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Making it New in 1884 Lie Kim Hok's *Syair Siti Akbari*¹

Tua-muda membaca dengan mesra tulisan-tulisannya, yang dipuji gaya-bahasanya yang sederhana, berirama, jernih, hidup, segar dan kuat. Cermat dan tepat dipilihnya kata-kata, tertib dan rapih disusunnya kalimat-kalimat. Ia menyukai menggunakan lebih daripada kurang satu perkataan untuk memudahkan pembaca menangkap maksudnya. Dan sesuatu yang merupakan pokok-kata tulisannya disaring bersih dan apik, hingga moril dapat dipertanggungjawabkannya sepenuhnya. Dikatakan orang ia terlalu mendahului zaman.²

It is in these words that, almost half a century after his death, Lie Kim Hok (born in Bogor in 1853, died in Batavia 1912) was respectfully commemorated by his biographer, Tio Ie Soei ([1958]:3). Lie Kim Hok was a man of many parts. He was not only one of the pioneers of Peranakan Chinese literature and a writer with a prolific output, but as a young man worked as a schoolteacher, assisting the Dutch missionaries Coolsma and Van der Linden, and wrote a grammar of Batavian Malay, entitled *Malajoe Betawi* (1884). After a period in which he did many odd jobs and, among other things, unsuccessfully tried his hand at running a printing house of his own, from the 1890's onwards he made a career as a prominent

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the Xth European Colloquium on Indonesian and Malay Studies, Berlin, 17-22 June 1996. I would hereby like to thank Professor W.A.L. Stokhof and staff of the International Institute of Asian Studies and the Projects Division, Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia and Oceania, Leiden, for the hospitality they showed a stray scholar by providing him with a quiet room in the Nonnensteeg and a laptop computer.

² Old and young eagerly read his writings, the style of which was praised for its simplicity, rhythmicity, clarity, liveliness, freshness and strength. His words were chosen aptly and appropriately, his sentences constructed with care and precision. He liked to use more than one word in order to make it easier for the reader to catch his meaning. And he took care to formulate the gist of what he wanted to say in his writings in words that were pure and refined, so that the moral could be fully accounted for. People used to say that he was far ahead of his times.

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journalist and played an important role as a promoter of Confucianist teachings and Peranakan Chinese education (Salmon 1981:228).

In the years in which Lie Kim Hok grew up to maturity, major social and political changes were taking place in the Netherlands East Indies, such as the progressive demise of the old political order of the indigenous kingdoms under the impact of Dutch administrative, economic and military encroachment; the arrival of new, competing forms of knowledge as disseminated by incipient Western-style school education and Christian missionaries and Muslim reformers; the liberalization of press regulations; the rise of literacy and the development of a vernacular press among the native population; and the shift of the political and cultural centre to the principal colonial cities. All these changes gave rise to an acutely felt need for new and more democratic forms of knowledge and awareness that could cope with the new realities of life. This in turn created a need for new textual genres to embody and exemplify these (Maier 1988; Ahmat b. Adam 1995).

In this article I will try to show how Malay literature produced in and for the cities – in those days mainly by Peranakan Chinese authors – reacted to the great changes that were taking place by means of a strategy of generic renewal. I will do so by discussing a single work as an example of this process, namely the *Syair Siti Akbari* (Poem of Siti Akbari), henceforth referred to as SSA³, the work with which Lie Kim Hok made his debut as a writer (Lie Kim Hok 1922). In this connection I will take my cue from an article by Monique Zaini-Lajoubert (1994:103-24) in which she examines the manner in which Lie Kim Hok reworked the *Syair Abdul Muluk* to create his SSA. According to her, Lie in his SSA remained well within the norms of traditional Malay literature, creating an adaptation that is sufficiently faithful to the *Syair Abdul Muluk* as a whole and only innovating in points of detail, such as narrative technique, to achieve greater realism. Moreover, in her view, Lie tried to give a new, woman-friendly interpretation of the Abdul Muluk story (Zaini-Lajoubert 1994: 118).

My approach differs from that of Zaini-Lajoubert in that I will analyse the process of literary change as this can be traced in the SSA itself, not, as she does, by comparing a presumed source and its adaptation in a later work, but by studying a confrontation between and intermingling of literary conventions and genres in the one work. An earlier exploration of conventions and genres in traditional Malay narrative literature is found in Koster 1997. In this article I will try to show that, if we read the SSA in terms of the conventions and genres of the Malay tradition, we will note fundamental changes, not just in details or narrative technique, but in the Malay literary system as a whole, notably as regards the genre invoked

³ I was unable to get hold of a copy of the 1884 edition of the SSA, and my quotations are from the 1922 edition.

yet transformed by the SSA, namely that of the Panji romance. Furthermore, I will try to show that, in order to bring about these changes, Lie Kim Hok borrowed literary devices from a particular school of realism still prevalent in Dutch literature at the time, namely that of Idealistic Realism. Lie transformed the traditional genre of the Panji romance in order to create a genre that could accommodate the new realism demanded by his times. The story of the *syair* is as follows.

In the kingdom of Barbari a captain from Hindustan tries to sell spoiled goods to a local trader. The trader lodges a complaint with the Sultan, Abdul Aidid, who imprisons the captain. In prison, the captain, who is in fact the uncle of the Sultan of Hindustan, starves himself to death. The Sultan of Hindustan, on hearing of his death, is furious. Because Sultan Abdul Aidid is too powerful for him, he decides to await a more suitable moment to take revenge.

The Sultan of Barbari marries his son, Abdul Mulan, to his niece, Siti Bida Undara. Two years later Abdul Mulan's father and mother die. In order to dispel his grief, the new Sultan embarks on a sea voyage, leaving his wife behind in Barbari and entrusting his kingdom to his uncle. On arrival in the kingdom of Ban, Abdul Mulan is lodged by the Sultan in one of his palaces. One day he sets eyes on Siti Akbari, the Sultan's beautiful daughter, as she is picking flowers in the garden. He falls in love with her and marries her. Six months later he returns to Barbari with his second wife. When Siti Bida Undara learns of her husband's second wife, she is at first rather sad, but pretends to be happy about it. Nevertheless, she is not angry with her husband. She and Siti Akbari get along quite well, each living in her own palace.

Convinced that the right moment has come to avenge the death of his uncle, now that Sultan Abdul Aidid has died, the Sultan of Hindustan invades Barbari, ignoring the advice of his two champions, the brothers Era and Eri, not to do so unless a proper pretext for waging war presents itself. He defeats the army of Barbari and captures Abdul Mulan and Siti Bida Undara. Siti Bida Undara, when pressed by the enamoured victor to yield to him, refuses to do so, saying that she will only agree to become his wife if Siti Akbari does so as well. The Sultan of Hindustan hurries to Siti Akbari's room, only to find a corpse there. She has apparently committed suicide. The Sultan of Hindustan now returns to his kingdom, taking Abdul Mulan and Siti Bida Undara with him. On arrival there, he has them thrown into prison.

Siti Akbari, who has not really committed suicide – the corpse in her room was in fact that of a minister's daughter – has managed to flee the palace. Pregnant, she roams the forest for months with the aim of seeing her father, the Sultan of Ban, in order to obtain help from him to set her husband free. On her difficult journey she meets a pious *syaiikh*, who styles

himself Syaikh Khidmatullah. He takes her into his house, where she gives birth to a son. When Siti Akbari tells the *syaikh* of her intention to set her husband free, he trains her in a number of fighting techniques. Thereupon Siti Akbari departs after a tearful farewell from the *syaikh*, leaving her baby behind in his care.

In the forest she comes upon seven sleeping men, one of whom attacks her. She defeats him, also killing the others, and puts on his clothes, so that she looks like a man of noble birth, and continues on her way until she arrives in the kingdom of Barbam. This kingdom is in turmoil because there are two pretenders struggling for the throne. Siti Akbari now assumes the name of Bahara and passes herself off as a former champion of the imprisoned Sultan Abdul Mulan of Barbari. When 'he' brings the legitimate Sultan of Barbam, Hamid Lauda, the head of his uncle Iban, who had tried to usurp the throne, the Sultan rewards 'him' by giving 'him' his sister, Siti Abian, in marriage and ceding his kingdom to 'him', as he had promised to do in the event of 'his' success.

With the help of the champions Era and Eri, who have fallen out of favour with their lord on account of their advice to him to be reasonable, Sultan Bahara of Barbam, disguised as a trader, reconnoitres the situation at the court of Hindustan. She devises a plan for setting her husband and Siti Bida Undara free and invades the country with a large army. The Sultan of Barbam captures the Sultan of Hindustan with 'his' own hands. 'He' sets Abdul Mulan and Siti Bida Undara free, repudiates Siti Abian and gives her in marriage to Abdul Mulan. Then one day she puts on the dress of a woman again and at last reveals her true identity.

Abdul Mulan sends an army to the *syaikh* to fetch his son, Abdullah Halim, and the *syaikh*, at Siti Akbari's invitation, joins her in Hindustan. Siti Akbari entrusts the sultanate of Hindustan to her husband and yields the throne of Barbam to Sultan Hamid Lauda. Her father, the Sultan of Ban, abdicates and gives the throne to his grandson, Abdullah Halim.

As Zaini-Lajoubert shows, a comparison of the story of the SSA with the 1934 Balai Poestaka edition of the *Syair Abdul Muluk* will reveal changes in the names of the protagonists and in minor details of the story line. The overall impression one gets, however, according to Zaini-Lajoubert, is that Lie Kim Hok's adaptation follows this text quite faithfully (Zaini-Lajoubert 1994:106-10).⁴ We do not know what edition of the *Syair Abdul Muluk* Lie Kim Hok used for his adaptation. What we do know for certain, however, is that, as an adaptation of a *Syair Abdul Muluk*, the SSA on the level of its story must follow the same generic conventions as those

⁴ Zaini-Lajoubert (1994:120 note 6) refers to earlier editions of the *Syair Abdul Muluk*, by Roorda van Eijsinga (1847), Akhbar Saidina and Haji Mochammad Jahja (1860), and Roorda van Eijsinga (?) (1892) respectively, but herself uses the Balai Poestaka edition (1934) as her basis for comparison.

governing that *syair*, namely those of the Panji romance. The conventions of this genre of romance can be seen to inform not only regular Panji romances such as the *Syair Ken Tambuhan*, the *Hikayat Misa Taman Jayeng Kusuma* or the *Hikayat Cekel Wanengpati*, but also what I would like to call 'Islamized' Panji romances like the *Syair Abdul Muluk* or the *Syair Siti Zubaidah*, in which the element of romantic desire and eroticism has been somewhat defused.⁵

Insofar as Lie Kim Hok in his SSA is repeating a well-known story of a familiar genre that holds no surprises – namely the genre of the romance – he obeys what in traditional Malay poetics is the central urge, namely commemoration of the accepted tradition. The principle of commemoration⁶ is at work at all levels of traditional Malay narrative. The author is not the only party involved in the attempt to recall and confirm tradition. The same is true of his fictional mouthpiece, the narrator, where he claims a particular traditional authoritative source for his narrative. The characters of the story, too, are involved in commemoration, because they are depicted as recalling (or failing to recall) the exemplary deeds and fine, appropriate words of the past. And so, finally, are the listeners or readers, who try to heed the moral and imitate the heroes of the story.

Of course there is no commemoration that is not accompanied by its shadow, forgetfulness. In ways that differ from genre to genre, all traditional Malay narrative can be seen to be propelled by a tension between the need to recall the law – what is and must be: God's will, the social, cultural and political order of the kingdom (*kerajaan*) – and the desire to give in to forgetfulness and dreams of how one would like things to be. Recalling the law is referred to as *mengingat*, whereas giving in to wishful thinking or elegiac memories of what is no more is termed *mengenangkan* (Koster 1997: 153-5). Put in different words, this tension surfaces as a conflict between the demand that the text represent what is proper (*mematutkan*) and the human desire to give in to the pleasures of amplification (*memanjangkan*). A narrative that is not seen to properly represent the culturally accepted orders (*mengadakan*) is likely to come under suspicion of merely mimicking the truth (*mengada-ada*) and leading away from it by improprieties, fantasies and illusions (Koster 1997:84-93).

Characterizing the genre of the romance, we may say that it comprises a triple-phased circular movement: from commemoration of the law, through a suspension of the law by forgetfulness, back to the law, restored by renewed commemoration. In other words, a movement from propriety

⁵ So far, no studies have been made of the way in which the genre of the Panji romance has been adapted to the requirements of Islam. In the writing of this article I read the *Syair Siti Akbari*, among others, against the background of this genre.

⁶ For a discussion of the operation of the principle of commemoration in traditional Malay literature the reader is referred to Koster 1997:76-85.

via impropriety back to propriety; or from reality via illusion and semblance back to reality. In the typical Panji romance the protagonist (usually a male, but sometimes a female) is temporarily exiled, or exiles himself (or herself), from a state characterized by just law and clear, fixed identity. He or she is temporarily parachuted by the narrator into a situation marked by tyranny, alienation, forgetfulness, mistaken identity, uncertainty of meaning and improper erotic desire, but ultimately effects a return home, to true identity and just law, by means of acts that recall his (or her) true status (Koster 1997:173-4, 195-8).

This plot pattern is indeed easy to detect in the SSA. Initially Siti Akbari is happily enjoying her status as a princess of noble birth who is about to become a mother – a state that does not invite story-telling. The invasion by the Sultan of Hindustan at a stroke turns this bright daylight world of happiness, in which things are the way they should be, into a nocturnal world of hardship and suffering, in which our heroine has to fend for herself and the child that is about to be born to her. On entering the world of darkness and tyranny, she disguises herself as a man and assumes a man's name, Bahara – a word obviously derived from Arabic *bahar* (ocean) and therefore indicating that 'he' is a stranger from overseas (Zaini-Lajoubert 1994:106).

The heroine in this phase is turned into what may be termed a 'signifier-errant': someone whose identity must be read, and is usually misread, by the other characters of the story. Similar to what we see in other Panji romances, this uncertainty of meaning and need for interpretation in the SSA are spun out in scenes full of dramatic irony in which the other characters struggle with vague suspicions that the main protagonist's identity may not be what it seems to be. An example of this is the scene in which the Sultan of Hindustan vaguely suspects the true identity of the trader from Barbari who has come to his court to sell cloth, struck as he is by her rather feminine way of dressing and soft feminine voice (pp. 160-1). Needless to say, these scenes playing a game of semblance and reality have contributed greatly to the value of the SSA as a work that offers amusement and helps the reader while away the time.

Siti Akbari effects a return to identity, certainty of meaning and just law by heeding the advice given her by her father just before her departure with her husband from Ban for Barbari, namely: *'Berhati tjinta pada soewami serta satia mati, / Itoelah ada soewatoe perkara yang amat misti. / Anakkoe oekir pesanan itoe di dalam hati, / Djangan sampe boleh terhilang di hari nanti. // [...] / [...] / Kesabaran hati, itoelah ada soewatoe barang, / Jang besar harganja dari doeloe sampe sekarang.'*⁷ (P.

⁷ Have a loving heart towards your husband and be loyal to him until death. / That is something that is indispensable. / My daughter, carve these instructions into your heart, / And never ever allow them to be lost. // Steadfastness of heart has always been something / Of great value from the days of old until now.

43:3, 5c-d.) In addition to remembering her father's advice and remaining loyal to her husband, she effects her return by performing great feats on the battlefield. These deeds commemorate the fine examples set by the great heroes of yore. Accordingly, she is recognized increasingly as someone who is worthy of the highest status, and she ultimately proves herself to be fit indeed to be the wife of Sultan Abdul Mulan of Barbari – perhaps more so than his first wife, Siti Bida Undara, who at least once briefly wavered in her determination.

Differently from the non-Islamized Panji story, the SSA does not feature a desiring prince who not only subdues armies and cities but also conquers in the bedroom every lady of exceptional beauty and high status who happens to cross his path. Although the aspect of desire on the part of the heroine in the SSA has been strongly defused in favour of an emphasis on commemoration of the law – and therefore on proper moral instruction for the reader – , the force of desire is clearly recognizable. We find it in the attempts of the Sultan of Hindustan, forgetful of law and propriety, to usurp Abdul Mulan's position and make Siti Bida Undara and Siti Akbari his wives.

As was stated earlier, Lie Kim Hok made the gesture of commemorating the tradition where he invoked the familiar Panji romance in his SSA. In actual fact, however, he tried not only to recall tradition but also to forget it. We discover such an example of forgetfulness when we recognize, as Zaini-Lajoubert (1994:111) was the first to do, that Lie Kim Hok has introduced an element of suspense in his story, for instance. A striking example of this given by her is the beginning of the episode about the trader from Hindustan, in which the disclosure of the identity of this character is deliberately deferred in order to make the reader wonder who this man may be.

The suspense is further heightened by the unusual opening of the SSA, namely with a quotation. The words quoted are those uttered by a soothsayer at the birth of Siti Akbari in the middle of a heavy rainfall of many days' duration, namely: *'Faedahnja hoedjan ini, Toewankoe sri Baginda, / Melainkan bri satoe alamat, atawa soewatoe tanda, / Satoe hal amat adjaib, satoe hal jang tida tida, / Lantaran sang Poetri, nanti menjadi ada'*⁸ (p. 1, p. 29). The soothsayer's promise, made to the reader over the head of Siti Akbari's father, is in fact kept. An instance of this is found in the sensational episode in which we are told of Siti Akbari's escape from Barbari.

In the context of the conventions of traditional Malay literature the first lines of the story itself are curious as well. These run: *'Pada waktoe boeroeng-boeroeng baroe tinggalkan sarang, / Ija itoe pada waktoe hari baroe djadi trang, / Dalam Barbari soedah banjak orang, / Jang terbangkit*

⁸ The purpose of this rain, my lord, / Is that it gives an omen or a sign / That something remarkable, something incredible, / Will happen because of your daughter.

*akan mendjoewal dan membli barang*⁹ (p. 1). This description of the awakening of nature and the human world, too, contributes to the tension of the SSA's opening pages by means of an act of deferral: the reader is aware that this cannot be yet what the story will be about.

The German mediaevalist Jauss terms this kind of tension, which arises when the reader is eagerly awaiting coming revelations and surprises, the '*Ob-überhaupt Spannung*' (If-at-all tension). This type of tension, which is a future-oriented one, is dominant in modern literatures. It is exemplified by the question 'What will happen next?' In traditional literatures, on the other hand, the main kind of tension is that which Jauss has described as the '*Wie-Spannung*' (How tension). This type of tension, which is past-oriented, arises when the reader expects to be told an already familiar story that does not contain any great surprises. Here the typical question is: 'In what subtly varied ways will we see our hero perform his familiar deeds and speak the proper words?' (Jauss 1977:[334].) This indeed typifies the frame of mind that is required in order to enjoy a Panji romance, namely a state of pleasurable anticipation at the thought that one is about to be a witness to a game that actually started long ago, a game with familiar, strict rules, the fun of which lies in the manifold variations in the ways in which it is played (Jauss 1977:16).

Lie Kim Hok, in creating a forward-looking tension in his SSA through an element of suspense and surprise, introduces his readers to a new experience that conflicts with the backward-looking tension of traditional commemorative Malay literature. On the one hand these readers are given reason to expect to see the old and the familiar reconfirmed in the narrative of the SSA, while on the other they are invited to forget tradition and look forward to hearing or discovering something new and surprising. The most remarkable example of such an invitation to forget is provided perhaps, as has been pointed out earlier by Zaini-Lajoubert (1994:111), by the passage in which the reader is deliberately misled into believing that Siti Akbari is dead, only to be surprised a few pages further on by the dramatic disclosure that she is still alive.

One of the rules of the game of narrating a Panji romance – in fact, one that also applies in most traditional Malay narrative genres – concerns the technique of presentation of the story by the narrator – a fictional construct not to be confused with the author. In Western mediaeval studies this technique is referred to as 'interlacing' (from the French term *entrelacement*). As he tells his story, the narrator continually intervenes in it, now by breaking off one thread of the narrative, to leave it suspended until it is taken up again, and now by starting on another. This technique usually avails itself of a brief formula like 'Here the story of Kelana So-and-So

⁹ At the moment when the birds had just left their nests, / That is, when day had just broken, / Many people in Barbari had already / Risen from their beds to sell and buy goods.

ends', 'Now is told the story of the King of Koripan, who was grieving for his son, Raden Inu Kertapati'.

In this way the narrator of a Panji romance weaves a tapestry of narrative, in which a profusion of lines of action is interlaced in a complex pattern with a multitude of characters, whose actions range over vast geographical distances. Obviously in the SSA, too, the technique of interlacing has been used throughout, so that in this respect its narrator is seemingly still acting in a time-honoured fashion. An example of this is where he says: '*Sekarang ini, Pembatjakoe, kita liwati bebrapa hari. / Habis itoe, kita tengok di dalam kapal Barbari, / Di kapal ini adalah soewatoe Mantri, / Jang berdoedoek depan wakilnya Oemar Boechari.*'¹⁰ (P. 33.)

There are also conspicuous differences between his procedure and that of his traditional colleague, however. To grasp this point, we should recall another convention of traditional Malay narrative: that whereby the narrator must present his tapestry in a modest, unobtrusive and self-effacing manner, standing aside in a commemorative gesture, humbly to let the voice of Tradition speak for itself. The prescribed narrator¹¹ of a Panji romance of the Islamized type like the *Syair Abdul Muluk* or the *Syair Siti Zubaidah*, but also of narratives in other genres, was the *dagang* or trader travelling far from home – a kind of storyteller typically embodying the central driving force of traditional Malay poetics, namely the need to commemorate.

A fine sample showing a *dagang*, who with consistent modesty refers to himself in the third person, in the act of commemoration is the prologue of the *Syair Lampung Karam*, where the narrator says:

'*Bismillah itu permulaan kata / alhamdulillah puji yang nyata / berkat Muhammad penghulunya kita / fakir mengarang suatu cerita // fakir yang daif dagang yang hina / mengarang syair sebarang guna / sajaknya janggal banyak tak kena / daripada akal tidak sempurna. // jikalau ada khilaf dan sesat / janganlah tuan sahaya diumpat / diambil kalam dicecah dakwat / hati mengingat tangan menyurat.*'¹² (Koster 1997:65.)

Besides the religious order – that is, the highest order, which could cancel

¹⁰ Now, dear reader, we shall skip a few days. / Then we will take a look at the ship from Barbari. / In this ship there is a minister, / Seated in front of Oemar Boechari, the Sultan's representative.

¹¹ For a discussion of the two types of narrator found in traditional Malay literature I would refer to Koster 1997:55-75.

¹² The invocation 'In the name of God' introduces this tale. / 'Praise be to God' is the laudatory formula opening it. / With the blessings of Muhammad, our leader, / This beggar will compose a tale. // This weak beggar and lowly trader / Will note down in his poem whatever seems useful to him. / Its rhyme is awkward and often halting, / Because his intellect is far from perfect. // If he commits an error and goes astray, / Please do not heap scorn on your servant, good sirs. / He takes up his pen and dips it in the ink. / While his mind recalls, his hand writes.

out all other authority – the *dagang* might also, where this was proper and necessary, commemorate the worldly order of the *kerajaan* and oral historical tradition, as we see in the following prologue from the *Syair Perang Siak* (Poem on the Siak War): '*Dengan berkat duli mahkota / ibarat dahulu sudahlah nyata / tidak dipandanglah dengan mata / sekedar fakir mendengar cerita*'¹³ (Koster 1997:153).

In a variant of the *Syair Abdul Muluk* published by Abu Hassan Sham in 1993, the narrator in the role of *dagang* is duly present from the start: '*Bismi'LLahi'l-Rahman permulaan kata / Nama Tuhan alam semesta; / Kemudian tersebut Sultan Mahkota, / Di negeri Barbari baginda bertakhta*'¹⁴ (Abu Hassan Sham 1993:459). But where is the self-effacing, commemorating narrator at the beginning of the SSA? As we have already seen, this poem opens with a quotation of a prediction and a description of the birds that have just left their nests at sunrise. Only now can we fully understand how strange and novel its opening pages must have appeared to Lie Kim Hok's first readers.

The reason the *dagang*-narrator behaves in a self-effacing manner is that he symbolizes a reluctant authorship. For the Muslim there is ultimately only one real Author Whose writing has authority, namely Allah, Whose authority eclipses even that of the Sultan and his *kerajaan* order. If human writing can lay claim to any authority, it can only really do so by expressly commemorating, recalling, invoking and repeating Divine Writing as best it can. One can penetrate this Divine Writing, an expression of God's Will acting upon the World, through the Holy Qur'an and the writings of divinely inspired theologians. A writer who, forgetful of Allah, takes pride in his own creative powers risks straying from the Truth, and his work may well lead its readers astray.

To signal to their audience or readers that their writing was properly authorized by Religion, traditional Malay authors therefore not only preferred to remain anonymous, but through their narrator disclaimed possession of any necessary qualifications for successful authorship, such as wisdom, power, ability. From a religious point of view writing could only be regarded as a necessary evil, which, unfortunately, could not be dispensed with. Obviously this commemorative concept of authorship, as expressed through the *dagang*-narrator, is separated by a vast gap from the concept we find in the narrator of the SSA. Concomitantly, the change from the diffident he-narrator of tradition to the self-confident I-narrator (auctorial narrator) Lie Kim Hok has made use of in his poem represents a major step away from tradition. It is yet another instance of how Lie Kim Hok is

¹³ By the grace of His Royal Majesty / The examples of the past are here made known. / This beggar did not witness the events of which he tells with his own eyes, / But merely heard the stories.

¹⁴ The invocation 'In the name of Allah, the Merciful and the Compassionate' prefaces these words, / In the name of the Lord of the Universe. / Next the story is told of His Majesty the Sultan, / Who occupied the throne of the kingdom of Barbari.

not only commemorating but also, simultaneously, 'forgetting' tradition.

A passage in which we come across this self-confident I-narrator is the following one, for instance, taken from the episode in which we are told how Abdul Mulan meets Siti Akbari in Ban and falls in love with her:

*'Seperti kita 'dah tahoe, Poetri ini eilok tida terkata, / Hingga dapat soewatoe nama dari orang saisi kota; / Tapi dari hal adatnja Pambatjakoe blon dapat warta, / Kerna blon ada terseboet dalam ini tjerita. // Saja rasa, djika kita soedah bitjara dari roepanja, / Baiklah kita bitjara djoega dari hal adatnja. / Maski sedikit, tida sampe samoewanja, / Loemajan djoega akan orang jang menanja.'*¹⁵ (P. 38:2-3.)

The words '*Pambatjakoe ... saja rasa*' are a clear indication that this is not the voice of Tradition speaking through a narrator who tries respectfully to stand aside and be as invisible as possible, but the voice of an individual – to be sure, a fictional one – who assumes authority on his own account and does so in a most conspicuous way. The step taken here by Lie Kim Hok is reminiscent of one taken earlier by, for instance, Munshi Abdullah. As Milner (1995:38-43) has shown in his seminal study, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, one way in which Munshi Abdullah rejected the authority of the *kerajaan* ideology was by founding the authenticity of his writing in the *Hikayat Abdullah* (1849) not in Tradition, but in the *aku* (I) of the constantly developing, directly experiencing, critically examining and emancipated individual.

Many parallels indeed might be drawn between the figure of Abdullah, as a modernizer in education, politics and literature, trained by British missionaries, who was far ahead of his times, and that of Lie Kim Hok, who, as a pupil of Dutch missionaries, made his mark in much the same fields and played a not dissimilar role. What we see Lie Kim Hok doing here is to bow to the *kerajaan* order by invoking the Panji romance, yet to resist that very order by introducing a sovereign I as the authority of his narrative. The voice of religious authority, too, seems to be toned down by him somewhat, although it can still be heard in the many references to *Allah yang Maha Kuasa* (Almighty God) strewn throughout the SSA. That even Abdullah could, in a sense, still bow to the *kerajaan* as well as rise in revolt against it, can perhaps be concluded from the fact that he took great pains to publish a new edition of the *kerajaan's* ideological mainstay, the *Sejarah Melayu* (Genealogy of the Malay rulers).

Not only the narrator but also his reader reaches a high degree of visibility in the narratorial interventions in the SSA. Insofar as the reader – or rather, the listener – is at all explicitly inscribed in the text in

¹⁵ As we already know, the Princess was of such indescribable beauty / That she was renowned among the population of the entire city; / But about her character my reader has not yet been informed, / Because nothing has as yet been told about it in the story. // I think that once we have started talking about her looks, / We may as well also talk about her character. / Although we will mention only a little, and not everything, / To be fair to people who want to ask questions.

traditional Malay literature, he is allowed only one attitude: that of listening in respectful silence to the monologue uttered by the voice of ineffably sacred Tradition. Here again we notice a stark contrast with the SSA. Once again we see Lie Kim Hok 'forget' Tradition as he proceeds from monologue to dialogue. In this text we find the reader democratically rubbing shoulders with his narrator, who even allows him to speak his mind, as the following example testifies.

After the scene in which the Sultan of Hindustan quarrels with his two champions about the manner in which to wage war on Barbari, the narrator comments:

*'Pembatjakoe tantoe bilang, marika itoe samoewa kasar, / Samoewa kakoe dan lekas mendjadi goesar; / Bitjaranja tida seperti orang jang besar-besar, / Ampir seperti orang jang roesoeh di tengah pasar. // Ja, Pembatjakoe, djika toewan bilang bagitoe, / Saja djoega tida maloe akan membantoe, / Tapi maski tra taoe dengan pasti atawa tantoe, / Boleh djoega kita taksir sebabnja itoe.'*¹⁶ (P. 54:2-3.)

Helpfulness is indeed a conspicuous feature of Lie Kim Hok's narrator ('*Saja djoega tida maloe akan membantoe*'). Part of this helpfulness is manifested in a way with which we are already familiar from works of traditional Malay literature with a highly visible commenting narrator. As Zaini-Lajoubert has pointed out (1994:110), the narrator in the SSA at every turn of his story carefully instructs his readers what to think in order to ensure that they will sympathize with the goodies and not with the baddies and will correctly grasp the moral that his narrative is intended to teach. In this respect the SSA can be seen as still partaking of a commemorative form of poetics, assuming as it does the existence of an exemplary moral universe of fixed, unchanging values that can be appealed to instantly as a matter of course and that must not be forgotten.

In a work that presupposes such a universe one would expect to meet characters that are flat and typical, mere pegs for the author to hang particular values or virtues he wished to exemplify on. If we expect to find such typical characterization in the SSA, however, we are in for a surprise. We see Lie Kim Hok endeavouring to create individuals whom one might meet in every-day 19th-century Batavia, rather than copying and thus commemorating the stock characters of tradition and the narrative techniques employed in creating them. Admittedly his sultans, princes and princesses as such are types inherited from the panoply of heroes in traditional storytelling. Their use can therefore be regarded as a commemorative bow to the old schemes of reality, that is, to the *kerajaan* order. However, they are given new, unusual features and traits and a new

¹⁶ I'm sure my reader will say that they are all coarse people, / All clumsy and irascible; / Their manner of speaking is not that of people of high standing, / But almost like that of people quarrelling in the marketplace. // Yes, my reader, if you say so, / I will not hesitate to play along with you. / But, although we do not know for certain whether that is really the case, / We can nevertheless guess at the cause.

manner of speaking – not the formulaic Malay of the manuscripts but living *Omong Betawi* – that strike us as being more individual and realistic because they no longer depend on the ancient schemes.

It is true that Lie Kim Hok had a penchant for realism, as has also been pointed out by Zaini-Lajoubert (1994:110). Perhaps the finest example in the SSA of his delight in individual characterization is the following portrait of an angry Arab *syaikh* whose *kopiah* (skullcap) has been snatched from his head by a thief as he stood in the jostling crowd watching the royal marriage procession go past, and the tongue-in-cheek manner in which it has been drawn:

'Roepanja sech ini, Pembatjakoe, ada seperti roepa orang / Jang tida boleh diseboet berajer moeka terang; / Djangoetnja ada pandjang terlaloe gigi 'dah banjak koerang, / Dan di bawa hidoeng mantjoeng ada koemis jang djarang. // Ija poenja kapala ada goendoel dan ada sereba salah: / Bagoennja terlaloe lantjip dan ada botak sebelah, / Jang lihat botaknja itoe, ampir samoewa kata "lailah!" / Kerna litjin sekali serta berkilap sampe menjalah. // "Astagafaroelah!" kata sech kita, "mengafalah! – / Ach, tjelaka betoe! – bangsa terkoetok Allah, – / Ija kira mentjoeri hitoe tiada salah? / Ija nanti dibakhar dalem narakha, afi menjalah." // ... // "Kaloe datat ake fegang bangsat hitoe, / Ake katokh fitjah kafalanja dingan batoe, / Ija aoerang djahat, ija ada anakh hantoe, / Maka ia mentjoeri kofea aoerang bachitoe".¹⁷ (P. 16:8; p. 17:1-2, 4.)

In addition to individual characterization, another means by which Lie Kim Hok seeks to achieve an effect of realism is by seeing to it that every incident in his narrative is carefully motivated. A case in point is the detail with which he makes plausible Siti Akbari's escape by climbing over the city wall of Barbari: it was dark so that no one could see her; there happened to be a scaffolding near the wall, by climbing onto which she could just catch hold of a rope hanging down from the wall, and so on (pp. 106-7).

In the formulaic storytelling tradition no need was felt for this kind of motivation in terms of cause and effect. A story was composed by stringing together traditional pre-fab elements of action, dialogue and description as codified in type-scenes and stock-characters (Sweeney 1980:41-74; Koster 1997:43-8). In the process, the narrator or writer would follow the typical plot schemes provided by custom, for instance the plots of the heroic epic, romance or genealogical historiography. Interestingly,

¹⁷ The appearance of the *syaikh* was like that of someone / Who could not be said to have an open face; / His beard was very long and many of his teeth were missing, / And under his sharp nose he had a sparse moustache. // His head was bald and there was everything wrong with it: / The crown (?) was very pointed and he was bald on one side. / Almost all who saw his bald spot would exclaim 'There is no god but God', / Because it was so very smooth and brightly shiny. // 'Ghod fohbidh', said our *syaikh*, 'Why khas zis khappened! – / Oh, what bad luckh – khabble accused of Ghod, – / Does khe zink that sythealing his not khrong? / Laydher khe will bhurn in khell for this, in a bhlaze of fire.' // ... // 'If only I khould lay khands on zat sykhoundrel, / I will knockh his head to bieces with a sythone, / Khe his a khrook, khe his the spawn of a ghosyt, / Khaving ze neghve to sytheal my sykhullkhap just like zat'.

although the SSA tries to avoid copying the old storytelling techniques, we still come across debris of typical scenes – traces of tradition – here and there, such as in the praise of a sultan's handsome appearance, fine manners and just rule on his first introduction in the tale; in the description of the prosperity of his city, to which many foreign traders are attracted by his just rule; and so on (p. 1:2-3; p. 4:4-7). Once again we see Lie Kim Hok on the one hand 'forgetting', yet on the other still commemorating tradition.

Yet another way in which Lie Kim Hok's desire for a realistic effect becomes manifest is in his frequent use of punctuation as a means of enhancing the artistic effect he wishes to create. In Malay manuscripts concerned with less important worldly matters, such as literature, punctuation was hardly used. Manuscripts were mere props for the reciter's memory, so that the texts they contained were not meant for reading and enjoyment in silence by an individual reader. The tales they included were presented by the living voice, which by means of tone and inflection helped disambiguate their meaning for the listener, thus guiding the process of interpretation. Lie Kim Hok, as we will see in the following example, used punctuation in order to help his reader imaginatively recreate the full drama expressed by the words in the SSA. The effect created by this is a feeling that we are actually hearing the words as if they were spoken in our very presence.¹⁸ This device he undoubtedly borrowed from contemporary European novels. A remarkable example of his creation of such a realistic effect through punctuation is the following passage, in which Sultan Abdul Aidid, on his deathbed, gives his last injunctions to his son, like an actor on a stage playing a dramatic scene full of pathos:

*'Di hari nanti ... saaende anakda, / Hendak bri titah ... lain dari jang telah ada, / Sablon dikaloearkan ... rempoekkan doeloe sama Mamanda, / Tanjakan doeloe padanja ... patoet atawa tida. // Anakko poenja Mamanda Oemar Boechari ... / Ada soewatoe orang ... amat bidjak-bastari; / Kasatiaan hatinja ... ajandamoe sendiri ... / Soedah kenjang dapati ... dari doeloe hari. // ... Adoeh! ... anggotakoe saboekoe-boekoe, / Soedah moelai ... soedah moelai merasa kakoe, / Selamat tinggal! selamat tinggal, koelawargakoe ... / Selamat tinggal, sekalian sobat ... sobatkoe!'*¹⁹ (P. 20:5-7.)

¹⁸ I am not saying that the use of punctuation per se creates a realistic effect. The fact that the *Syair Siti Akbari*, in a passage like this, invites the reader to re-enact the drama of the situation through his/her manner of reading may perhaps also have something to do with the possibility that the text of this poem was first committed to writing with a view to helping actors memorize it for enactment on the stage (Zaini-Lajoubert 1994:103).

¹⁹ Later ..., my son, if you / Want to give an order ... that deviates from what is customary, / Discuss it (?) with your Uncle before you issue it. / First ask him ... whether or not it is proper. // My son, your Uncle Oemar Boechari ... / Is a man ... of great wisdom and discretion; / I, your father, myself ... have basked ... / In the loyalty he has shown me ... from earlier times. // Alas, ... I can feel my limbs, one by one, / Already beginning ... beginning to stiffen. / Farewell! Farewell, my family ... // Farewell, my friends ... all my friends!

We have already seen how the language of the SSA – *Omong Betawi* – enhances the realistic effect of the poem. A feature of the poem that is closely related to this is pointed out by Lie Kim Hok's biographer, Tio Ie Soei, where he describes it with great insight as *prosa bersajak* (rhymed prose) that *lebih banyak berbicara daripada bernyanyi* (speaks rather than sings) (Tio Ie Soei [1958]:101). Indeed, we have in the SSA, rather than a traditional *syair*, a new literary form: a prose poem. To understand this point, it will be useful to recall the formal conventions governing the *syair* verse form.

The *syair* quatrain displays striking symmetry, consisting of four lines divided into two couplets, each in turn divided into two lines, each line, finally, being split up by a strong caesura into two half-lines. The principal requirement on the level of the line is that there must be two stresses on either side of the caesura. Each line tends to be a complete syntactic and semantic unit, constituting either a sentence or a clause (Koster 1997:36-9, 48-52). If properly handled, the traditional quatrain thus is a sufficiently pliant and lively form of verse, which does not necessarily become a see-saw drone and yet is markedly balanced, economical and regulated. This balanced yet flexible structure is also reflected by the structure of the melodies to which *syair* were traditionally sung. An example of a piece of verse that obeys the old rules is the following quatrain from the *Syair Ken Tambuhan*:

Adapun akan / Ken Tambuhan
 bermimpi bulan / jatuh ke ribaan
 cahayanya limpah / sekalian badan
 pinggang dibelit / naga gentaran²⁰
 (Teeuw 1966 I:21)

Even the most superficial comparison of the quatrains of the SSA (of which I quote many in this article) with those of the *Syair Ken Tambuhan* will show that, with the exception of rhyme, all the old formal conventions have been flouted. Once again Lie Kim Hok has allowed himself to 'forget' tradition. And once again his reason for doing so seems to have been the desire to achieve a new form of realism.

Summarizing what we have learned thus far about the way in which the SSA confirms yet denies Malay tradition when read against the foil of the genres and wider conventions of the narrative of the past, we can say that the basic characteristic of the poem indeed is its oscillation between commemoration of tradition and creative 'forgetting' of this tradition. The plot of the SSA recalls that of the de-eroticized version of the Panji romance, but is apt to disturb the still prevalent backward-looking

²⁰ As for Lady-in-Waiting Tambuhan, / She dreamed that the moon fell into her lap. / Its radiance flooded her entire body / And a snake was coiling around her waist.

expectation of the reader of Lie Kim Hok's times by introducing a forward-looking element, namely suspense. The plot is worked out in a narrative that is woven more or less in the traditional fashion using the technique of interlacing narrative strands, but instead of the regressive, self-effacing he-narrator of tradition (*dagang*), we have here, as in other passages where the narrator intrudes, a self-confident I-narrator who speaks not with the voice of tradition but on his own authority. This self-assertive narrator – a directly experiencing and critically examining personage – has a counterpart in an imagined reader who no longer has to listen respectfully to the monologue of tradition, but is democratically given the right to make up and speak his own mind.

As in traditional narrative, the comments of this I-narrator give explicit, helpful guidance in the interpretation of characters and events by the reader, assuming the self-evident authority of an exemplary moral universe of fixed, unchanging values, which may be instantly appealed to and must be perpetuated. Yet the characters of the SSA are not, as one would expect, flat types but are round and individual personages, and this is one way in which Lie Kim Hok strives to achieve a realistic effect. This effect is further strengthened by the abandonment (almost, but not quite, total) of the non-motivating formulaic mode of constructing a story with the aid of type-scenes, and the adoption instead of a method of painstakingly developing the narrative as a carefully intertwined sequence of causes and effects that seems to be more real, more probable and more true by its very structure.

Realism is also strengthened in the SSA by Lie Kim Hok's frequent use of punctuation to achieve an artistic effect. We are moving here from the manuscript of the oral-aural tradition, which had to be brought to life and given the right meaning by the living voice of the reciter, to the book, in which carefully placed diacritical marks help the reader recreate the drama of the words of the text in his mind. The punctuation not only helps him to arrive at a correct interpretation, but – what is even more important – also gives him an illusion of unmediated experience and emotion. What further strengthens this realism is the language used in the SSA – not the high Malay of the manuscripts, but the everyday language of Batavia. Removal of the barriers between high and low representational forms indeed is a typical ploy used to achieve greater realism (Levine 1981:6). The attempt at realism, finally, is also responsible for Lie Kim Hok's deviation from the relatively rigid verse structure of the traditional *syair* – a form of poetry that is to be sung to a melody – towards a prose poem of sorts, which 'speaks rather than sings'.

Realism is the main innovation in the SSA, therefore. But what kind of realism? Obviously not the formulaic realism of the *kerajaan* order as enshrined in the traditional body of storytelling techniques. To discover the models for Lie Kim Hok's realism we apparently have to look

westward, towards Europe, as is indicated, for instance, by his generous use of the rhetorical figure of the anaphora – in conjunction with abundant punctuation – to generate pathos and immediacy of experience, an example of which we found in the scene in which Abdul Aidid utters his last injunctions. To be more precise, we should look towards Dutch literature, as is suggested also by the frequent occurrence throughout the SSA of such Dutch interjections as 'Ach!', 'Hoera!', 'Hm ...', and so on.

As the recent studies by Anbeek (1982) and Bel (1993) show, at the time Lie Kim Hok was writing his SSA there were two strands of realism competing for supremacy in the Netherlands. The one, which is known in Dutch literary history as Idealistic Realism, at that juncture was just on the way out there, after dominating the Dutch novel for about fifty years. Like its rival, Naturalism, it was not a specifically Dutch school, but had ramifications all over Europe. In England its practitioners were novelists like Walter Scott, Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens, whereas in France it was represented by such figures as Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo. Well-known Dutch authors writing in this particular realistic vein were J. van Lennep, J.W. Oltmans, J. Potgieter, N. Beets and M. Bosboom-Toussaint. The other variety of realism, Naturalism, was still brand-new in the Netherlands in the 1880's and was just beginning its climb to the ascendancy it was to enjoy later in the novels of writers such as L. van Deyssel, L. Couperus, J. Netscher and H. Heyermans. An early practitioner – though not quite wholeheartedly so – in the Netherlands Indies was P.A. Daum. Naturalism had been first developed and established in France through the novels of writers like Emile Zola and Gustave Flaubert.

In the Netherlands and other European countries, Naturalism manifested itself in the novel by such features as hyper-sensitive protagonists. The story would tell of the hero's or heroine's gradual disillusionment with life and society, which frequently ended in his/her suicide. It would pay a great deal of attention to circumstances of birth and class determining the protagonists' course of life, underlying which was a deep-seated hatred of the bourgeoisie and its hypocrisy, which allowed the world to be so mercilessly evil. It also frequently had an obsession with sex as theme, including homosexuality, which was still utterly taboo at the time. And finally, it was characterized by the presence of a cool, objective, seemingly indifferent and usually invisible narrator, who most fittingly was not an I-narrator (Anbeek 1982:49-72; Bel 1993:280-91).

It will be clear to the reader that the SSA displays none of these features of Naturalism, which is not surprising, since this form of realism could hardly have been known in the Netherlands Indies in 1884, except to readers of French novels. Even if we assumed that Lie Kim Hok might have been familiar with this brand of realism, it would seem unlikely that he felt attracted to the negative universe it portrayed. The principal features of novels written in the school of Idealistic Realism as followed in

the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe, on the other hand, can be easily traced in the SSA.

In the first place, the Dutch Idealistic Realist novel, not unlike a traditional Malay narrative, proceeded from the assumption of a set system of moral values the validity of which was taken for granted. Secondly, again not unlike the traditional Malay narrative, it tended to have a happy ending, elevating the reader's mind by showing the triumph of virtue and the punishment of vice. Thirdly, plot was all-important, with the narrative brimming with fortuitous but opportune meetings, surprising coincidences, and even more astonishing revelations, such as the disclosure that a poor orphan was really a child of a very well-to-do family. Fourthly, care was taken to achieve individual characterization and provide careful motivation for the sake of realism and immediacy of experience. Fifthly, the story was told by an I-narrator taking great pains to guide the reader's sympathies in the right direction (Anbeek 1982:111-8; Bel 1993:272-9).

To demonstrate that Lie Kim Hok's models were indeed provided by Idealistic Realism, I will cite two examples from Dutch novels of this school. The first example is taken from Bosboom-Toussaint's romantic novel *De Prinses Orsini* (The Princess Orsini; 1885:2).²¹ In it we can see how, just as in the SSA, a figure is meticulously characterized through a strongly partisan, commentatorial description of his physical appearance and dress, with a constant appeal to a system of values that is assumed to be self-evidently shared with the reader. As we will see, this is quite comparable to, for instance, Lie Kim Hok's characterization of the hapless *syaiikh* who had his skullcap stolen. The passage from Bosboom-Toussaint (1885:2) reads:

*'De vriendelijke maan, die de voorwerpen alle met een schel wit licht overgoot, geeft ons gelegenheid hem van het hoofd tot de voeten op te nemen om daarna te gissen wie hij zijn mag. Zijn gelaat draagt een zuidelijken karakertrek, niet slechts door de donkerbruine tint, noch zelfs door de glinsterende zwarte ogen, maar vooral om iets beweelijks en sterk sprekends, dat de kinderen van het Zuiden onderscheidt; de kleine hoed, aan drie kanten opgenomen en gegalonneerd, liet een hoog en open voorhoofd geheel onbedekt, dat u weer had kunnen bevredigen met den fijnen, listigen trek rondom den mond.'*²²

²¹ Tio Ie Soei ([1958]:73) was the first to point out Lie Kim Hok's familiarity with the works of Dutch novelists like Bosboom-Toussaint and Van Lennep. Salmon (1994) has traced Lie Kim Hok's adaptation of the novel *Klaasje Zevenster* by Van Lennep in his novel *Tjhit Liap Seng* in detail.

²² The friendly moon, which bathed everything in a glaring white light, gives us an opportunity of observing him from head to toe, subsequently to try and guess who he might be. His face possesses a southern character, not only because of the dark brown complexion, nor even the glittering black eyes, but especially because of a certain mobility and strong expressiveness that distinguishes the children of the South; the small hat, braided and turned up on three sides, left a high, clear forehead wholly exposed, which might in turn have pleased you with the subtle, cunning lines around the mouth.

The other example concerns the way the I-narrator makes his presence felt in the Idealistic Novel. It is not difficult to see the close similarities between the following sample of narratorial intrusion and the passages from the SSA I have quoted above. I have taken this fragment from J. van Lennep's historical novel *De Roos van Dekama* (1882 edition, p. 110):

*'Wellicht zullen reeds velen mijner lezers, even als Reinout, Deodaat van trouweloosheid jegens zijn vriend en van dubbelzinnigheid beschuldigd hebben. Het is onze plicht, als die van een waarheidslievend schrijver, hem zoo spoedig mogelijk van dezen onverdienden blaam te zuiveren.'*²³

Here it is difficult to ignore the narrator's awareness of the highly fictional nature of his activities or the resultant tension between this and his realistic mission.

At this point I would like to return to the question of how Malay literature produced in the cities reacted to the many changes that were taking place in colonial society at the end of the nineteenth century, as exemplified by the SSA. As we have already seen, Lie Kim Hok on the one hand is still making certain concessions to some of the requirements of the Islamic and *kerajaan* literary traditions by writing a story in the genre of the Islamized Panji romance. On the other hand he is innovative in that he introduces a new realism that seems to be associated with a shift in the source of authority from tradition to the individual and towards more democratic attitudes. The new elements introduced into Malay literature by Lie Kim Hok via his SSA may be regarded as representing a reaction in the field of literature that parallels comparable reactions in other fields of indigenous culture and politics in the developing cities of the Netherlands Indies.

We know from the history of the rise of realism in the Western novel that this particular development was made possible by, among other things, a number of momentous developments in European thinking, which increasingly led literature away from the notion that its sole aim was to hold up an ideal moral universe for the reader to emulate. One new idea, introduced by Locke, was the concept of the individual as a *tabula rasa* (clean slate). Another was the notion of the self as the validation of knowledge, as expressed in René Descartes' famous adage *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I exist). Yet another development was the separation in aesthetics and philosophy of the good and the beautiful. From holding up ideals for imitation, literature was now able to turn to imaginative investigation, such as of the question of what will happen if we put a character in this or that situation (Hulme 1984:34-7). Hence the idea of

²³ Many of my readers will probably, like Reinout, have accused Deodaat of disloyalty towards his friend and of duplicity. It is our duty, as that of a truth-loving author, to clear him as soon as possible of this undeserved blame.

the novel as a laboratory for experimentation. In the SSA we see Lie Kim Hok similarly involved in a break – albeit only a partial one – from the exemplary, formulaic universe of Malay tradition and a shift towards a more exploratory, discovery-oriented notion of the function of narrative.

As Tio Ie Soei has pointed out, there is a Malay saying *tak ada gading yang tak retak* (there is no ivory without a flaw). According to him, quite a few critics have criticized Lie Kim Hok's writings, and especially his SSA, for undeniably being adaptations (Tio Ie Soei [1958]:90). I myself wholeheartedly agree with the view taken by Salmon and Zaini-Lajoubert in their 1994 articles in *Archipel* that there is no need to have any the less appreciation for a literary work because it is an adaptation.²⁴ As we have seen, the SSA can still partly be regarded as a continuation of an old genre, while at the same time it appears to formulate a new genre in the modernizing system of Malay literature. Thus Lie Kim Hok not only was a man of his time, but in some respects he was indeed ahead of his times. If I may be allowed to make what is merely a tentative suggestion, I would point out that it might be worthwhile investigating to what extent Lie's later fiction, such as his novel *Tjhit Liap Seng* (The Pleiades), which has been the subject of such perspicacious analysis by Claudine Salmon (1994:125-56), represents a continuation or elaboration of this new genre.

²⁴ On the other hand, I believe that our scholarly enthusiasm for a new field of research, however praiseworthy it may be, should not blind us to the possibility that an adaptation may not necessarily be a masterpiece.

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