression in the pantun" — would entail more research and require, in particular, the analysis of a much larger treasury of pantuns. The examination of that material would have to be minutely detailed and examplified, more precisely classified perhaps, in connection with concrete observation. It would help connect and organize the elements scattered so far in so many documents and former studies.

CHAPTER VIII

Beauty and Magic

If one of the assets of poetry at its best is the magic of beauty accomplished by language, the Malay pantun can be placed among the highest achievements of mankind in this form of art. Too much analysis and dissection, an excess of absorption in technicalities, could make us forget the essential about it, without which very little of this research would be worth while : the powerful charm of a poetic language both accessible to all and subtle as a medium of expression, within the limits and rules of a brief form which obliges the "poet" (any Malay boy or girl, man or woman) to be "efficient" in sixteen words or so.

Not unlike any other poetic form in world literature, it has its own clichés, its own conventional phrases, symbols and images, and part of the existing treasury of pantuns, even in anthologies, is certainly far from outstanding. But, even if each and every quatrain is not necessarily a masterpiece, the Malay pantun, as one of the fixed forms of poetry ever devised by man, can vie, as I have said, with such famous genres as the Japanese *haiku* or the European *sonnet*.

Not so short as the former, not based on the "naiveté" and suddenness of surprise, it lends itself to the utterance of a much larger scale of thoughts, emotions, sentiments. More condensed and tense than the French, or Italian sonnet, for instance, its two parts could be said to correspond to their division into two quatrains and two tercets but with its own peculiar use of the relationship between them. Moreover, should the brief space of the four-line pantun prove too narrow for the span of expression required, there are always, as we have seen, various "expanded" forms available, even if we must

acknowledge the superiority of the single quatrain.

An assessment of beauty is no easy thing, however, and the fewer the words the better. The beauty of a poem, of any arrangement of words always speaks for itself, and the discourse that one can make about it — whether commentary or paraphrase — is always inferior to its object : a bunch of faded flowers as compared to those which make nature so radiant in spring. This is probably why so few people, it seems, have written about the beauty of pantuns, and so little indeed.

Winstedt for one, in his *History of Classical Malay Literature:* « At its best the *pantun* does far more than juggle with verbal assonance, is indeed 'simple, sensuous and passionate' and has the magic of inevitable phrase. »[1] The very sae statement is repeated in his postface to *Pantun Melayu*, where we can read: « So much study has to be devoted to the structure and purport of the *pantun*, to the intricate puzzle side of it, that its claim to be poetry is apt to be forgotten. »[2] Which is, more or less, what I observed at the beginning of this chapter.

For Winstedt, the pantun is « an ingenious metrical form » which « gives expression to some very clever satire »[3] He also says that it « has love as its principal theme » but his reference, his standard, his touchstone in this field, what he calls « a high form of poetry, » is examplified in the following quatrain by Robert Burns:

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun,
I will love thee still, my dear,
While the sands o'life shall run.

which he seems to consider as one of the summits of poetry — while I would say that it is charming and touching undoubtedly, like many of Burns's songs, but does not certainly take us as far as many a pantun!

Anyhow, Winstedt contends that « it is a high standard to set »[4] and simply concedes that in certain pantuns, « in some dozen or so out of the hundreds one may collect, that standard is reached. »[5] But

[1] Winsted, *op. cit.*, p. 207.
[2] In Wilkinson and Winstedt, *Pantun Melayu, op. cit.* p. 200.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 200.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 200.
[5] *Ibid.* p. 200.

strangely enough, he does not even quote the last two lines of a pantun which utter as much as the above stanza with only eight words and such intensity:

Kering laut tanah Melaka,
Baharu saya mungkir janji.

When Malacca's sea runs dry,
Only then I'll break my promise.

In my opinion, there is hardly any point of comparison — apart from the theme — between the pantun in general and the type of poetry mentioned by Winstedt as a standard, a standard which seems to prevail among the British authors who have commented and translated pantuns. Their idea, their model of poetry of the mock Robert Herrick or Burns type, quite visible in Hamilton's translations, for instance,[6] seems to me light-years away from the real style and beauty of the Malay pantun in terseness and reserve. To me, there is no such false, artificial naivety of language and tone about the pantun, which on the contrary remains always halfway between discrete familiarity of expression and mystery, and will rather veil its feelings than express them with such an excess of sentimentality and even garrulousness as sometimes with Robert Burns. The beauty of the pantun is certainly characterized by entirely different qualities.

---

[6]As, for instance, the same well-known pantun in English translation, by Winstedt first, then by Hamilton:

Dari mana punai melayang?
Dari paya turun ke padi.
Dari mana datang sayang?
Dari mata turun ke hati.

Whence from the fallows winged the dove?
Eyes led his flight towards the stalk.
Ah! thence it springs, does callow love!
Aye fed by sight — for eyes can talk.

Whence the dove on outstreched pinion?
From the swamp to fields apart.
Whence the dawn of love's dominion?
From the eye it fires the heart.

Where's the direct, simple freshness of the original?

A good part of it depends essentially on the sounds and their harmonious combination and organization, their repetitions in each pair of rhyming lines, first of all on their intrinsic quality — together with the peculiar rhythm of pantun lines, founded on the presence of a light stress at the end of words (something which Malay has in common with French). But at the same time, the powerful charm of these poems cannot be dissociated from its two principal characteristics in connection with the "meaning" or "content": first, the concreteness of the language in the opening couplet; secondly, the terseness, the elliptic expression of feelings, sentiments, intentions in the *maksud*, which can make the last two lines stand out like striking formulas:

Pura-pura tidak melihat,
Hati di dalam bagai digaru.

Pretending not to have seen,
The heart as if harrowed in me.

or:

Mulut manis kepada saya,
Hati kasih pada yang lain.

Sweet words on your lips for me,
Love for another in your heart.

or:

Karam di laut boleh ditimba,
Karam di hati bilakan sudah.

A ship that's sinking you can bale,
But a heart's wreck, when will it end?

or:

Putus benang boleh disambung,
Patah arang sudah sekali.

A broken thread again you'll tie,
But broken charcoal can't be mended.

With the best pantuns — and these are far more numerous than Winstedt wants us to believe — the strength, the evidence, the intensity, together with the sound organization in close relationship with the expression, make the "formula" sound like something impossible to alter, something which could never have been different — exactly what Winstedt calls "inevitable phrase", so that many of them became proverbs or proverbial sayings.

But this should not lead us to underrate the importance of the "pembayang", of its apparent or more secret links with the "maksud", of the pantun as a whole in the creation of beauty:

Manis sungguh tebu seberang
Dari akar sampai ke pucuk,
Manis sungguh mulut orang,
Kena tipu di dalam pujuk.

That sugar-cane on yonder shore,
How sweet inded from root to tip!
That coaxing mouth which lied the more,
How sweet indeed from lip to lip!

or:

Rumah kecil pintu ke laut,
Tempat orang menggesek biola.
Tubuh kecil bagai diraut,
Di situ tempat hatiku gila.

The little house beside the sea,
Where men their fiddles scrape.
Her little body's maddening me,
Her slender sculpted shape.

or:

Anak beruk di kayu rendang,
Turun mandi di dalam paya.

Hodoh buruk di mata orang,
Cantik manis di mata saya.

Young monkey for a bathe descends
To the swamp from a shady tree.
Plain, ugly in the eyes of friends,
Beauty and sweetness she's to me.

In such accomplished pantuns — and there are so many more — beauty develops so to speak progressively, homogeneously, through a succession of stages which include both sound modification and a metamorphosis of meaning until, the last chord being struck, the poem closes in on itself to become one harmonious sphere. There is something really magical about the way it unfolds in us like one of these Japanese paper flowers when plunged in water.

In the first of the above examples, "manis sungguh tebu seberang" gives us first to hear an insidious note of desire for inaccessible sweetness — the sweetness of what will soon appear like unattainable love, of what first looks like love but is mere sweet words on the lips and treachery hidden beneath flattery.

In the next, all the beauty lies in the image of the house and the music which is like the soul of it : likewise the body is the house of the soul, it is small, too, and as beautiful as a carved image, the very place for the burning desire which is madness in the heart; the whole poem combines elements such as the sea and music in connection with the little house, which enhance the beauty of the small statue-like shape of the beloved — a mixture of torture and delight in the whole being of the man in love. With the exception of "gila" — mad — this pantun is entirely composed of concrete images, by means of simple everyday words whose associations have a magical effect on our imagination and affect our own feelings.

Very rich, too, is the third one, with a touch of irony to begin with, when you think of the parallel "beruk/buruk" — monkey, ugly — but at the same time the idea of bathing makes us forget about the monkey and the implicit comparison, to suggest the image of a sleek body in a wet sarung, and love, or desire, which makes the plainest girl an object of beauty: what does it matter if she looks ugly to people's eyes while she looks fair and sweet to mine?

Perhaps there is one more thing to say about the relationship between "pembayang" and "maksud": apart from the possible

effect of the former on the latter, there is very often at least a sort of counter-effect, of "feed-back" of the latter on the former and thus, a succession of new effects and counter-effects which multiply the beauty and magic power of a good pantun.

Actually we should not speak of beauty in general terms, of the magical effect of pantuns: if I have given a few examples, to try and comment upon them, awkwardly perhaps and artificially, it is only to show that the only way for us to identify beauty and enjoy it is to *listen* attentively to one pantun at a time, as long as it is necessary for harmony to become fully perceptible and for harmonics to develop.

The magical effect, I said.

For truly this is nearly always what I feel in front of a good pantun : its beauty acting like magic — to such an extent that it came up to me one day to ask myself — hypothetically — whether or not it was possible to speak not only of the magic of the Malay pantun, but of the pantun ***as magic***. As magic, that is, not simply as a magic formula, a sort of "mantera": for what struck me indeed when studying the structure and prosody of pantun lines, was the recurrence of their specific rhythm in everyday speech as well as in commercial, moral and political slogans (and what are slogans, if not manteras of some sort pronounced and repeated in order to obtain certain effects), not to forget *bomoh's* manteras themselves, like the following ones:[7]

Asal embun menjadi air,
Asal air menjadi buih,
Asal buih menjadi batu,
Asal batu menjadi bijih.

From dew there came water,
From water there came foam,
From foam there came earth,
From earth there came ore.

*

[7] Richard Winstedt, *The Malay Magician* (see Bibliography), pp. 130, 135, 130 and 131, and pp. 29, 47, 30 and 31 for the translations, respectively.

Tepung tawar! Tepung jati!
Dapat emas berkati-kati.
Aku menepung tawar beras padi.
Sudah berisi maka menjadi.

Rice-paste without speck!
I'll get gold by the peck!
I charm my rice crushed and in ear!
I'll get full grain within the year!

*

Sinar mencerang akan mukaku.
Bintang timur akan mataku.
Gajah jantan akan badanku.
Harimau buas akan sandarku.
Buaya ganas kedudukanku.

The light of dawn for my face,
The morning star for my eyes,
A male elephant for my body,
A fierce tiger for my support,
A ravening crocodile for my home.

*

Kau turut kataku!
Jikalau kau tak turut kataku,
Mati bunuh Seri Rama.
Jikalau kau turut kataku,
Dihidupi Maharisyi.

Obey my words (trapped elephant)!
If thou obeyst not,
Thou wilt be killed by Sri Rama;
If thou obeyst,
The great Rishis will keep you alive.

For a pantun, once composed, although or because it flies from mouth to ear and from ear to mouth as so many did for centuries, will

tend to assume a fixed form, to become a formula which anyone can use in order simply to express some kind of hope, love, lesson in a more effective, instructive or propitiatory way : any pantun in fact, the one which will seem the most appropriate among already existing pantuns or a modified or entirely new one composed for the occasion to express a sentiment, a passion or on the contrary an ironic judgement or a trait of wisdom. As expressed by means of the coded message of a fixed form, it could perhaps have more strength — greater amorous or paedagogic power — and be apter to communication, cause the person or persons addressed to be more favourably influenced in spite of themselves, not through direct conscious perception, but through the channels of the subconscious. This is why I said "once composed", once it has passed into the public domain — in which case it can be used as a mere formula — because at the origin, when about to be created by a given human being, it can be understood as a unique individual magic operation.

For instance, — there could be thousands of them of this kind — the man or woman in love will compose an original pantun (this must have happened as many times as there are recorded pantuns, plus as many times as there are pantuns which were not recorded — certainly the more numerous — either because they were known only by the person for whom they were secretly destined, or quickly forgotten because they were not really worthy of attention), or a pantun partly borrowed — either the first couplet because something in its music or in its symbols calls irresistibly for the second — which is then the genuine expression of the love, desire, passion or despair of its author — or the second, because it seems to be perfectly adapted to the situation, but which the author wants to initiate with a "pembayang" of his own, in closer connection with the circumstances (place and time) or else clearly related (for the author and his or her love) with their person and the peculiar occasion of their meeting.

It is quite possible to imagine, then, that the first two lines, whose link with the other two has often been contested — or the total absence of link claimed, other than in sound and rhyme pattern — could be, conversely, at least in some cases, because of their concrete nature, the essential element of the magical operation. Perhaps it would be necessary to say: in spite of it **and** because of it, in other words, there would be some sort of a hide-and-seek game between the evidence expressed by the concrete elements of the "pembayang" — something belonging to the familiar, the commonplace, the daily,

with its really palpable character — and their symbolic and magical role.

The fact that such elements belong to everyday familiar reality, or possibly to historic facts, known places or personages, etc. could endow them so to speak with an active strength, a power of efficacy, which should communicate itself to the unreal, the optative. I mean to the wishes and hopes of success implicitly contained in the expression, often abstract and more or less veiled, at least in its terms, of the suffering or despair of an unhappy passion perhaps purposely exaggerated.

It could even be that, originally, some of the elements of the first couplet such as, for instance, dried flowers or basil in a basket or on a tray,

Bunga rampai di dalam puan,
Bunga selasih di dalam peti,

Petals and leaves in the bowl,
Sweet basil flower in the chest, —

were disposed in reality, somewhere in his room, by the author or user of the pantun to make the operation even more effective. It is difficult not to think of a magical operation (whether really performed or only in words) when reading a pantun like the following:

Malam ini malam Jumaat,
Pasang lilin di atas peti,
Tepuk bantal, panggil semangat,
Supaya bertemu dalam mimpi.

Muslim Sabbath eve tonight,
So light a candle on the chest,
Pat your pillow, call a sprite,
So we meet in dreamland best.

(And meeting in dream can be regarded as a first step towards reality, a favourable forewarning).

Likewise, insofar as the first two lines can evoke the traditional preparation of the bride for the wedding, here is a pantun where the nuptial image, we can imagine, is being called forth in order

to favour a happy end to love's torture:

Orang berinai berhitam kuku,
Mandi dijirus air mawar.
Tuan seorang biji mataku,
Racun diminum jadi penawar.

With henna nails are stained in red,
The bath full of rose water pure.
With you alone I'd fain to wed,
The poison drunk would be my cure.

We find rose-water again — destined to assuage the burning ache caused by red ants — as the magical duplicate, the propitiatory image of the wished for antidote to the "poison" of unrequited love in the well-known pantun:

Kerengga di dalam buluh,
Serahi berisi air mawar.
Sampai hasrat di dalam tubuh,
Tuan seorang jadi penawar.

Red ants inside a bamboo cane,
Rose water in a long-necked flask.
When burning desire fills my frame,
From you alone the cure I ask.

Such evident examples are numerous indeed. And perhaps, conversely, where the rôle, the meaning of the first couplet and its relationship with the second remain obscure, should we proceed with caution and not insist on transforming at all cost an apparent or real incoherence into a supposedly magic formula ! But it is not forbidden, I think, to raise the question everytime. Without dwelling complacently on the idea nor forcing the issue, I am convinced that an attentive examination, in a number of pantuns, between the two extremes of the very-clear and the entirely-obscure, would enable us to make out, to unravel the elements of a magic — love magic in most cases — founded on symbol and analogy and borrowing from the concrete existence of simple everyday objects, from the force contained in their reality, a power of creation, of materialization, of

action which the symbols, images, metaphors of the pantun designate and call forth.

The same sort of spontaneous intention is clearly visible in some of the pantuns traditionally sung by mothers to their babies, like the following:

Ta-teh setahun lagi,
Pandai berjalan pandai berkata;
Ta-teh sebulan lagi,
Boleh jadi bujang perkasa.

Step by step and one year more,
He can walk and talk he can;
Step by step and one month more,
A courageous little man.

Buai tinggi
Sampai cucur atap;
Belum tumbuh gigi,
Pandai baca kitab.

Toss him up high,
Up to the eaves,
Not teething yet,
Books he can read!

Oh bulan di mana bintang?
Sudah terlindung di kayu ara;
Oh sayang, di mana bujang?
Bujang menjadi orang perkasa.

O moon, the star, where is she?
She's hiding in the fig-tree;
The lad, alas, where is he?
A valiant man, as you see.

« Pantun kanak-kanak ini, says Alias Yunos, [8] digunakan oleh ibu-ibu atau nenek-nenek untuk menanamkan satu semangat ke

[8] *Op. cit.* p. 3.

dalam jiwa anak-anak itu dengan harapan apabila kanak-kanak itu menjadi orang dewasa kelak mereka menjadi orang bijak, bersemangat, etc. » : these pantuns are used by mothers and grandmothers to infuse "semangat" — the spirit of life force, of vitality — into their children with the hope that in future, when they are adults, they will be intelligent and courageous.

The kind of magic I am hinting at could not, obviously, be anything else than individual magic, instinctive and "natural", especially with a people whose belief in magic is deeply ingrained, having gone, in the course of centuries, through different religions without disappearing, adapting itself to Hinduism and Islam successively — quite different in fact from the magic practised by acknowledged specialists, *bomoh* or *pawang* — a magic directly accessible to anybody and as if spontaneously improvised in case of need; if not to anybody, at least to those who are able to conceive, and perceive, together and separately, the existence and the essence of things, or rather to consider them — and use them — in the first two lines of a pantun, on these two planes at a time : openly, by means of the enunciation itself, on the plane of their concrete physical existence (in which lies their strength, the strength of real things) and implicitly, as a reflection to the idea, the intention, the deeper meaning of the second couplet, in their essence, through which, by analogy, they will acquire power of action and creation.

A simple sort of magic, not performed with the help of spirits — which is why the wizard or sorcerer is not required — a magic which necessitates no special formula, no *mantera* in order to avail itself of the spirits' cooperation or goodwill, or keep them away should they be nocive or nefarious.

A purely verbal sort of magic — but there lies its force and originality — which rests, like that of all deeper poetry, on the belief in the creative force of the word, in the power of denomination: this force, on the human level, resides so to speak in the alternative current between the concrete referent and its essence, the meaning, the signification. The sign is directed with all the might enclosed, concentrated in matter, towards the realization of the purpose.

Maybe this could be said of all poetry, but more or less approximately, whereas it seems to be inherent in the very form of the pantun, in its utterly peculiar structure, which one cannot ignore without denying at the same time the notion of pantun itself, based on more or less distant analogy. The two "halves" of the pantun are like

two separate poles without which there can be no current, no magnetic field – or like the two ***separate*** parts of the critical mass necessary for nuclear explosion (or controlled reaction). This is precisely why pantuns can work like a sort of magic – a magical operation for the creator of an original pantun, a magic formula for those who will use it after him, consciously or not, rather out of instinct, naturally so to speak.

This, of course, is only a hypothesis carried to its utmost consequences, but I think it enables us to catch more than a glimpse of what, deeply, makes some of the Malay pantuns so fascinating. I am not unaware of its possible foolhardiness, but I feel at the same time that it can throw some additional light on the question of the relationship between "pembayang" and "maksud", the most mysterious characteristic of the pantun and one of the essential elements of its beauty.

Ambil pena tuliskan surat,
Mari ditulis di atas batu.
Dari dunia sampai akhirat,
Badan dua menjadi satu.

Take a pen and write a letter,
Come, let us write it on a stone.
From this world unto a better,
Bodies twain, henceforth, are one.
(A.W.H.)

*

Bunga melur kembang sekaki,
Mari dibungkus dengan kertas.
Di dalam telur lagi dinanti,
Inikan pula sudah menetas.

A solitary jasmine flower,
Let's wrap it up in paper fast.
Inside the shell unto this hour,
I see you're fully hatched at last!

*

Asal kapas menjadi benang,
Asal benang menjadi kain.
Sudah lepas jangan dikenang,
Sudah menjadi orang lain.

Cotton will become a thread,
Into fabric thread will come.
Chase the absent from your head,
Now another he's become.

CHAPTER IX

Translating Pantuns

A few general considerations to begin with: as a writer and literary translator, not a specialist of linguistics nor what might be called a scholar in any literary disciplin whatsoever, I do not intend to propound any theoretical opinions about the translation of literary works, of poetry in particular. All I wish to do here is to try and speak of my personal adventure, I mean experience and practice in this field in connection with my attempts at translating Malay pantuns into French.

One preliminary remark, nevertheless : whereas the language of science and technology is supposed and has to be univocal, the language of literature, of poetry first of all, is and has to be plurivocal, which means, in particular, that there can always be several versions (several readings) of the same original text, and also that the ideal translation is never attained once and for all. Moreover, the variability of the individual factors at work and their variability within each separate individual are such that I can hardly believe in the possibility of establishing (even after the fact) any satisfactory and valid theory of literary translation. A certain way of considering one's task, an unselfish attitude in front of the original work, a devoted disposition towards it, some sort of ethics and an unflinching critical position regarding the result of one's work, undoubtedly ... And I am sepaking, of course, of the translation of a literary work of art into a literary work of art, the only type of translation in which I can be interested as a writer.

Literal translation, in literature, can seldom be the case, not to say never, although it is a must for the translator, I think, to stick to

the literality of the original work as long as he has not begun writing a single line of translation in his own language — which is the only way of seeing through the words and between the lines. The simplest sentence in a novel, the clearest line of a poem will give rise to endless discussions on the part of different translators, professors and critics. Besides, the same endless conflicts will take place within the mind of the translator himself sitting alone to face his task. Andre Gide, for instance, once wrote in his *Journal*: « This morning I finished translating the first act of *Hamlet*, and I can't push myself further. I've spent three weeks on these few pages at the rate of four to six hours a day. I'm not satisfied with the result. The difficulties are never completely conquered ...»[1] The literality of the original should be the guardian of its spirit, and this is why we must come back to it, listen to it attentively whenever we are in doubt and the right words and phrases do not form satisfactorily in our mind.

Experience has taught me to consider every book, every single poem I wish to translate as a particular case and to treat it as such, as ignorantly and innocently as I can, without any preconceived ideas. In other words, to apply whatever skill I may have acquired, whatever talent I may possess, with humility and patience, to find out what seems to me the best way of conveying by means of my own language what I feel, what I believe to be the genuine essence of the original — aware that in the transfer, anyhow, part of this essence evaporates.

It may take days and weeks (as André Gide experienced, weeks of disappointing efforts sometimes), days and weeks of careful reading and appreciation, of patient attention, of endless brooding and waiting before you come up, or wake up one fine morning, with the fully convincing (or simply acceptable, "satisfactory") rendering of a line or stanza on the tip of your tongue. The poem you want to translate has to become *your* poem, you must eat and sleep with it, so to speak, until it is born to life again with a new body and a new soul as well. The only difference in this case with a personal poem is that instead of originating from the start in your own feelings and thoughts, your urge for expression feeds back on another poet's words, on the emotions or ideas which he was able to convey in his poem or which lay deep in him as its background. Some way or other, they have to become yours before you can really do the job with a real chance of success.

[1] André Gide, *Journal I*, Gallimard (Pleiade), p. 735.

Need I say that such a process is doubly subjective, contesting therefore, as I have already done, the very idea of scientific theorizing at this stage — even more the idea of computer assisted translation in this field, not denying the possibility of assistance but simply thinking that the machine would leave most of the task, the essential part of it, for the flesh and blood translator to achieve, irrespective of the fact that the machine would certainly be dangerous perhaps, surely misleading, at the early stage which is not one of writing, but of getting pervaded by the ideas, images, emotions, etc. which the machine, dealing with words and structures only, would be unable even to perceive.

As is always the case with art in general — as I mentioned in my chapter on pantun prosody — what we call "rules" or "laws", methods, etc. will always come after the masterpiece, not before, and cannot be of real use for the creation of a new one. The original work of art has its intrinsic, inner laws. Whoever puts forth "the laws" first and then the work is an imitator, not a creator. Actually, translation can be taught only to a certain point, which is purely technical, not to that of good literary translation, which is creation : no more can you teach anyone to become a creative writer if he does not feel the urge to write and learn what he has to learn for himself through attempt and failure.

Furthermore, you can have a perfect knowledge of the source and target languages and be a poor translator of fiction and poetry. Although such a knowledge is a prerequisite (but you can be helped by a native speaker of the source language and do a good job in your own), it usually proves insufficient. Literary translation at its best, as I have just said, is an act of creative writing very similar to that of the novelist or of the poet, because it implies, it requires, to be really accomplished, that the result be as good a novel or a poem in the new language as in the original or even, why not, a better one. The case is not unfrequent of authors who have a preference for the translation of one of their works in another language: I remember Lawrence Durrell maintained that the French version of his *Alexandria Quartet* was better than his own.

Useless to say that where poetry is concerned the process of re-creation, but at the same time the necessity of faithfulness, is hardly ever possible. Too much of what gives its poetic truth and strength to a line in the original language depends as much on its very sounds and rhythm, on its own respiration, as on its semantic and syntactic

contents, to say nothing of all that lurks between the words and lines — wherefore poetry has been deemed untranslatable in its essence.

Think, for instance, of these two opening lines of one of Rilke's poems:

Das ist die Sehnsucht: wohnen im Gewoge
und keine Heimat haben in der Zeit.

which give, in the version of Maurice Betz, his first translator in France about fifty years ago:

Telle est la nostalgie: habiter sur la houle
et ne jamais avoir d'asile dans le temps.

Honestly, the idea is there, more than roughly. But if you listen to the German words attentively, you realize that something essential has disappeared in French, which was inherent in their weight and rhythm : the long vowels of *Sehnsucht, wohnen, Gewoge;* the long **o** repeated on the stress, the sound **ei** (*ai*) three times on the stress in the second verse — this one literally out of breath, due to the two successive **h**'s and to the inverted rhythm in "**h**aben in der **Zeit**" ... whereas "nostalgie" sounds a bit weak in comparison with the German word, which is so much stronger in sound and so different in its connotations, moreover, on account of the two radicals *Sehn* and *Sucht* — i.e. instead of the simple idea of homesickness, those of burning desire and passion for something all the more desirable as it is indefinite. *Heimat* is something different from "asile" — shelter, refuge : it is both the *mother-country* and the place where one feels at home. Identical remarks could be made regarding the two other words : "habiter" and "houle" fail to render the heavily moving seas of time and timelessness .... And yet this is not a bad translation, far from it. It is a good poem also in French. I have never forgotten these lines ever since I first read them, long ago.

Let us take another example, from a well-known English poem this time, the *Sonnet on Westminster Bridge* by Wordsworth:

Earth has not anything to show more fair.
Dull would he be of soul, who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty.

This sounds unquestionably harmonious, beautiful and convincing in English in spite — or because — of the uncommon turns of speech : "not anything", "more fair", the inversion "dull would he be of soul", etc. Very simple and easy also as long as you keep to the original text, with no special difficulty of interpretation. Told by an elderly man's mellow voice, it is terribly touching indeed. But try to translate it into French! (I have never tried, it simply came up to me when I started writing this chapter.) What seemed so clear and evident suddenly becomes impossible to express in other terms than commonplace speech, devoid of poetic resonance. Only the platitude of the message remains. Very little of the original gets through, all the beauty, the harmony evaporates, especially from the first line. Whether you say, literally:

La terre n'a rien de plus beau à montrer

or:

La terre n'offre pas plus beau spectacle

or:

Il n'y a pas plus beau spectacle sur la terre,

the result is wholly discouraging. Then you have to find out a suitable equivalent for "dull would he be of soul", just before realizing that "who could pass by" will be a problem too, because it implies blindness or indifference to beauty ... There are cases indeed where the translator of a poem can be driven to desperation by the extreme difficulty, not to say the impossibility of a task that seemed so easy!

It is true that problems of sound and rhythm are not so obvious when the translation takes place between two languages having little or nothing in common, such as Chinese and French or English, whose systems are entirely different. There is no question, of course, of being as terse as Chinese can be, or of finding equivalents for tones, or again for the ideographs, and one can enjoy a comparative freedom of expression. But apart from sound and rhythm comparisons with the original, you can also be at a loss to convey many shades of expression or meaning which are in direct connection with Chinese syntax or graphic connotations, for instance.

With languages like Malay and French we are, so to speak, halfway between — possibly nearer than French and English. The sounds in both languages are very much alike, although they combine to form words bearing no resemblance with each other; and some aspects of Malay syntax have their counterpart in French (or English, more or less), so that the order of words, in the simple sentence patterns of pantuns, can often be similar in both languages.

For example:

Kalau / tidak / kerana / bintang
Si / ce n'est / à cause des / étoiles
If / not / because of / the stars

Masakan
Comment se fait-il que
How is it that
/ bulan / terbit / tinggi?
/ La lune / monte / haut?
/ the moon / rises / on high?

or:

Tuan / laksana / bulan / yang terang,
Tu (es) / pareille / à la lune / qui brille,
You're / like / the moon / that shines

Cahaya / liput / serata / dunia,
(Ton) éclat / enveloppe / entièrement / le monde,
(Your) light / is flooding / the whole / world.

The literal translation, quite correct here in French, follows exactly the Malay order of words, even though groups of words may correspond to single words in Malay, and no particular problems would arise here if we were translating a prose text. But in the case of pantuns, we are in the presence of a very strict and dense, though simple, form of poetic expression. I remember that Nerval translated the verse passages of *Faust I* into French prose and the result was praised by Goethe himself. But such a process could not be acceptable for the translation of pantuns, where we do not have the continuity and dramatic movement of the play, whereas each pantun is an isolated jewel of a fixed shape, with a fixed number of characters which make it a pantun specifically. These are the number and the

length of lines, their rhythm, the rhyme pattern, as we have seen, without which a pantun would not be a pantun. And in a translation, however difficult, especially into languages like English or French — into French perhaps better than into English, because of the similarities of sounds and stress I have already mentioned — we have to find adequate equivalents for these elements and keep to them constantly once our choice is made.

Another set of typical characters in the Malay pantun is the presence of internal rhymes and assonances, the most frequent being the rhyme occurring on the last syllable before the caesura. Although not always present in the originals, they are important insofar as they contribute to give the pantun a very strong and compact structure, counterbalancing the apparent lack of connection which can sometimes be observed between the two couplets.

These specific features of the genre have set the limits within which my translations had to find their own form, and it seemed to me that I could do no less than fix for myself the following rules or principles and try to obey them as closely as possible:

1° - **The choice of an appropriate meter**.

Instinctively, I have decided not to exceed the length of the French decasyllabic verse, using the octosyllabic line as the best actually in most cases as a counterpart for the average pantun line — whenever possible of course, i.e. without sacrificing too much of the content of the original line — and even the heptasyllabic, still more crisp and epigrammatic, as for example in the following pantun:

Apa guna berkain batik,
Kalau tidak dengan sucinya?
Apa guna berbini cantik,
Kalau tidak dengan budinya?

A quoi bon pagne en batik
S'il n'a pas la propreté?
A quoi bon femme jolie
Si son coeur est sans bonté?

What use is batik in life,
If it be not neat and clean ?
What use is a pretty wife,
If her heart is hard and mean?

In some very few cases, however, I had to resort to the twelve syllables of the French "alexandrine", as for example:

Orang mengail di lubuk Bulang,
Apa umpannya? Kulit duku.
Bermain dengan kekasih orang,
Nyawa bergantung di hujung kuku.

On pêche les fonds de Bulang en appâtant
Avec des pelures de fruits.
On suspend sa vie à un fil en fleuretant
Avec la bien-aimée d'autrui.

Those who fish in Bulang's deep,
Use duku skins for bait, 'tis said.
With another's love a tryst to keep
Is risking life upon a thread.
(A.W.H.)

It should be noticed in this case that only the first and third lines are alexandrines. The second and fourth are octosyllabics, all this is due mainly to the difficulty of providing rhymes without altering the context too much. But this tranlation, as a counterpart, offers a few interesting features, some of which refer to problems which will be examined further on, such as the choice of the more general term "fruits" instead of an exact equivalent for "duku", which as "dou-kou" is quite unknown in French and thus would exaggerate the exotic aspect of the poem uselessly; or the fact that "pembayang" and "maksud" repeat the same structures, which is far from being the case in the original.

As a rule, as in the above pantun, I try to maintain an equal balance of syllables between the first and third lines as well as between the second and fourth.

For the French decasyllabic verse there are two types, one with the caesura after the fifth syllable (the "5 + 5 cut"), and the other with the caesura after the fourth or sixth syllable (the "4 + 6" or "6 + 4 cut"). Wherever the 5 + 5 cut occurs, I manage to obtain the same division of the verse in the corresponding line — whereas to a 4 + 6 or 6 + 4 cut responds a line of similar rhythm. It should be noted here that in French the 5 + 5 cut is more lively while the even rhythm of the other two gives a more ponderous and serious tone.

2° **Rhyming scheme.**

The rhyming scheme *abab* has to be adhered to in the translation, as one of the invariable, ever-present features of the Malay pantun, essential to this type of verse usually transmitted from mouth to ear and therefore easier to commit to memory — the inner rhymes or assonances playing the same part, though less regularly present than the rhymes.

Regarding these, I have observed the following principles and rules, which consist:

a) in writing down a first version as close as possible to the original and as simple and natural in French as it is in Malay, and see whether any possibilities of rhymes appear in the text as such.

If not, I try either to modify the order of words, or to say the same thing in another way, or to replace any of the ending words by a suitable "synonym", while remaining as "simple and natural"; a dictionary of French rhymes can prove useful for this purpose, as it sometimes offers unthought of substitutes, though not so often as one can think or wish;

b) in avoiding "acrobatic" manipulations of lines to obtain rhymes at all cost. Rather a simple assonance — like "batik/jolie" in one of the examples above, or "daurade/montagne" as will be seen further on — than a far-fetched rhyme, in order, still, to maintain naturalness of tone and simplicity of expression;

c) in taking good care that the rhyme be borne by meaningful words preferably;

d) in trying to obtain as perfect and convincing a rhyme as possible between the second and fourth lines rather than between the first and third, which can do with a simple assonance, should it prove really too difficult to get rhymes without altering the content or complicating the text too seriously;

e) as a last resort only, preferably in the first couplet, in inverting two lines if it can help, provided it does not alter the content;

f) in avoiding overlaps of sentences from first to second line or third to fourth, which never occur in the original pantuns.

Here is an example to illustrate these various points. Between the Malay text and its present translation:

Hari-hari jalan ke teluk,
Tempat orang membakar arang,
Lubuk dalam jangan diseluk,
Takut dipatuk ular belerang.

A la baie tu vas chaque jour,
Où l'on fait le charbon de bois.
Dans ce trou d'eau la main ne fourre,
Ou te mord le serpent sournois.

Daily to the bay you must,
Charcoal's burning there in view,
Deep in holes your hand don't thrust,
Lest a sulphur snake bite you.

I had to try a good deal of non-rhyming translations:

Jour après jour va à la baie
Où travaillent les charbonniers.

Chaque jour tu vas à la baie,
A la baie tu vas chaque jour,
Où l'on fait le charbon de bois,
Là où l'on brûle le charbon.

Ce trou, ne fouille pas dedans,
Ne cherche pas dans ce trou d'eau,
Dans ce trou ne va pas fouiller,
Ne mets pas la main dans ce trou,
Dans ce trou d'eau la main ne fourre,
Crains la morsure du serpent.
Etc.

Finally, among these various transcriptions of each line, all in octosyllabic verse, there appeared a possible rhyme between "jour" and "fourre" (sound "ur" as in "telur"). The next difficulty was "ular belerang", which is an unidentified and perhaps mythical species of sea snake reputed to be extremely venomous (the *Kamus Dewan* says, simply : "ular laut yang berbisa") : impossible then to translate it into French with precision. The snake usually passes for a sly, wily

animal, in French "sournois", which supplied a rhyme for "charbon de bois" (sound "wa") — a rhyme, besides, which occurs on the same words as in Malay.

Another example will show the way a simple assonance (the final vowel is the same, though not the consonant) can do as well as a regular rhyme:

Niat hati nak pancing temenung,
Sudah terpancing ikan setoka.
Niat hati nak peluk gunung,
Sudah terpeluk biawak celaka.

For gilt-head I set out to fish,
A tiny stingray's all my gold.
Embrace a mountain was my wish,
An ugly lizard's all I hold!

The first problem was that of a suitable equivalent for "temenung" in French, meaning a fish of the mackerel family. In the absence of any precise denomination, the only word was "maquereau" for "mackerel" a noun which also means, in familiar slang, a pimp. Impossible to keep it here, as in the original it stands for something good, in parallel with the (noble) mountain.

With "maquereau" it could have been, in humorous fashion:

Voulu pêcher le maquereau,
N'ai pris qu'une méchante raie!
Voulu embrasser la Jungfrau,
N'étreins qu'un iguane, et bien laid!

But, as I have said, "maquereau" is impossible here, and it would be difficult in the context to use the name of the Jungfrau — quite a noble Swiss mountain but also the German word for a maiden — a double-meaning which would be quite adequate in a way. So I had to choose another fish, a good one, without any unpleasant connotations, and the pantun became in French, with the assonance "daurade/montagne" instead of a rhyme:

Voulu pêcher une daurade,
N'ai pris qu'une méchante raie!
Voulu embrasser la montagne,
N'ai pris qu'un varan des marais!

or, more epigrammatic, in heptasyllabic verse:

A la pêche à la daurade,
Pris une méchante raie!
A l'assaut de la montagne,
Pris un varan des marais!

3° **Internal rhymes.**

Internal rhymes, assonances and alliterations are still more difficult to obtain in translation than the final rhyme itself without altering the content of the original beyond recognition. As their occurrence varies so much from one pantun to another that they can be sometimes totally absent, I have decided to treat them as less important than the rhyme — if not as a secondary feature — and to disregard them at least provisionally, when no solution can be found. If I was able to produce a few in what I called Zain's pantun (see Chapter I), it is only because I first tried to re-create the pantun in French and was free to associate the sounds I liked since it was not a translation. As to the Malay text, it is only an approximation which I composed afterwards.

But as long as a translation is not published in book form, it is always possible to improve on it and I can still hope to hit on a better version.

Repetitions of structures, however, are often easier to obtain and produce a similar effect, i.e. an internal rhyme, as for instance in the following pantuns (which have been already quoted several times in the course of this book):

Jikalau tidak kerana bintang,
Masakan bulan terbit tinggi?
Jikalau tidak kerana abang,
Masakan saya datang ke mari?

Etoiles – est-ce pas grâce à elles
Que la lune monte si haut?
Et toi – grâce à toi qui appelles
Que j'arrive ici aussitât?

or else:

Padi muda jangan dilurut,
Kalau dilurut pecah batang,
Hati muda jangan diturut,
Kalau diturut salah datang.

Le jeune riz, n'y passe pas la main:
Si tu le fais, vois la plante périr.
Le jeune coeur, ne lui accorde rien:
Si tu le fais, vois la faute accourir.

or else:

Apa guna pasang pelita,
Kalau tidak dengan sumbunya?
Apa guna bermain mata,
Kalau tidak dengan sungguhnya?

A quoi bon allumer la lampe
Si la lampe n'a pas de mèche?
A quoi bon ces regards de vamp
Si au fond tu n'es pas de mèche?

Thus, whereas it is seldom possible to find equivalents of the sound correspondences and echoes of original pantuns, we can still devise repetitive structures to produce similar effects in the translation.

4° — **Rhythm and terseness.**

For the sake of rhythm and terseness we can suppress words carrying no essential notion in the original line, should they happen to lengthen the French verse uselessly.

In the same way I use verbs in the imperative mood whenever possible, or without a personal pronoun, or nouns without an article, for instance, in order to avoid the multiplication of "useless" words in French, especially in the first couplet, where the images have to be as simple and direct as possible — invocations or evocations, so to speak, as in the following pantuns:

Anak beruk di kayu rendang,
Turun mandi di dalam paya.
Hodoh buruk di mata orang,
Cantik manis di mata saya.

Jeune singe en l'arbre touffu
Descend se baigner au marais.
Laide, affreuse, ainsi l'a-t-on vue,
Jolie et douce me paraît.

Young monkey for a bathe descends,
To the swamp from a shady tree.
Plain, ugly in the eyes of friends,
Beauty and sweetness she's to me.

Rumah kecil tiang seribu,
Rumah gendang terpanggung.
Dari kecil timangan ibu,
Sudah besar timangan untung.

Maisonnette aux cent pieux fichés en terre,
Maison vaste aux piliers hautains,
Petit on est dorloté par sa mère,
Grand, balloté par le destin.

A little house on thousand posts,
A mansion as if on a stage,
When small by mother up I'm tossed,
By destiny when come of age.

5° – **Semantics**.

It is sometimes uneasy to follow the semantic content of the Malay line literally, and necessary to replace some specific terms (names of local trees, fruits, etc.) by more general ones when there is no simple common word in French for them or no equivalent except for their Latin botanical name or names too complicated or bizarre, exaggeratedly "exotic" — "buah jering" for instance, being in French "fruit (or gousse) de bois macaque". Firstly, the average Frenchman, however learned, will have no idea of what it may be. Secondly, it

would have a doubtful poetical effect, lacking the simplicity, the familiarity, the directness of everyday language as in the original poems. The problem is the same for a Frenchman as for a Malay. We should bear it in mind that there is nothing "exotic" for a Malay about such trees, fruits or other objects found in pantuns, so that a translation in this case ought to sound as simple and natural in its terms (if not in meaning) to a foreign ear. In such cases, a more general term is by far preferable, or even sometimes the Malay term with an explanatory footnote, or, if it does not happen to have any incidence on the general meaning, the name of another tree, fruit or bird. But only after checking that no special significance is attached to it.

Here is another pantun which can illustrate this question (it has been quoted in the first chapter):

Asam kandis asam gelugur,
Ketiga dengan asam rembunia.
Nyawa menangis di pintu kubur,
Hendak pulang ke dalam dunia.

Mangue aigre-douce et mangue amère,
Une autre au goût de térébinthe.
L'âme veut revenir sur terre,
De la tombe monte sa plainte.

This pantun raises two series of difficulties. Firstly, the three names of fruits in the "pembayang" have no convenient equivalent in French. It would not be possible to use their learned names. Of course, it is known that the word "asam" or "asam-asam" designates acid fruits : "asam kandis" is said to be the acid fruit of a kind of wild mangosteen; "asam gelugur", for some people, is another variety of mangosteen, for some, a kind of yellow-orange fluted fruit — which it actually is, as was shown to me in a jungle village, but with no name in English or French ; the third one, "asam rembunia", is said to be an acid or sour fruit of the family of the terebinthaceae, like the wild mango (which has a strong taste and smell of turpentine — and this I know by experience). Hence a simple choice : the word "mangue" for the three of them, and the three qualificatives "aigre-douce", "amère" and "goût de térébinthe". As for "ketiga dengan" — which makes three with ... — it had simply to be dropped as too heavy in

French and replaced by "une autre" — another one.

Secondly, there were also choices to be made concerning the second couplet : partly commanded by the rhyme, partly with a view to avoid what would have sounded like excessive mannerism, preciosity. "Nyawa menangis di pintu kubur", literally means "L'âme pleure à la porte du tombeau" — eager to return to this world, as the fourth line says. But such a metaphorical turn of speech is completely unnatural in French, while "di pintu kubur" is normally used for those who are about to die, "au seuil du tombeau" — on the threshold of the tomb, or, familiarly, who have one foot in the grave, as we say in French. This is why it was necessary to reverse the last two lines in the translation.

« All poetry is untranslatable, » says Henri Fauconnier in *The Soul of Malaya*, and he goes on : « but in the translation of a pantun it is not merely the rhythm, the rhyme, and the assonance that are lost It is the play on words, the equivocations, the tenuous allusions, that constitute their special charm for the Malays. One must have lived a long while among them to catch the various connotations of each word beside its literal sense. They all know a large number of pantuns by heart and are constantly inventing new ones. Their conversation is full of these poetic insubstantial images. It is a game of leap-frog between the concrete and the abstract in which the players constantly change places, and our anxiety to translate clearly, breaking the impulse of ideas, produces merely a flat sense of verbal acrobatics. Word for word translation is the crassest betrayal. »[2]

Well, yes and no.

Word for word translation is always the crassest betrayal, but it is not to be confused with literality, without which we cannot get to the spirit of a text; and free interpretation, on the other hand, can be even worse. For a poem is not a commentary or a paraphrase of itself, nor should it be in translation where, it is true, much of the original flavour evaporates. We must try and do with our "foreign" words what the poet has achieved in his mother tongue. And see what happens. And try and try again until something happens and we get close to the original, catch something of its real spirit.

In the case of pantuns, in particular, I am inclined to believe that the substance at work in the original can be re-embodied in another

[2]H. Fauconnier, *The Soul of Malaya*, *op. cit.* p. 82.

language like French without losing all its power. Probably because its elements are simple. In the first couplet, fruits, flowers, trees, birds, landscapes, small events from everyday life, allusions to historical events, legends or religion are always concrete and identifiable. If anything remains doubtful, it is mainly the connection with the second couplet. But since this connection may happen to be invisible or even non-existent, it is so in the original text and we have to take it as it is into the translation. If something has to be elucidated, the question arises on reading or hearing the original and the enigma, or the riddle, should be transferred as such into the translation. Any attempt to explain the poem from within makes it no longer a poem but amounts to an interpretation. Sir Richard Winstedt, for instance, is probably right in *interpreting* the following pantun as he does, to show what it really means to a Malay listener:

Kalau roboh Kota Melaka —
Sayang selasih di dalam puan!
Kalau sungguh bagai dikata,
Rasa 'nak mati di pangku tuan.

Malacca fort it cannot fall!
My love, She could not lie,
As dies the basil in yonder tray,
In her arms would I die.[3]

but this is not, this cannot be called *a translation.*[4]

We certainly have to try and master the Malay language of fruits, flowers, plants and birds, to detect the proverbs or proverbial idioms which can be read or heard behind or between the words of a pantun, recognize symbols, disclose hidden meanings if we want to be able to see through phrases which otherwise may sound like mere

[3] *Classical Malay Literature, op. cit.*, p. 201.

[4] I am not criticizing Winstedt's way of casting the light of keen intelligence on pantuns offering no apparent connection between *pembayang* and *maksud*. This is certainly one of the best ways to show how such pantuns can "work" poetically and to help the reader (or the translator) to tackle this kind of difficulty. But this sort of analysis and the explanation or englightenment it brings forth should not be added to the poem.

conundrums or jingles in the apparent disconnection of the two halves. But this necessary knowledge should not be inserted into the translations, only suggested. Better a footnote in this case, which will supply the enlightenments required for the foreign reader.

In fact, the translation of a poem is always a compromise between what can be transferred from the original insofar as it fits more or less into the system of the so-called "target language" and what has to be abandoned in the way of sound, rhythm, interplay of words and connotations. In between there is a rather indefinite, variable zone, depending very much on the subjectivity of the translator, where his imagination as a writer, his sense of verbal chemistry — or alchemy, if inspired, or magic — can supply convincing substitutes or equivalents preserving the poetic essence.

I have always believed that it is only by a close, repeated examination of the substance of the original, by a stubborn questioning of its own words, that one can eventually find out the best or at least a comparatively satisfactory reply to the challenging poem. This is what I call literality, which does not mean translating word by word, but before translating, not to leave one word unturned to see what lies beneath. If you manage to encompass, within your mind, I mean, all the connotations, references, allusions, symbols, echoes which the original poem is liable to awaken in the minds of native listeners, then only can you hope, with time and patient attention to the interplay of your own words, to strike on some vein as close to that of the original as you wish.

In today's world, where the stress seems to be laid exclusively on science, technology and economics, on figures and quantities rather than qualities, on having rather than on being, the translation of poetry is certainly as important as that of exclusively scientific or technical books and documents. Poems and other literary works are in direct correspondence with the souls of nations, of peoples with their sense of shadow and light, their doubts, fears and certitudes, their beliefs and disbeliefs, etc. It is essential to mankind that literature and poetry — the most representative poems of all the people of the earth — should be translated into their various languages because they are their common property, a legacy they have to share for their spiritual enlargement. It is through the channels of these everlasting poems and other masterworks that they can communicate with each

other in their most subtle basic feelings in spite of all their peculiarities and differences — language, customs, way of life, climates, habits, etc. — and foster mutual understanding. This is what I had in mind, at my own modest level, when I started translating Malay pantuns.

Kuala Lumpur, July-December 1986
Oloron-Sainte-Marie, January-May 1987
Revised in Kuala Lumpur, November 1987 – March 1988.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I have consulted most of the excellent bibliography collected at the end of the *KUMPULAN PANTUN MELAYU* published by DBP. For the study and translation of Malay pantuns in general as well as for the composition of this work in particular, I am more specially indebted to the following books and articles to which I am adding mine:

Alias Yunos, 1966. *Pantun Melayu Sastera Ra'ayat*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Federal 1965.

Altman, Gabriel and Robert Stukovsky, 1965. "The Climax in Malay Pantun", *Asian and African Studies*, pp. 13-20.

Archipel, N°1, 1971. Etudes interdisciplinaires sur le monde insulindien, "Pages d'exotisme I", pp. 103-104.

Daillie, René, 1985. *Quarante pantouns malais*, translated into French, with an introduction: "**Anciennes voix malaises**", in La Nouvelle Revue Francaise, N°392, Septembre 1985, éditions Gallimard, Paris, 12 pp.

Daillie, René, 1987. *Quarante pantouns malais* (*Deuxième série*), translated into French, with a foreword, in SUD, N°69/70 special issue on Translation, Marseille 1987, 14 pp.

Daillie, René, 1987. *Victor et le Fantôme*, about "Victor Hugo's pantun", in "Siècle" N°4, Paris 1987, 7 pp.

Etiemble, René, 1981. *Quelques Essais de Litterature Universelle*, Paris: Gallimard 1981, « Du "pantun" malais au "pantoum" à la francaise » , pp. 175-192.

Fauconnier, Henri, 1986. *Malaisie*, Paris : Stock, Delamain et Boutelleau 1930, winner of the 1930 Goncourt Prize. New edition: Paris, Stock, December 1986. First published in English in 1931 (George Allen and Unwin Ltd), translated by Eric Sutton : *The Soul of Malaya*. Oxford University Press 1965, Oxford in Asia Paperbacks, Singapore 1965, third impression 1985.

Hamilton A.W., 1959. *Malay Pantuns*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1959, last impression 1982 (first published in 1941).

Kamus Dewan, 1984. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, second impression.

Kumpulan Pantun Melayu, 1983, under the supervision of Zainal Abidin Bakar, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Marsden, William, 1812. *A Dictionary and Grammar of the Malayan Language*, London: Cox and Baylis, Singapore: Oxford in Asia Historical Reprints 1984.

Mohd. Taib Osman, 1984. *Bunga Rampai : Aspects of Malay Culture*, Kuala Lumpur : Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka/Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, with special reference to the chapter "Classical Malay Literature : A Brief Survey", pp. 15-37.

Mohd. Taib Osman, 1975. *Warisan Puisi Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, seventh impression 1986.

Overbeck, H., "The Malay Pantun", *JSBRAS, 85*, 1922, pp. 4-28.

Overbeck, H., "Rejang in Malay Pantun", *JSBRAS, 67*, 1914, pp. 219-220.

Pantun Melayu, 1958. Jakarta : Balai Pustaka, Ist impression 1920, 8th impression 1984.

Segalen, Victor, 1982. *Stèles*, Edition critique, commentée et augmentée de plusieurs inédits, établie par Henry Bouillier. Paris : Mercure de France.

Sejarah Melayu, 1983. '*Malay Annals*', translated by C.C. Brown, with an introduction by R. Roolvink, Oxford in Asia Paperbacks, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, second impression.

Sim Katharine, 1957. *Flowers of the Sun*, "A Simple Introduction to the Enjoyment of the Pantun", with illustrations of the author, Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.

Sim, Katharine, *More than a Pantun, Understanding Malay Verse*, re-edition of *Flowers of the Sun* by Times Books International, Singapore 1987.

Sjahril Nursal, *Le pantun malais et son influence sur la poésie francaise du XIXème siècle*, "mémoire pour la Faculté des Lettres, Université d'Indonesie", typescript, Jakarta 1972.

Thomas, Phillip L., 1980 "Syair and Pantun Prosody", *Indonesia*, 27 April 1979, pp. 51-63.

Thomas, Phillip L., 1980 "Long and short Pantun Lines", *Rima*, 14, 1980, pp. 23-39.

Wilkinson, R.J., 1903. *Kamus Jawi Melayu-Inggeris*, a reprint by Penerbit Baharudinjoha, Melaka 1985 (numerous examples of pantuns, with explanations).

Wilkinson, R.J. and R.O. Winstedt, 1961. *Pantun Melayu*, with an Introduction in Malay abridged from Winstedt's Postface in English and a choice of 1251 pantuns, Singapura : Malaya Publishing House.

Winstedt, R.O.,1969. *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, second reprint 1977.

Winstedt, R.O. 1985. *The Malay Magician*, Singapore Oxford in Asia Paperbacks, second impression.