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Review Article

Between Iron Formalism and Playful Relativism: Five Recent Studies in Malay Writing

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The heritage of traditional Malay literature: A historical survey of genres, writings, and literary views
By VLADIMIR BRAGINSKY
Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004. Pp. xiv, 890. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

John Leyden's Malay Annals
With an introductory essay by VIRGINIA MATHESON HOOKER and M. B. HOOKER
Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 2001. Pp. 81, 361. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

We are playing relatives: A survey of Malay writing
By HENK MAIER
Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004. Pp. viii, 542. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

Bidasari: Jewel of Malay Muslim culture
Edited by JULIAN MILLIE
Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004. Pp. 310. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

A merry senhor in the Malay world: Four texts of the Syair Sinyor Kosta
Edited by A. TEEUW, R. DUMAS, MUHAMMAD HAJI SALLEH, R. TOL and M. J. VAN YPEREN
Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004. Pp. x, 467. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

The study of Malay texts has a long history. Following early contacts between the West and the Malay World, travellers and priests began to collect manuscripts and other curiosa to bring back from their voyages. In Europe these objects ended up in a variety of repositories, such as local archives, private collections and libraries, and eventually museums and public libraries. Manuscript collections greatly expanded from the nineteenth century onwards when the colonial machinery accelerated the accumulation of knowledge to maintain and reinforce its hegemony in the colonies. The study of these manuscripts and the texts contained in them, however, started in the late seventeenth century when Western clerics were searching for the appropriate vocabulary to translate the Bible into Malay. Colonial scholars studied Malay texts not only to find a language

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for the standard imperial enterprise, but also to penetrate into the minds of the subjects, in order to understand the culture and its people. Soon they expressed their disappointment about the poor quality of the language and the unsatisfactory literary merits of the texts they studied: the language was often a mixture of Malay with some other language, Arabic most of the time, and the stories dealt with nothing but worthless fantastic adventure stories about fairies and *djinn*s (spirits).

Manuscript collections are shaped and pre-selected by our predecessors, and if one adds to this calculation that many of these manuscripts were anonymous and difficult to date when the original was written, one can imagine the difficulties of compiling a comprehensive survey of the texts contained in an estimated number of around 10,000 existing manuscripts. A tried and tested method of categorization of different Malay texts is to group those that show significant similarities and may be dated to the same period. One of the most common and unquestioned oppositions in such a classification is the distinction between 'traditional', or the often used 'classical', and 'modern'. Such a conception is often based on a suggested or expressed underlying development in time of an 'origin' in oral tradition going through a stage of manuscript reproduction of texts to the modern technology of dissemination by printing, although Amin Sweeney and Ian Proudfoot have argued that this is untenable and new methodologies of compiling a historical overview of Malay writing are needed.[1] In this review article I will consider two recently published books that propose to discuss traditional Malay writing as an integral and orderly system, including Malay writing in its entirety, and three books that deal with a particular traditional Malay text.

A 'system' for Malay writing

In his *The heritage of traditional Malay literature*, Vladimir Braginsky provides a historical survey of traditional Malay writing incorporating theoretical sections, as well as descriptions and analyses of certain works. For his historical survey, Braginsky does not opt for the discussion of all the available texts, but focuses on a selection of representative texts which he examines at some length. The selection was made on the basis of established preferences of students and the popularity of the texts as reflected in the number of extant manuscripts, which, albeit not an absolute criterion, is 'not totally useless in the absence of something better' (p. xii). This rather awkwardly phrased statement – not the last in this book – however, represents Braginsky's main objective. He does not want to provide a survey of Malay writing; he wants to reconstruct the literary system of written Malay literature as developed from roughly the seventh to the mid-nineteenth century.

Perhaps the most famous classification of traditional Malay literature was laid out in R. O. Winstedt's 'A history of classical Malay literature', which first appeared in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1939.[2] Not surprisingly, this

1 Amin Sweeney, *A full hearing: Orality and literacy in the Malay world* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Ian Proudfoot, *Early Malay printed books: A provisional account of materials printed in the Singapore-Malaysia area up to 1920, noting holdings in major public collection*s ([Kuala Lumpur]: Academy of Malay Studies and the Library University of Malaya, 1993); Proudfoot, 'From recital to sight-reading: the silencing of texts in Malaysia', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 30, 87 (2002): 117–44.

2 R. O. Winstedt, 'A history of classical Malay literature', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 17, 3 (1939): 1–243. This text has been republished numerous times, reflecting its influence on the study of Malay literature.

study has left its marks on later studies of traditional Malay writing, especially those that were written and published in the Malay World, often resulting in scholars forgoing more interesting approaches developed since Winstedt's influential work.[3] Braginsky has continued this formidable task with a series of preliminary studies since the early 1980s. The most readily available of these is *The system of classical Malay literature*, which gives a concise outline of the system he has proposed.[4] As Braginsky proudly announces on the first page of the preface of his most recent work, however, this book is 'almost twice as long' as the preliminary Russian version from 1983; well, more does not always mean better. Do we need a re-hash of an earlier model, albeit with more descriptions and explanations spread over 900 pages? Before discussing the positive and negative features of such an approach, let us first see what the book contains and how it is structured.

The heritage of traditional Malay literature is divided chronologically into three parts dealing with the reconstruction of the Old Malay, Early Islamic and Classical Malay literary system respectively, with an understandable emphasis on the latter. The Classical Malay literary system, according to Braginsky, contains texts that are believed to date from the second half of the sixteenth until the mid-nineteenth century. During this period, especially the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Islam was gaining prominence with the peoples of Southeast Asia and 'the entire heritage of Malay literature was reinterpreted in conformity with Islamic principles as one orderly whole – a system of literature' (p. 204). It is this Malay literary system that is discussed in the last 600 pages of the book, which involves reconstructing the development of a self-awareness within the system (Chapter Six), expounding a division into genres (Chapter Five), and discussing types of prose and poetry works of that period (Chapters Six and Seven), as well as specific Muslim hagiographic and Sufi works (Chapter Nine). The book ends with a concise conclusion, as well as the usual bibliography and index.

Some key concepts in Braginsky's work are visible in the above overview. Firstly, there is the reconstruction of an Old Malay and Early Islamic literary system, which is an amazing and well-nigh insurmountable task because, as the author admits, 'no samples of literature of this [pre-Muslim] period exist', and 'the modern scholar can have only a vague idea of the early Muslim stage of Malay literature' (p. 15). The few earliest surviving Malay manuscripts date from the late sixteenth century, while only epigraphic material remains from earlier periods. The reconstruction is therefore based on secondary sources, which in this case is quite difficult as there is not much extant proof of material culture, and foreign sources are limited and usually do not focus on Malay culture. Supporting data is mined from the cultures close at hand, the neighbouring Javanese in particular, who unlike Malays 'created magnificent architectural and sculptural monuments, as well as remarkable bas-reliefs' (p. 1). Several times Braginsky emphasizes the differences between Malay and Javanese cultures, but apparently enough similarities can be extracted to reconstruct a system and assign certain texts to that system. The result is

3 For examples of those published in the Malay World, see Liaw Yock Fang's *Sejarah kesusastraan Melayu klasik* (Singapore: Pusaka Nasional, 1975); Teuku Iskandar, *Kesusasteraan klasik Melayu sepanjang abad* (Jakarta: Libra, 1996); Harun Mat Piah *et. al.*, *Traditional Malay literature* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pusta, 2002). Among the more interesting approaches to Malay literature is that outlined by Sweeney in *A full hearing*.

4 V. I. Braginsky, *The system of classical Malay literature* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1993).

quite a diffuse Chapter One. Braginsky meanders from the bas-reliefs on the Borobudur (p. 56) through epigraphic data without giving any reference (p. 58); a translation of a (Sanskrit?) panegyric inscription from a region in present-day Southern Thailand (p. 59); minor references to Tantric deities in a few inscriptions, which 'confirm the idea that such [Mahayanic] hymns could exist' (p. 60); a reference to 'Annals of Zabag' (Srivijaya) in the notes of an Arab author (p. 61); to the eventual – and rather obscure – assignment of a number of texts to the 'non-functional' sphere of the system.[5]

One of these 'non-functional' texts is the *Hikayat Seri Rama*, which Braginsky discusses at some length. This text has come down to us in about 20 manuscripts, of which the oldest dates from the early seventeenth century. In this discussion he suggests that the tale should be included in the Old Malay period because later versions testify of an oral proto-version that was developed in 'the budding popular culture related to the Indian quarters in Malay city-states' (p. 68). Apart from the rather Winstedtian ascription to account for Indian elements in the tale,[6] this suggestion also defies Braginsky's own emphasis on the written tradition as opposed to the oral; but, of course, in lack of any concrete texts, an oral prototype can serve as argument.

The reconstruction of the Early Muslim period is also problematic and the deployed line of reasoning frequently quite muddled. One example of this reasoning will suffice: Malay versions of the Mahabharata epic were younger than the Rama tale because they were written in Arabic characters (p. 114), but not later than the early sixteenth century because one of the characters in *Sejarah Melayu* bears the name Rajuna Tapa which evokes associations with the Javanese *kakawin Arjunawiwaha* (p. 115). This line of argumentation fails to consider why a writing system of repeatedly copied manuscripts can exclude a possibility of earlier versions in another script. It also misses the point of why a name in a text that is known to us in an early nineteenth-century version cannot have been changed in the course of time, or why certain associations with a *kakawin* text can be used as 'evidence'. Is the name Rajuna Tapa (Arjuna the hermit) only known from that text, or did it come from *wayang* tales as Braginsky also suggests?

Such attempts to reconstruct the system of Old Malay and Early Muslim literature to elucidate later developments is quite paradoxical and its outcome predictable. A few snippets of shaky information do not make a system. Braginsky has projected the later stage of Malay literature onto the older phase and simplified it to represent the system of that stage in the development. This, to a certain extent, may be justifiable because of a lack of data, but would it not make more sense to depart from the 'firmer' system and then look for traces in an earlier period?

The discussion about the so-called Classical period of traditional Malay literature is based on much firmer ground, and Braginsky can give full rein to his hobby-horse 'system' and 'structure'. The body of Malay texts for this period is judiciously carved up and hammered into the system that consists of three circles or functional spheres of spiritual perfection (*kamal*), benefit (*faedah*) and the least central to the system, beauty (*indah*). The author then describes genres as belonging to a certain sphere in the system,

5 The non-functional sphere in the system of Old Malay literature refers to texts outside the core of the system which contained religious canon and edifying texts.

6 With regard to this claim, Winstedt also wrote that an original version of *Hikayat Hang Tuah* 'had grown up in the Javanese and Tamil quarters' of Melaka; 'A history of classical Malay literature', p. 44.

such as fantastic-adventure *hikayat* and romantic *syair* that predominantly belong to the sphere of beauty but through an allegorical reading sometimes may also enter the sphere of spiritual perfection. Braginsky argues that the system came to full bloom after the development of 'self-awareness' in the writings of Malays, which he describes as 'the sum-total of ideas concerning the creation of a literary work, principles governing its effect on the reader/listener, its functions and poetics, fixed in written form in one way or another' (p. 25). This 'self-awareness', however, may be questioned, as the data seems to be limited to stereotypical expressions in the prefaces of a limited number of manuscripts, which according to Braginsky may not be relevant for individual authors (or copyists) but they are for the tradition as a whole. The system as such can hardly be denied or contested. The author even displays a healthy sense of reality when he concludes the chapter about self-awareness with an almost apologetic confession that what was presented was a model for a much more complex and 'alive' reality of Malay literature (p. 280). Still, there is the imminent danger that the model will soon take over from reality when a system is overemphasized.

In this fourth chapter, however, one well-nigh fatal omission becomes apparent in this book: for the reconstruction of the literary self-awareness Braginsky discusses a number of keywords found in the prefaces of certain texts. However, in the explanation of the different words, none of the quotations from the texts are given in the original language. To compensate for this, some keywords are given in parentheses, which results in almost useless explanations of terms such as *patut* ('appropriate, fitting') by providing 'synonyms' or terms of similar meaning in English passages and then in the end clumsily claiming 'having established the meaning of the term *patut*, we can define meanings of other terms' (p. 233). I fail to see how the meaning of any word can be established without taking its original context into consideration. I also have objections against Braginsky's rather sloppy and mistaken use of terms such as 'synonym', 'opposition' or 'antonym' which, for instance, make *indah* ('the beautiful') synonymous with *heran* ('amazed') and *ajaib* ('miraculous') (p. 247). The absence of passages in the original language also detracts from the merits of the book. Braginsky presents himself as a very passionate scholar of traditional Malay writing, who time and again refers to exquisite descriptions in poems, gems and pearls in the writing, but what follows is an often rather dull rendering in English. For anyone with a scholarly interest in Malay literature these quotations are not very useful without their originals; perhaps this 900-page book hopes to cater to a bigger audience?

The omission of original passages deprives the book of the opportunity to become the self-contained standard work that it sets out to be. Students of Malay literature who are interested in a key term such as *patut*, for instance, are forced to repeat the research done by Braginsky, making this method of presenting key words problematic.[7] This is a

7 Fortunately, there is a quicker and also more thorough method of consulting Malay texts in their original language. Ian Proudfoot's Malay Concordance Project is a reference that is tellingly missing in Braginsky's book. In search of the meaning of the word *patut*, for instance, one would type in the word and within seconds gets 1416 hits from over 80 texts available in the database (http://www.anu.edu.au/asianstudies/proudfoot/MCP/Q/info.html visited on 17 August 2006). Of course, not all the material used in the book is there and one still needs to cull the information by checking the references, but on the other hand a lot of data not consulted by Braginsky will become available.

shame because, however oversystematic the composition of *The heritage of traditional Malay literature* sometimes may seem, and however disturbing the lack of Malay originals and the clumsy argumentation or stilted English may be, Braginsky displays an intimate familiarity with traditional Malay writing combined with an extensive knowledge of writing traditions in the Arab World, Persia and the Indian subcontinent. His emphasis on the influence of the Sufi literature on the development of Malay writing may be a little inflated, but the analysis he gives of some of the examples are very convincing. The discussion of Malay historiography, emphasizing the structure of the most prominent historical work, *Sulalat al-Salatin* or *Sejarah Melayu*, is admirable, and so are Braginsky's structural analyses of most of the other works. They are formalistic, always within the (tyranny of the) system of the allegedly extremely stable written tradition, but they are based on a thorough reading of the texts contained in a large amount of manuscripts the author consulted for this book.

Considering the *syair*

Romantic *syair* became an increasingly popular genre from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. The Royal Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) in the Netherlands has recently published editions of two interesting examples of this genre. The first, *Syair Bidasari*, edited by Julian Millie, has had quite a history of earlier editions in print starting from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, which testifies to its popularity among both a Malay public as well as a scholarly Western audience. Categorizing the poem as an exemplary romantic *syair*, and after some obscure remarks about time and place of origin, Braginsky gives an extensive summary of the narrative and a structural analysis of its content (pp. 511–28), while also referring to a possible reading of the *syair* as Sufi allegory and Millie's analysis in his Masters Thesis. This thesis is the basis for the KITLV publication, which contains a transliteration of one of the manuscripts, an English translation, a concise introduction about the *syair*, the Romanisation of the text and some notes about the translation. In addition, there is a second part to the book, which comprises a concise analysis of a few aspects of the poem in six chapters. In his introduction of the translation Millie discusses some of the choices he was confronted with while preparing the book, the most important being whether to make it into a flowing English text or show how the poem is structured in the original. Fortunately and wisely, he chose the first option while discussing the structure and performance of the original in Part Two, which makes his translation highly readable and, as far as I have checked, a correct English rendering of the text.

The story of the *Syair Bidasari* is that of a princess left in the forest as a baby by her royal but destitute parents. She is brought up by a rich merchant and grows into a beautiful woman who evokes the jealousy and fear of the queen, who tricks the young princess into coming to the palace where she is locked up and tortured. Bidasari then prays to God to take her life, which is partly realized when the queen wears a pendant in the form of a golden fish containing Bidasari's spirit during the day time. Only at night, when the golden fish is put back in its casket, is the princess revived. She is returned to the merchant, who builds a palace in the woods where she is found by the king, who falls in love and marries her, while the queen gets her deserved punishment. The story concludes with the disclosure of the princess' noble birth by her brother, who has come to the

kingdom and recognizes the young woman as his sister. In the end the children are reunited with their parents, and the brother is married to a princess whom he saved from a dreadful ogre.

Syair Bidasari contains enough elements to explain its popularity, which was further enhanced when it became part of the repertoire of Malay theatre in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and was made into a movie in 1965. Millie discusses performative elements in the *syair*. Key to this discussion is the inclusion of *pantun* (popular four-line verses in which the first two lines contain phonetic or symbolic allusions to the better comprehensible last two), which Millie notes are used to emphasize comic and amorous scenes. This discussion of *pantun* points to one the key questions in the study of Malay literature, how to study written forms of what fundamentally is an oral literature.

Amin Sweeney has been at the forefront of promoting the study of Malay literature as being heavily influenced by orality. His main argument is that the oral orientation of Malay communities influenced a substantial part of their chirographic tradition, which was studied by scholars from their 'more sophisticated' print literate viewpoint. Sweeney's *A full hearing* is also an important study to try to envision how copyists shaped and reshaped texts every time they copied a manuscript. This is especially relevant when one realizes that many of the manuscripts in repositories were copied on the behest of Western collectors some time during the nineteenth century.[8]

Basing his argumentation largely on Sweeney's work, Millie argues that since the incorporated *pantun* in *Syair Bidasari* do not contribute to the narrative, they may be considered as interludes in which improvisations can heighten the performance, a common practice in Malay popular theatre. Millie argues that, as *syair* of this type and oral performance and theatre have much in common, they existed side by side in the same milieu. These not only have a possible bearing on the origins of these *syair*, but also on the way they were and should be interpreted.[9] Silent reading – with which we are so familiar – only obstructs the modern reader in fully grasping and appreciating the poem. Millie further corroborates this argument by indicating that there are phrases indicating a formal change of scene ('Here a story is told of. . .') followed by a concise summary of what had transpired previously. He also points out that the most common and basic prop in theatre is a chair, which is the only thing needed to visualize the social hierarchy of the setting at court where many of the scenes took place. Although this latter argument may be exaggerated, I fully subscribe to the notion that this type of *syair* was embedded in an oral performance milieu prior to and contemporaneous with burgeoning popular theatrical forms of the late nineteenth century in the region.

8 Sweeney, *A full hearing*.

9 Sweeney and Millie's arguments are in contrast to Braginsky, who immediately incorporates this predominantly oral genre into his system of writing by tracing back early insertions of *pantun* in other works: as early as the fourteenth-fifteenth century these verses were included in written works – amazing since no manuscripts from that period have been preserved. Braginsky then sets out to establish the connection between the two pairs of lines in the verses, an issue that has been tackled by many a student of Malay literature before him, and comes to the conclusion that the predecessors he refers to were all telling a part of the truth, since the genre itself evolved having certain consequences for the type of relation between the two pairs of lines. He distinguishes three lexical levels in the 'language' of *pantun*, of which the third, 'least stable' and open level is displayed in 'that peculiar poetic game' between youngsters (p. 499). However, it may be argued that this 'least stable' level is actually the core of the system.

In his discussion of the poem in Chapters Three and Four, Millie distinguishes three plots: an initial plot in which a royal child gets separated from her/his parents; the child grows up elsewhere, its true identity unknown while a an evil female is an adversary; the marriage of the grown-up child with prince or princess from a second kingdom; and the reunion of the child with his or her parents. The second plot structure is that of a relative who goes out on a quest to rescue a sibling, and must fight a superhuman adversary, whom he slays to open the way for a second marriage in the story. The third plot, which Millie calls 'common plot', is both these plots together, which is commonly found in romantic *syair*, such as in *Syair Ken Tambuhan*.

Braginsky also discusses these plot structures in *The heritage of traditional Malay literature*, indicating the high degree of symmetry: *Syair Bidasari* is divided into five cantos with the central third being the most important (the end of Millie's initial plot). In this respect, Braginsky (pp. 526–7) also points at the similarity with fantastic adventure *hikayat*, *Hikayat Indraputra* in particular, which can also be read as Sufi allegory. Millie, on the other hand, connects this plot structure to other stories in the oral tradition, which he uses to connect to Sweeney's line of reasoning that composition of stories in oral and chirographic traditions follow a literary grammar of schema that operates at various levels 'from building the plot to choosing the actual words used'.[10] Millie's conclusion is that this common plot was one of the schemata that guided the oral story teller and was very influential in the milieu of *syair* authors as well.

Millie also expands this argument by focussing on the opening lines of the *syair* in which the *pengarang* (his term for the complex of producers of the text) states that he composed the text as a *hikayat*. This term is often used as 'genre form' (in Braginsky's terms) for a variety of stories in rhythmic prose. However, as Millie rightly observes, we should not limit the term only to 'classical prose hikayat' as it also applies to 'textual materials in the domain of the oral specialist' (p. 256). This is a cautious statement that in certain contexts it may refer to any stylized narrative, which would include *syair*.[11]

Millie continues this discussion about the common plot in Chapter Four by expanding on the opposition between palace (*istana*) and wilderness (*hutan*). The story of Bidasari is set in two localities: the royal court of several kingdoms and the wilderness. The scenes at the court are used to enhance the mores and proper traditions in a courtly environment, in which the propriety of women is singled out as a subject of moral advice. Events happened as they were expected and ordained at court and romantic love is devoid of any passion or inconsistency with social requirements. In the wilderness, as might be expected, everything is turned around: unpredictable things happen, coincidental meetings take place, love is fraught with sexual desire and even women can occasionally transgress the boundaries of propriety. This opposition also has 'a polarizing influence in both the structure and language of the common plot' (p. 265), as *pantun* are more frequently used and give the opportunity for (unregulated) improvisations in scenes set in the *hutan*, which at the same time parody and subvert the didacticism of the court scenes.

10 Sweeney, *A full hearing*, p. 8.

11 Braginsky apparently misses this point as he states that 'the poem allegedly represents a versified reworking' of a tale in prose, although he questions its existence (p. 512). Also the poem of Abdul Muluk was initially referred by its alleged author, Raja Ali Haji, as 'Hikayat Abdul Muluk that I wrote myself'; Robert Martin Dumas, *'Teater Abdulmuluk' in Zuid-Sumatra* (Leiden: CNWS, 2000), p. 209.

Another dynamic device to propel the story forward is that of the 'signifier-errant' in which the identity of prominent characters in the plot is obscure to the other characters, but not to the audience.[12] The game of finding out the main character's true identity is a means to evoke laughter, stage transgressions of certain social norms and subvert the general tone of the story. Bidasari, the main character of the story, is left behind in the forest by her royal parents; she is found and raised by a merchant, abducted and tortured by the evil queen, and eventually is married to the evil queen's husband as his second wife. In all these parts of the story Bidasari's true identity is a source of interpretation and guessing by the other characters, which not only elongates the story, but also paves the way for expositions about the proper role and conduct of women.

Millie concludes his book with two very concise discussions about possible sources in oral and written traditions and the didacticism of the *syair*, as opposed to the earlier discussed soothing character of romantic *syair*. In these chapters he emphasizes the connection that is being made in the poem between Malayness and Islam, which is especially targeted at women, for it is not the archetypical evil queen disregarding all the rules of proper conduct for women and unable to restrain her passion for worldly goods at the end of the story who is left alone without any servants or husband? In summary, Millie has done a commendable job by republishing this interesting poem, translating it with flowing style and giving an interesting, more than basic, interpretation, which calls for elaboration and expansion to other examples. What more could we expect of a text edition?

Another recently published consideration of a *syair* – *A merry senhor in the Malay world: Four texts of the Syair Sinyor Kosta* – also reflects a care and concern that goes beyond a simplistic rendering of a Malay text in Latin script with a translation in English and a basic analysis. At least, that is what is suggested in the preface where A. Teeuw writes that the study is aimed at investigating 'the pluriformity of the Malay literary tradition in the nineteenth-century historical setting' (p. viii). This is endeavoured through an exemplary edition of a *syair* that has been preserved in at least seven manuscripts, seven lithographed editions in Arabic script and two early Romanized editions. The research for this book was started in the early 1980s at a graduate seminar in Malay literature conducted by Teeuw at Leiden University.[13] After an interval of several years the project was taken up again by the five people whose names are printed on the title page. It is therefore the result of a team effort, with each member being responsible for a certain part of the book. The edition is published in two volumes, and is divided into the five following parts: a description of previous studies about the text and the manuscripts (including lithographs) by Roger Tol; a synopsis of the different versions of the story by Rob Dumas; an English translation by Maria van Yperen; a poetical recreation of one of the versions in English, in line with 'Malay literary tradition', by Muhammad Haji Salleh; and an analysis of the recensions of the poem from a number of different approaches

12 Gijs Koster introduced this concept of 'signifier-errant' into Malay literary studies in his interpretation of *Syair Ken Tambuhan*; G. L. Koster, *Roaming through seductive gardens: Readings in Malay narrative* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1997), pp. 161–98.

13 This is probably the reason for the rather outdated bibliography, which gives several titles as conference papers that have been long published since then.

by Teeuw.[14] There is also a facsimile reproduction of one of the manuscripts, the transliteration of the four differentiated recensions, together with annotations and a glossary of words with their meaning in the poem. All in all, this represents a massive scholarly effort by the authors.[15]

This *syair* then must be special, it can be surmised. And, here too, the reader will not be disappointed. Though surely not the finest example of Malay poetry, *Syair Sinyor Kosta* displays innovations in style and also is interesting for the divergent recreations of its story. The poem has come down to us in four recensions that differ in the denouement of the story. It has also been categorized as romantic *syair*, but differs from *Syair Bidasari* and others in that group in its setting and confirmation of proper behaviour. *Syair Sinyor Kosta* is not set in a palace or wilderness, but unfolds in mercantile quarters of a port city, the identity of which varies in the different versions, and does not purport to enhance Islamic mores. The plot is rather simple, entertaining and not fraught with Islamic teaching. It deals with a foreign trader named *Sinyor* Kosta who walks into town and is struck by the beauty of a woman from Pegu. The woman, however, turns out to be married to a rich Chinese merchant and, therefore, the assistance of a Balinese female go-between is sought to make contact with the woman in secret. The procuress visits the woman, makes her smitten with the foreign trader by applying a certain love charm and the trader elopes with his sweetheart after a farewell party at the Chinese merchant's home when all of his Chinese guests are intoxicated. When the husband detects that his wife has vanished, he seeks the assistance of the Dutch authorities to recapture her and a battle at sea ensues after a brief pursuit. This is the main point where the versions branch out into different directions. In one recension, the Portuguese *sinyor* wins the battle and takes his sweetheart back home where they live happily ever after, while the Chinese merchant returns home destitute and miserable; in a second recension, after his victory, the Dutch *sinyor* returns home and marries the Burmese, while the story concludes with a marriage and erotic scenes of two servants; in a third recension, a second sea battle occurs and results in the Chinese merchant getting his wife back and the European *sinyor* is killed. The Chinese trader lives happily with his recaptured wife; in a fourth recension, Chinese and Dutch forces win the second battle and the Portuguese suitor is killed, but his love will not be taken alive. She stabs herself and both lovers are reincarnated as snakes.

This *syair* contains enough material for scholars of Malay literature to explore how these different plots came into being and to try to explain why they differed in a literary tradition, which is so fraught with lack of information about when, where, why and by whom these manuscripts were written. Teeuw does most of this work in an admirable manner in the concluding chapter, in which he gives a detailed textual comparison,

14 The philological tradition of Malay writings usually only considers texts in hand-written manuscripts. However, the lithographic reproduction of texts that flooded the market in the last half of the nineteenth century is very similar to the copying of a text by hand. Unfortunately, and without any clear reason, not all the lithographs were included in the analysis: the team was not able to consult all the printed versions (11); one wonders why? And, if one sets out to investigate the 'pluriformity of the Malay literary tradition' and includes lithographs, then the apparent popularity of *syair* with Singapore-based printers would be an interesting angle to investigate further.

15 That such a consideration of the *Syair Sinyor Kosta* would occur is ironic since in the nineteenth century it was dubbed 'a worthless rag' (p. 4). But, of course, such a depiction tells more about the observer (J. Pijnappel) than about the poem.

discusses the mimetic aspects in the various versions, provides a long exposition about rhyme and poetic constraints and concludes by giving an interpretation of the four recensions.

A unique characteristic of this poem is its distinct preference for octosyllabic lines, with the predominance of four words in each line. Though *syair* lines are usually not that long, eight to twelve syllables being the norm, the structure of the *Syair Sinyor Kosta* in all its recensions indicates a certain model or innovation of poetic conventions. Not only does this have profound consequences for the performance of the text, a topic hardly discussed in this book, but also for the structure of the words and their interpretation. Most Malay roots are disyllabic, but to use them in stylized utterances, affixes are added to indicate the role of the constituents of the utterance. A simple example may elucidate this: *Sinyor mengasih anak Bandan* ('Sinyor gives [something] to the Bandanese'), in which *Sinyor* is the agent of the action and *anak Bandan* the recipient as is indicated by the *meng-* prefix of the root *kasih*. However, this line has nine syllables and therefore the agent-indicating *meng-* is normally dropped in the poem, resulting in ambiguity over who the agent and who the recipient is. This example becomes more complicated when one adds that *kasih* is not only 'to give', but may also have a meaning of 'love, affection' or of its verbal derivation 'to love' (*mengasihi*). For more information about this I refer to the introduction to the translation by Van Yperen, but one can imagine what a nightmare it must have been to interpret some of the passages and capture the ambiguity of the Malay original in an English phrase. A cursory reading of the text does not pose many problems, as one usually follows the flow of the text, acknowledged by one of the editors (p. 383). But, with a more than cursory glance at the Malay-language version, the different possibilities come rolling in to distort one's general understanding. Perhaps this is the reason for some obvious mistakes in the translation, one of which is related to the semantic scope of the word *cinta* ranging from 'sorrow' to 'love' (see Henk Maier's use of this word below).

Despite this being in many ways an exemplary text edition, there are a few problems relating to the description of manuscripts and the identification of its authors or copyists in *A merry senhor in the Malay world*, which should have been more accurately and fastidiously formulated. One of the manuscripts was written by a certain Ibrahim, whom Tol initially – and very cautiously – identifies as Haji Ibrahim, a colourful dragoman in nineteenth-century Riau. He then continues by giving more information about this Haji Ibrahim, *inter alia* by quoting an erroneous footnote taken from Virginia Matheson's and Barbara Watson Andaya's translation of *Tuhfat al-nafis*, to corroborate his initially cautious identification, which is not explicit in this section and most probably wrong.[16] A few pages later, however, in discussing another manuscript also written by a certain Ibrahim (other than the first), Tol claims: 'thus we have here another scribe bearing this familiar name, and again we know who the person behind the name was' (p. 16). Apparently, I misread the first possible identification. Yet there is another Ibrahim that causes problems; this time it is al-Faqir Ibrahim, who is mentioned in the colophon of

16 Raja Ali Haji, *The precious gift (Tuhfat al-nafis)*, tr. Virginia Matheson and Barbara Watson Andaya (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 12–13. Information about Haji Ibrahim and the correction of the erroneous identification of him with Sulewatang Ibrahim from Lingga by Andaya and Matheson may be found in Jan van der Putten, *His word is the truth: Haji Ibrahim's letters and other writings* (Leiden: CNWS, 2001).

a lithographed edition of the poem. However, Tol cannot subscribe to Proudfoot's identification of this Ibrahim with a certain Ibrahim Riau, who was very actively involved in the printing industry in Singapore in the late nineteenth century, for *al-Faqir* Ibrahim was not included in the name list under Ibrahim. Fearing that my comments about 'poor' Ibrahim will turn into pedantry, suffice it to say that these slips are but minor points in the good description of the manuscripts.

One other minor point in this exemplary text is the poetic translation of one of the recensions of the *syair* by Muhammad Haji Salleh, a scholar of Malay literature and one of the most distinguished poets of Malaysia. This second translation is different from the first more literal translation based on the reconstructed version, and was incorporated to 'arouse the interest of a broader readership' (p. 3). This version is also an attempt to revive the poem from its 'death of the age of printing' (p. 304), that is to say to continue a tradition by recreating another version. While a number of positive and negative arguments may be directed at this romantic aspiration, the text does read well and, therefore, may be of special use for educational purposes and may give readers a glimpse into the content of one of the versions of the *Syair Sinyor Kosta*.

A classic translation

The obvious danger that Muhammad Haji Salleh is referring to in his romantic aspiration of saving a Malay text from 'death of the age of printing' is when a recreated version gains in authority and becomes 'the' *Syair Sinyor Kosta*, thus displacing other versions of the text. A classic example of this invention of tradition is found in the textual history of *Sulalat al-Salatin*, of which John Leyden's translation was republished by the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 2001. For many nineteenth-century colonial scholars this translation was their introduction to traditional Malay literature; its role was so encompassing it even eclipsed its Malay original as well as a Malay version that was published 20 years later.[17] Only at the end of the nineteenth century did Leyden's version give way to William Shellebear's well-known Malay edition, which is another example of creative manipulation of textual material. Shellabear's popular school edition only reluctantly and belatedly passed the baton of authority over to Winstedt's transliteration of a manuscript that is considered to contain the earliest extant text, which further accumulated prestige through its translation by C. C. Brown in 1952.[18] Since then several other editions have appeared vying for supremacy in Malay(sian) historiography.

The 2001 facsimile reproduction of Leyden's early nineteenth-century translation then may be considered a welcome addition to the present collection of versions. It is introduced through an extensive essay by Virginia Matheson Hooker and M. B. Hooker, who *inter alia* strongly suggest that Leyden's translation strategy was to compose

17 The first Malay printed edition, which is ascribed to Abdullah bin Abdulkadir Munsyi, was not published in 1831 as scholarly lore has it, and perpetuated in the introduction of this 2001 English edition (p. 41), but about ten years later; Proudfoot, *Early Malay printed books*, p. 464.

18 W. G. Shellabear, *Sajarah Malayu, or the Malay Annals* (Singapore: American Mission, 1898); R. O. Winstedt, 'The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu. The earliest recension from MS. No.18 of the Raffles collection, in the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society, London', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 16, 3 (1938): 1–226; C. C. Brown, 'Sejarah Melayu or "Malay Annals". A translation of Raffles MS 18 (in the library of the R.A.S, London) with commentary', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 25, 2 and 3 (1952): xxxv, 1–273.

a 'creative re-creation' of texts from a distant past (p. 49), and to improve them in an attempt to come to terms with contemporary conditions and developments. Muhammad Haji Salleh had some illustrious predecessors, indeed. This also means that Leyden's translation of *Sulalat al-Salatin* should be considered as a divergent version of the text which should be taken into consideration if anyone dares to undertake the long overdue compilation of the critical edition of this very prominent text in Malay literary history. It is telling for the state of Malay philological studies that until now there has never been an authoritative critical edition collating all the different manuscripts of the text, as well as the inclusion of parts in other texts, while taking into account everything that has been written about it. Instead a number of different editions float around the Malay World, Malaysia in particular, which may be seen as yet another 'continuation of the tradition'. Moreover, the original manuscripts, on which Leyden's translations are based, have probably been lost, and therefore the translation forms a unique representation of local manuscripts. As Hooker and Hooker bring forward in their essay, a comparison of the two early nineteenth-century versions could produce interesting insights into the 'localized' versions, which are versions that were adjusted and edited to suit the circumstances in a certain locality.

The introduction contains biographical data of Dr John Leyden, a prominent figure of the Scottish Enlightenment movement of the late eighteenth century, when he directed his attention at Scottish history and its oral tradition, in close cooperation with the more famous Sir Walter Scott. In 1803 Leyden departed for Asia, where he displayed his special talents for learning languages, something that his contemporaries often emphasized in descriptions of him. For reasons of health he went to Penang in October 1805, when he made his acquaintance with Thomas Stamford Raffles, who became his host during his time on the island. During the four months he stayed with Raffles, Leyden had a stimulating effect on Raffles' study of Malay, while he also pursued his own interests by collecting information from local teachers and acquiring manuscripts to study. It was in Penang that he collected a copy of the *Syair Sinyor Kosta* and made his acquaintance with the copyist/author, the language teacher Ibrahim, as described in *A merry senhor in the Malay world* (pp. 16–17). Two years later this Munsyi Ibrahim brought a copy of the *Sulalat al-Salatin* with him on his trip to Calcutta, where he entered into the service of Leyden. Apparently, the teacher read the text out aloud in the presence of Leyden who would write down its translation, while asking questions about obscure words or passages. The Hookers explain that this was similar to the methodology Leyden applied when he recorded oral stories of Scottish bards. In 1811 Leyden joined the British expedition to Java, during which he brought along many of his papers. He had planned to amend the translation of the Malay text but fell ill and died two weeks after his arrival in Java in the train of his friend Raffles.

The authors of the introduction unfortunately did not consult all materials available in the repositories, which has led John Bastin to offer a critical rebuke.[19] Bastin places particular criticism on two 'theories' the Hookers promote. These theories pertain to Raffles's choice for Singapore as an entrepôt at the south end of the Malay Peninsula and the reason for the ten years it took before Leyden's translation, with an introduction by

19 John Bastin, 'John Leyden and the publication of the *Malay Annals* (1821)', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch, Royal Asiatic Society* 75, 2 (2002): 99–115.

Raffles, was finally published in England. In respect to the latter issue the Hookers argue that it was not Raffles' preoccupation with his work as Lieutenant General of Java that prevented him from publishing the book, as he did prepare other works for publication during this period. Instead, they come up with an attractive theory that Raffles waited for the opportune moment in order to convince his adversaries in Europe that the establishment of Singapore was necessary and should be maintained (pp. 43–5). However, basing himself on personal letters of family members and friends of Leyden, Bastin posits that the postponement was caused by indecisiveness, personal pride and conflicts.

In passing, Bastin also dismisses as myth the story that Raffles chose Singapore based on his reading of the *Sulalat al-Salatin*. Bastin describes a letter Raffles wrote to John Addenbrook, which underpins this theory, as 'a typical piece of exaggeration on Raffles's part'. Instead he argues that Singapore was very well known to the navigators and that Raffles already had set eyes and his mind on the island when he passed it on his way to Java.[20] However, the argument put forward by the Hookers goes a little further than that: it is not so much that the island would not have been known to him, but rather that Raffles may have realized its historical position as a thriving entrepôt in the glorious days of yore from his reading of *Sulalat al-Salatin*, either in its English translation or the original Malay manuscript form. Of course, it was not the only source of inspiration or the main reason to establish a British settlement on the island, but 'the site of the ancient city of Singapura' must have had a ringing sound to it which he believed in and made it easier to 'sell' the settlement to his superiors. Although Bastin has deflated an attractive theory, as well as criticized the Hookers on other points as well, their interesting introduction about Leyden's personal and scholarly background, as well as his life as a poet of which they give a few examples as conclusion to the introduction, is an excellent addition to our knowledge of this key, early figure in the study of Malay literature.

John Leyden's Malay Annals makes the first-ever edition of the historical Malay text readily available to students of Malay literature, history and culture. It also provides indications that *Malay Annals* as the translated title and *Sejarah Melayu* as reference to the original text were both coined in Leyden's translation in the early nineteenth century. The word *sejarah* (Arabic for 'tree, genealogy') may have been in use prior to this period, but it is not used in any of the early texts, as far as can be ascertained through a search in Proudfoot's Malay Concordance Project database; early historical works were simply called *hikayat* ('story').

A playful account

The system of Classical Malay Literature collapsed in the mid-nineteenth century under the influence of the encroachment of colonial presence, according to Braginsky. Abdullah bin Abdulkadir Munsyi's writings from the mid-nineteenth century form a watershed between traditional writing and the development of 'modern' ways of presenting stories, according to many others. Suddenly Malays embraced modernity, and at the beginning of the twentieth century they started to produce novels, which – as text books continually repeat – can be neatly distinguished into Indonesian and Malayan writing traditions that would be the basis for national canons. In *We are playing relatives*, the last

20 Ibid., p. 109.

book in this review, Henk Maier tells us a different story. Instead of looking for differences and watersheds, Maier seeks continuity between 'traditional' and 'modern' writing, emphasizing similarities rather than differences in writing produced by authors from the Islands and the Peninsula.

Maier's survey of Malay writing covers the broad scope of his interpretation of *Hikayat Hang Tuah* – a text that is usually the odd one out in traditional Malay writing as it is usually set apart in surveys – to a discussion of the latest developments in Indonesian literature. In many respects Maier's approach is the exact opposite of Braginsky's survey. Maier invites the reader to build up his own story, to compose her own tale about what Malay writing was and still is all about: fluidity, ambiguity, evanescence, elusiveness, flexibility. Braginsky writes his book in a grave, serious and scholarly tone of voice. Maier expresses himself in a playful and artful manner, replete with metaphors. Maier's voice is spirited at times, playing with words and their meaning in English while writing about Malay words and their meaning, presenting highly evocative, and sometimes provocative, highly-informed musings about Malay writing of the days of yore until the present day. He provides opposing terms, shows that they converge because of their ambiguity and fluidity and then diverge again in a play of words, in which he never soothes or tells, often informs or shows, but most often quizzes, and almost terrorizing the reader with ever changing images and ideas. Sometimes even the reader may feel as if being led into the woods and invited to have a sniff of the fragrant flowers by the author, who then leaves to storm off on one of his other lines of reasoning.

It is a formidable task to make sense out of 13 centuries of language data put in writing and then to make one integrated whole out of it. Maier does this by building an overarching argument that is based in a set of oppositions – of homogeneity versus heterogeneity, centre-periphery, centripetal versus centrifugal forces, real, pure (*sungguh*) against hybrid (*kacukan*), *et cetera* – all of which pervade the book. On his voyage through the 'fragrant garden of Malay writing' Maier picks a number of texts to discuss in depth which will show how political and literary authorities always have tried to tame heterogeneous writings but never have succeeded. He starts with the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, from which he takes the title of the book: in a well-known scene at the court of Indrapura, Hang Tuah has come to abduct Tun Teja for his master, the sultan of Melaka. The Indrapurans excuse themselves for not being 'real Malays' (which, in this context, means Melaka). Hang Tuah's reply is that Malays from Melaka also are not 'real' Malays, and when he apologizes for his inability to dance a real Malay dance, the host's answer is *kita bermain adik-beradik*, a phrase Maier translates as 'We are playing relatives'. This phrase permeates Maier's argumentation as he wants to show that *sungguh* and *kacukan* are terms that are obscure or irrelevant, or at times can switch position, or are opposed but can still live with each other, at least it seems so because the term 'playing' is of course full of ambiguity itself. In the first chapter with special reference to the tale of Hang Tuah he gives an exposition about the language, of course the example *par excellence* to reflect such hybridity, although the conclusion that it has 'escaped systematization and order' is surely not one that a linguist would give.

The second chapter deals with the writings in manuscript form of an older phase of Malay writing. Here Maier explores orality and writing by discussing Malay terms such as *baca* ('read'), *patut* ('appropriate') and *gelisah* ('anxious'), and gives an interpretation of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and its significance by using the rhetorical device of the collection of writing as garden and texts as flowers. In a rare instance of referring to other scholars in

the field, he comes to the conclusion that Malay traditional tales defy any kind of system: does Malay writing not resist the very notions of homogeneity and coherence?[21] Maier regards the tale of Hang Tuah as 'a genre all by itself . . . and an anomalous work is a useful starting point for conversation about something else' (p. 81). Then unfolds a 'conversation' about this *vade mecum* of Malay writing to which everything that has been written since is a mere footnote (p. 100).

Maier spends the next 400 or so pages writing about these 'footnotes'. In these pages he displays some beautiful evocations of the situation in which a manuscript tradition slowly gave in to the printing mode of disseminating texts around the end of the nineteenth century and the advent of groups of writers of Indo-European and Chinese descent who were never elevated to the stage of Malay literature. As may be expected, Maier picks out works that have either been forgotten or marginalized. For example, *Student hidjo* and *Hikayat sempurna jaya* are not works which one see amply discussed in the literature. Normally one also does not encounter a discussion about the writing in the Malay Peninsula in a book that focuses on Malay writing from Indonesia. With the same fervour Maier crosses over the Melaka Straits to discuss developments in the twentieth century, to return again to Indonesia to follow the time line from Balai Pustaka in the 1930s to internet sites with poems in Cyberia. On his travel he focuses the discussion on the works of Armijn Pane's *Belenggu* ('Shackles', 1940), Hamka's *Tenggelamnya kapal Van der Wijck* ('The wreck of the Van der Wijck', 1938) and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's well-known tetralogy of the 1980s. In these he also makes admirable use of rhetorical devices to make the chapters into a whole, such as the triangle to emphasize the foregrounding of music and the relationship between the three protagonists of *Belenggu*, and the development in the meaning of the Malay word *cinta* (sorrow, pity, longing, love) for his chapter on Islamic writing of Hamka and others. The last two chapters contain an exposé on literary developments during Suharto's New Order and after 1997.

With great dexterity and immense knowledge Maier leaps from the tales of Hang Tuah to *Student hidjo* and beyond while filling in the intervening developments with reference to many other works from all over the Malay World as well. However, as the line of reasoning is quite often rather ambiguous, the rhetorical devices do tend to lose their strength and get boring after a while, while the chapters are also quite repetitive. Furthermore, the quotations are downright sloppy with sometimes a Malay original, sometimes not, without any apparent reason for inclusion or omission. And, of course, there are the omissions which can be enumerated. Why were certain texts such as *Burung-burung manyar*, which Maier mentions, not considered worthy of full discussion? And, what about its author, Mangunwijaya? What were the considerations for inclusion or exclusion of certain authors or texts in his discussion? The answer may be simply that this work is not meant to be an all-encompassing discussion of Malay writing; it is a survey of interesting examples to show how diversity is impossible to put into one single collection called canon or Malay literature or modern Indonesian literature.

On the other hand, Maier realizes that being mentioned in a book such as this helps to homogenize the collection, to elevate a certain piece of writing to enter the canon and

21 This quote appears on page 75 of the book. Only with regard to traditional writing does Maier refer to scholars such as Winstedt, C. Hooykaas and Braginsky. Surprisingly, in his discussion of writing of the twentieth century, there are no references to scholars such as Teeuw, Keith Foulcher or Harry Aveling; Maier only refers to Will Derks in the last chapter.

that his book has a certain authority. Is this the reason perhaps for the ambiguity that often crops up in his argumentation? Why is he so evasive and contradictory in admitting Pramoedya's novels to the canon: on one page he says Pramoedya's tetralogy came too late because '"novels" had lost their central position to short stories and short playful tales' in the canon (p. 471); on the next page he notes that these books caused a thrill among the critics and were bestsellers. And, what to think about the echo of Hans Overbeck's dictum about the death of Malay writing in the beginning of the twentieth century: 'in retrospect it looks as if Pramoedya Ananta Toer could be described as the last great protagonist of the Dutch-inspired notions of "literature"', which may be found in the pinnacles *Belenggu*, *Burung-burung manyar* and Pramoedya's *Bumi manusia*? Was not Overbeck unaware of new developments and is Henk Maier a little too pessimistic, or even disparaging, about new developments, which are not only anchored in cyberspace, as he seems to suggest? And, then at the very end of the book, a suggestion for reinstating the 'novel' as the institution to regulate and make sense of the writing in the Malay garden? Still, *We are playing relatives* will provide food for thought for some time to come, and we need not be afraid that it will ever become silent, for as Maier quaintly states at the end of his book 'never will there be a definite or unambiguous answer' (p. 505).

Conclusion

How to make sense out of a vast number of texts composed in a period that spans many centuries and originate from an area, the Malay World, which encompasses a large part of Southeast Asia? The only, thin, line that holds these texts together seems to be a common language. Two surveys have tried to give definitions and delineate the boundaries of groups of texts within the larger whole. Braginsky's focuses on texts stemming from the seventeenth until the nineteenth century, which he puts into a system subdivided into three functional spheres. The kernel of this system was a Sufi doctrine that authors would find divine inspiration and come closer to the Creator through their writings; the system apparently disintegrated under increasing pressure from colonial powers. Maier envisages a primarily later collection of Malay writings as a heterogenous family of texts, of which members, as conditioned by certain circumstances, may be valued higher than others in a particular time frame. He also suggests the demise of a system – an anomaly in his survey – in which the novel sets the norm for literary works to be elevated to the Indonesian national canon. Both surveys, however, have problems in cementing their protracted reasoning with sufficiently convincing arguments, but at the same time provide a wealth of ideas and information that will further the study of Malay texts a great deal. When combined with the three other publications, there will be a positive effect on the scope and depth of Malay literary studies.

Finally, it must be pointed out that these books – with one exception – were published by the KITLV, a Dutch institution that has focused on the study of its (former) colony for over 150 years. The publishers must be commended for producing books that, albeit valuable, will probably not attract a large readership. Although the editors at the KITLV, as well as MBRAS – the publisher of *John Leyden's Malay Annals* – could be a little stricter in their attempts to avoid overly-lengthy books, they are all of high quality and help open up this relatively limited field of study to a larger audience by providing English translations with the Malay originals. We *are* playing relatives after all!