

**ISLAND STORIES,
ALTERNATIVE VOICES**
Contemporary Depictions of Transgressive
Post-Independence Masculinities



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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of Louise Marie Roussou, my mother; my first teacher, original storyteller, and nurturer of a clan of island men. Her passion for reading and writing inspired my own.

ISLAND STORIES, ALTERNATIVE VOICES
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I. PRELUDE



The whine of a Persian nai (a reed flute) echoes in the cavernous chamber. A faint light infuses the hall, settling on the smooth, creamy skin of the young performer. The Sheik and his men stare transfixed as the slender boy reaches into the basket and lifts out a python. The Qur'anic script circling the tops of the walls, animated by the music, weaves a spell around the group. Undulating to the mystical desert melody, the snake wraps its powerful body around the boy's naked torso. The Sheik twists his moustache and licks his lips. The Abyssinian strains forward, almost involuntarily, entranced by the haunting, hypnotic tune and the boy's calm demeanour. The serpent flicks its tongue, then hisses, its tail writhing suggestively, its beady eyes penetrating into each man, mesmerising. Murmurs of appreciation, along with a few barely disguised groans and a small sigh, escape from the assembly. One of the men shifts uncomfortably to accommodate the stirrings between his legs. Another stretches his for the same reason. The boy lifts the python's head in offering, an invitation, as the music reaches fevered pitch. The Nubian purses his lips and clenches his thighs. Sweat beads on the Andalusian's brow. The Sheik smiles appreciatively.

Such exoticised and eroticised images and representations of the 'Orient' were popular in Western Europe, especially during the late nineteenth century. In what amounts to pure fantasy, Jean-Léon Gérôme's *The Snake Charmer* (c. 1880) is a pastiche of Indian, Egyptian, Turkish, and other Asian and North African elements that would not have appeared together like this in actuality, despite the artist's virtually photographic realism. The various weapons and individual attire of the spectators indicate this band of motley warriors is composed of men (and a young boy) from different ethnic backgrounds, geographic regions, and perhaps even time periods. A detail from this typically orientalist fantasy graces the cover of the 1979 Vintage Books edition of *Orientalism*, Edward Said's influential study of the European construction and exoticisation of the (Islamic) East. As an example of a Western representation of non-Western masculinity, the painting suggests the homosocial culture and 'deviant' sexuality associated with non-European societies. While Western representations of non-Western masculinity have been widely circulated and investigated by Western scholars, little work has been done on non-Western representations of non-Western masculinities and transgressive sexualities.

Armando Jannetta writes that, following independence, it was essential for formerly colonised writers “to exorcise the distorted images created and imposed upon them by white imperialist dominance and its colonial discourse.”¹ In this thesis I examine depictions of postcolonial masculinities, especially the treatment of ‘alternative’ or ‘transgressive’ male characters and themes in post-independence fiction from New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and Singapore within the last ten to fifteen years. I am interested in the writings of the descendants of formerly colonised peoples affected by the aftermath of British colonialism, national independence, attempts to reclaim or appropriate ‘authentic’ ethnic identities, and recent developments and programmes aimed at modernisation, globalisation, and/or Westernisation. My enquiry concentrates on indigenous male authors. Although the term ‘indigenous’ is highly contested, I employ it here to indicate the native, non-European-descent, ethnic populations. In the context of this study, the notion of the ‘native’ or ‘indigenous’ becomes increasingly problematic, and applies in my original (and strictest) sense only to the Māori of New Zealand. For the purposes of this study, however, I consider Sinhalese and Tamil authors from Sri Lanka (rather than Veddha),² Chinese and Malay in Singapore (instead of Malay only).

A survey of texts on postcolonial theory and criticism reveals a lack of work on non-European masculinities. ‘Gender’ issues are usually presented and discussed in terms of female subjects, women writers, femininity, and feminism. Discussions of ‘sexuality’ focus mainly on cross-cultural/racial desire and relationships, or frame the issue in terms of rape and exploitation. For example, Joseph Boone’s “Vacation Cruises; or, The Homoerotics of Orientalism,” is an interesting article, but his focus is primarily on ‘gay’ European men’s

¹ Armando E. Jannetta, “Textual Strategies of Identity Formation in Witi Ihimaera’s Fiction,” *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* 12.2 (1990): 17.

² The Veddha are considered Sri Lanka’s indigenous peoples, pre-dating the arrival of the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples, but debates continue to rage about whether or not they still exist, or whether they have been assimilated into the coastal-dwelling Tamils in the East. See for example, Yuvi Thangarajah, “Narratives of Victimhood as Ethnic Identity Among the Veddhas of the East Coast,” in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, eds. (Colombo: Social Scientists Association, 1995), 191-218.

desire for the non-European Other.³ Leela Gandhi discusses homosexuality as anglophilia (the effeminate or emasculated 'native' in relation to the metropole) and the ambivalence of (homo)sexualised racial violence against the male immigrant in England.⁴ Philip Darby examines the masculine bias in colonial texts as expressed through various motifs related to sexuality and gender, including homoeroticism and the feminisation of the Other.⁵ Katie King's contribution in the *Blackwell Companion to Postcolonial Studies* is primarily a discussion of terms, while Geeta Patel's chapter on transgressive masculinity focuses on the transgender role of *hijras* in India.⁶

The major collections and anthologies do not deal with native men or indigenous masculinities, much less 'alternative' or 'transgressive' masculinities and expressions of sexuality from a non-European, (post)colonised subject perspective. There are remarkable absences and silences in most of the primary texts on which the contemporary discipline of postcolonial studies is based, and the discourses surrounding it. John Hawley's and Terry Goldie's work on the intersections of postcolonial and queer theories⁷ provides a good starting point, however, the majority of theoretical and critical writings I have examined do not discuss indigenous masculinities and (homo)sexualities. In most cases, when gender is

³ Joseph A. Boone, "Vacation Cruises; or, The Homoerotics of Orientalism," in *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies, Vols. I-V*, Diana Brydon, ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 961-987. Also appears as chapter 2 in *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, John C. Hawley, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 43-78.

⁴ Leela Gandhi, "'Ellowen, Deeowen': Salman Rushdie and The Migrant's Desire," in *England through Colonial Eyes in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, Ann Blake, Leela Gandhi, and Sue Thomas, eds. (Hampshire, England: Palgrave, 2001), 157-170.

⁵ Philip Darby, *The Fiction of Imperialism: Reading Between International Relations & Postcolonialism*, (London & Washington D.C.: Cassell, 1998).

⁶ Katie King, "Global Gay Formations and Local Homosexualities," 508-519, and Geeta Patel, "Home, Homo, Hybrid: Translating Gender," 410-427, in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray, eds. (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, England: Blackwell, 2000).

⁷ John C. Hawley, ed., *Postcolonial and Queer Theories: Intersections and Essays* (Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 2001) and *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001). Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1989); "Introduction: Queerly Postcolonial," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 30.2 (April, 1999): 9-26; *Pink Snow: Homotextual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction* (Broadview Press, 2002); ed., *In a Queer Country: Gay and Lesbian Studies in the Canadian Context* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001)

mentioned, it is assumed or overtly presented as female/feminine.⁸ In the few instances when masculinity is discussed it is primarily in relation to the colonisers, or from a European perspective, or located in the West.⁹ If indigenous post-independence males are mentioned at all, it is only through the eyes of the coloniser, or as objects of colonial loathing and desire. Any discussion of the construction of masculinity or the masculine subject is overwhelmingly about white colonial males.

⁸ For example, see Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London & New York: Verso, 1992); Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London & New York: Verso, 1997); Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1999); Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed. Theory Out of Bounds*, Vol. 18 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Christopher O'Reilly, *Post-Colonial Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Laura Chrisman, *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism, and Transnationalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

⁹ For example, see Radhika Mohanram, "Postcolonial Spaces and Deterioralized (Homo)Sexuality: The Films of Hanif Kureishi," in *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts: Theory and Criticism*, Gita Rajan and Radhika Mohanram, eds. (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1995), 117-134; Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (St. Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1998); Jan Campbell, *Arguing With the Phallus: Feminist, Queer and Postcolonial Theory – A Psychoanalytic Contribution* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2000); Sukhdev Sandhu, "Pop Goes the Centre: Hanif Kureishi's London," in *Postcolonial Theory and Criticism*, Laura Chrisman and Benita Perry, eds. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 133-154; Graham Huggan, *The Post-Colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001); Richard Phillips, "Imperialism, Sexuality, and Space: Purity Movements in the British Empire," in *Postcolonial Geographies*, Alison Blunt and Cheryl McEwan, eds. (New York & London: Continuum, 2002), 46-63.

I begin by locating my inquiry in relation to Frantz Fanon (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967), Edward W. Said (*Orientalism*, 1978), and Ashis Nandy (*The Intimate Enemy*, 1983).¹⁰ All three provide complex analyses of the intricacies of colonial discourses and subjectivities. However, like most postcolonial theory and literary criticism, their work overlooks issues of masculinity as performance, the production of alternative masculinities, same-sex desire and relationships, and the ways in which indigenous male authors in the post-independence era depict such topics. None of these theorists articulates the impact of (post)colonial ambivalence in terms of transgressive male same-sex sexuality. Several postcolonial critics expound on the significance of gender (usually meaning feminine) and class within (post)colonial contexts, but frequently overlook or avoid the issue of homoeroticism. In the same vein, some recent theoretical investigations (e.g. Blake, et al, *England through Colonial Eyes in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, Blunt and McEwan, eds., *Postcolonial Geographies*, Hansen and Stepputat, eds., *Sovereign Bodies*) make passing mention of homosocial practices or homophilia, but do not discuss the matter in a sustained or detailed analysis.¹¹ Furthermore, current studies on the politics and aesthetics of heterosexism (e.g., Newman, *The Ballistic Bard* and Blake, et al, *England through Colonial Eyes*), homoeroticism (e.g., Boone, "Vacation Cruises," Castle, ed., *Postcolonial Discourses*, Darby, *The Fiction of Imperialism*, Codell and Macleod, eds., *Orientalism Transposed*), and masculinity (e.g., Bhabha and Comaroff, "Speaking of Postcoloniality" and Jensen, "Above the Law") are produced from, and remain embedded in, a primarily Euro-American urban(ised) academic context.¹² As such, the

¹⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Charles Lam Markmann, trans. (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* [1978], reprinted with a new Afterword (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1995); Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹¹ Ann Blake, Leela Gandhi, and Sue Thomas, eds., *England through Colonial Eyes in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Hampshire, England: Palgrave, 2001); Alison Blunt and Cheryl McEwan, eds., *Postcolonial Geographies*, (New York & London: Continuum, 2002); Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, eds., *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹² Judie Newman, *The Ballistic Bard: Postcolonial Fictions*, (London: Arnold, 1995); Gregory Castle, ed., *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology* (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); Julie F. Codell, and Diane Sachko Macleod, eds., *Orientalism Transposed: The Impact of the Colonies on British Culture*, (Hants, England & Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate, 1998); Homi Bhabha and John Comaroff, "Speaking of Postcoloniality in the Continuous Present: A Conversation," in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 15-46; Steffen Jensen, "Above the Law: Practices of Sovereignty in Surrey Estate, Cape Town," in *Sovereign Bodies*, Hansen and Stepputat, eds., 218-238.

analytical frame of reference for these readings is usually focused and depends on the writings and experiences of Western men, often in colonial times. This is my point of departure from the Fanon/Said/Nandy theoretical triad, as well as the more recent investigations of (post)colonial masculinities. This thesis concentrates on what I term alternative and transgressive post-independence masculinities as described and inscribed by contemporary indigenous men themselves.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* Frantz Fanon discusses the project of colonialism in terms of repressed male sexuality:

The white man is convinced that the Negro is a beast; if it is not the length of the penis, then it is the sexual potency that impresses him.... The Other will become the mainstay of his preoccupations and his desires.¹³

Unsurprisingly for the time in which he writes, Fanon positions non-traditional expressions of sexuality within the discourse of pathology (“fault, guilt, refusal of guilt, paranoia”), but argues against the application of Freudian and Jungian theories on non-Western, non-European peoples because “neurosis is not a basic element of human reality.”¹⁴ Nonetheless, Fanon declares that white fear of the non-white is developed not from actual experience (as other phobias are formed) but through socialisation, and concludes that “the Negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual.”¹⁵ Fanon reasons that although “the majority of Negrophobic men” have not been threatened with sexual assault by a black man, the terror of an imaginary attacker is an ambivalent mixture of sexual revulsion and fascination.¹⁶ He goes on to argue that “when a white man hates black men [he is] yielding to a feeling of impotence or of sexual inferiority.”¹⁷ The black man is a “penis symbol” and eliminating him is “sexual revenge.”¹⁸

Fanon, however, makes the assumption that homosexuality does not exist in and is not natural to black people. In a footnote, Fanon observes that in his home country of Martinique

¹³ Fanon, 170.

¹⁴ Fanon, 183, 151.

¹⁵ Fanon, 156.

¹⁶ Fanon, 155.

¹⁷ Fanon, 159.

¹⁸ Fanon, 159.

he “had no opportunity to establish the overt presence of homosexuality” which he credits to “the absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles.”¹⁹ He acknowledges the presence of “men dressed like women” but remains “convinced that they lead normal sex lives.”²⁰ On the other hand, in Europe “several Martinicans ... became homosexuals,” but he hastens to add that “this was by no means a neurotic homosexuality” for it was only a means of earning a living.²¹ Furthermore, Fanon exhibits an unfortunate heterosexism (unfortunate because of his eloquent arguments against racism) when he declares: “I have never been able, without revulsion, to hear a *man* say of another man: “He is so sensual!” I do not know what the sensuality of a man is.”²² Part of my project stems from the suspicion that not only does appreciation for sensuality (indeed, desire) exist between men of colour, but also that they can and do express such attitudes without revulsion.

Besides the belief held among many in the postcolonised world that alternative or transgressive sexualities are a European import, the notion of the gendered East (particularly the feminised non-European male) has been a popular topic within Western academia. In his groundbreaking and influential examination of Orientalism, Edward Said analysed the various methods Orientalist scholars essentialised the Orient as sensual, aberrant, degenerate; as available and malleable as a woman inviting sexual conquest.²³ For Said, the positioning of the colonial subject was gendered and sexualised, a feminised Other to be forcibly dominated by the imperial powers. As a feminised space, the Orient becomes a space for projection, “a living tableau of queerness,” according to Said.²⁴ Trapped in this feminised space, the non-European male was rendered ‘effeminate’, weak and passive. However, what Said describes is the gendering and eroticising project of the colonial or colonising period. Said’s endeavour is historical and does not deal or concern itself with the post-imperial, post-colonised, post-independence male subject in the late twentieth (and early twenty-first) century.

¹⁹ Fanon, 180, note 44.

²⁰ Fanon, 180, note 44.

²¹ Fanon, 180, note 44.

²² Fanon, 201.

²³ Said, 205-206.

²⁴ Said, 103.

Like Fanon and Said before him, Ashis Nandy's project in *The Intimate Enemy* is also primarily etiological. Nonetheless, he provides an interesting theory of colonial masculinity that is useful to my project. He declares that,

the main threat to the colonizers is ... the latent fear that the colonized will reject the consensus and, instead of trying to redeem their 'masculinity' by becoming the counterplayers of the rulers according to the established rules, will discover an alternative frame of reference within which the oppressed do not seem weak, degraded and distorted men trying to break the monopoly of the rulers on a fixed quantity of machismo.²⁵

What Nandy is gesturing towards here is the possibility of native alternatives to British gender ideas and ideals in the colonised society. According to Nandy, large areas of Western culture have denied (or been in denial about) men's psychological bisexuality. This enabled Western colonialism to utilise the corresponding hierarchies of political and sexual oppression and exploitation: "It produced a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolized the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity."²⁶ But more than that, the perceived rightness of male dominance over female also naturalises dominance over any gender/sexual expression which differs from the authorised version. Nandy confirms that "femininity-in-masculinity was ... perceived as the final negation of a man's political identity, a pathology more dangerous than femininity itself."²⁷ Hence, the 'unmasculine' or 'effeminate' man is treated by other (presumably masculine, or 'real') men as a threat, not an enemy spy but a traitor from within. This is why Arjie's father and brother (in the novel *Funny Boy*) abhor his 'funniness', and why Bala's father (in *Cinnamon Gardens*) threatens to disinherit him unless he marries, and perhaps is why the narrator of *Servants* is more reluctant to discuss his own relationships than those of the people around him.

Nandy mentions Mahatma Gandhi as an example of the subversive potential of dissident androgyny. Gandhi protested against the colonial cult of masculinity through his affirmation of the ability to transcend the male-female dichotomy.²⁸ This aspect of Gandhi's ideology had an impact on English society, particularly among the sexually marginalised and vilified.

²⁵ Nandy, 11.

²⁶ Nandy, 4.

²⁷ Nandy, 8.

²⁸ Nandy, 53.

Leela Gandhi argues that,

the underground and radically dissident tradition of nineteenth-century homosexual literature drew much of its sustenance from the liberated alterity of the Orient. Writers like E.M. Forster and Edward Carpenter, among others, imagined, wrote, thought and discovered the Orient, stereotypically, as a safeguard against the political and personal repressions of imperial Europe.²⁹

Nandy contends that these Europeans drew inspiration not only from ancient Hindu and Moghul narratives and art, but also from the lives and teachings of contemporaries like Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo. It is no coincidence, therefore, that several of the authors examined in this thesis are inspired by or make connections to these English writers, especially Forster and Carpenter. Selvadurai, for instance, introduces Carpenter as a minor character in *Cinnamon Gardens*, and in Johann Lee's *Peculiar Chris*, Forster's *Maurice*, acts as code between friends.

The texts gathered under the rubric of 'literature,' particularly those generally available and easily accessible, are globally and institutionally positioned as an individual's (the writer) and a group's (the generating society) means of entrée to the world at large. They can also function as sites in which readers interact in some manner with the author, the originating culture, the text's internal world, and each other. Fiction has the potential to influence and affect people's lives profoundly: it can initiate self-awareness and identification, or awareness of an Other leading either to empathy or antipathy. Jonathan Dollimore suggests that novels, especially ones which deal with 'social issues' such as homosexuality or deviance, are "art-ful interventions, not passive reflections of 'the real', whatever or whoever's that is."³⁰ Thus, art (specifically literature) performs an active intrusion into society. Elsewhere, Dollimore invokes the Wildean philosophy of "art versus life," which can be reformulated as creativity

²⁹ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 79. See also Dennis Porter, "Orientalism and its Producers," in *The Politics of Theory*, Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen, eds. (Colchester: University of Essex, 1983), 179-193, and Parminder Kaur Bakshi, "Homosexuality and Orientalism: Edward Carpenter's Journey to the East," in *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism*, Tony Brown, ed. *Prose Studies Special Issue* 13.1 (1990): 151-177.

³⁰ Jonathan Dollimore, "The Dominant and the Deviant: A Violent Dialectic," *Critical Inquiry* 28.1-2 (1986): 186; reprinted in Wayne R. Dynes and Stephen Donaldson, eds., *Homosexual Themes in Literary Studies, Studies in Homosexuality*, Vol. VIII (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1992), 94.

versus dominant culture.³¹ For Dollimore “art wilfully, perversely, and rightfully ignores” the prevailing, predominantly conservative, social order, and the successful author can give “an accurate description of what has never occurred.”³²

Fiction as “art-ful intervention” is important in all three island societies treated here, and probably most relevant overall to the three writers from Singapore. While all of the authors herein attempt to produce “art-full” work, the potential for intervention seems to be a significant motivation especially for Ihimaera and Selvadurai, as well. Dollimore goes on to say,

literature generally has played a considerable part in the legitimation of homosexuality, not only because of the influence of novels like these, but because many of the positive identifications appropriated for the reverse discourse of homosexuality come from within literature.³³

Like Dollimore, Trudy Steuernagel contends that art, especially literature, can inform and influence us:

Homosexual fiction can ... present the gay experience to individuals who might otherwise have little direct knowledge of homosexuality. Moreover, it can convey images of homosexuality which challenge the stereotyped view that homosexuals are sick, disturbed individuals. Art cannot make a revolution, but it can prepare the ground for one.³⁴

As Dollimore declares, “literature which represents homosexuality is always political.... [It] is a medium of competing representations which have complicated histories with the potential profoundly to affect people’s lives.”³⁵ Not only does such fiction affect the individual who either reads or writes it, it also has an impact on those whom it represents. ‘Gay’ fiction that is aimed at a general audience either demystifies sex and homosexuality (by presenting ordinary and sympathetic characters in familiar environments) or sets out to

³¹ Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). See Oscar Wilde, “The Critic as Artist,” [1890] in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, R. Ellman, ed. (London: W.H. Allen, 1970).

³² Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 10.

³³ Dollimore, “The Dominant and the Deviant,” 186.

³⁴ Trudy Steuernagel, “Contemporary Homosexual Fiction and the Gay Rights Movement,” in *Journal of Popular Culture* 20 (1986): 125; reprinted in Dynes and Donaldson, eds., *Homosexual Themes in Literary Studies*, 339.

³⁵ Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 62.

shock, disturb, and challenge dominant society and its values. The argument about which approach is more effective in the struggle for queer equality is ongoing. For many 'gay' people, such literature has shaped how they see themselves and how others see them. It has appealed for tolerance, for inclusion in society at large, for the right to the same freedoms, privileges, and opportunities enjoyed by the majority. And for some people it helps confirm and affirm their identity as gay. Dollimore notes that 'homosexual' novels "have played a considerable part in the long and continuing struggle for the legitimacy of homosexuality."³⁶

Although not all the texts examined here can be classified as 'homosexual,' it should become evident, in the course of the following discussion, that in addition to reflecting social change(s) most also intervene as agents of change. According to Dynes and Donaldson, literary representations of homosexuality, or sexual relationships between men, "are always conditioned by the prevailing views of same-sex relations within the [culture] that gave them birth."³⁷ The degree to which this is true, and the gradual shifting of such conceptualisation is evident in the novels discussed here. If one were to construct a timeline on which the novels were placed, it would become apparent that as perceptions have changed and as homosexuality becomes more acceptable, at least as a topic of fiction, so has the portrayal of 'gay' or alternative/transgressive masculinities and non-traditional relationships between men.

The modern, Western invention of the concept of the 'homosexual' gave rise to the possibility of a separate and distinct identity. Gilbert Herdt asserts that "there is no single word or construct, including the western idea of "homosexuality," that [adequately] represents" all the variations of non-exclusively man-woman sexual relationships throughout geographical space and historical time.³⁸ Many argue that 'homosexuality' was 'created' in Europe in the nineteenth century (the term "homosexual" was coined in England in 1869). Foucault argued that prior to this the sodomite was a man who performed or committed a certain act – there

³⁶ Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 61.

³⁷ Dynes and Donaldson, "Introduction," vii.

³⁸ Gilbert Herdt, *Same Sex, Different Cultures: Exploring Gay and Lesbian Lives* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1997), 3.

was no specific identity attributed to, or assumed by, the sodomite.³⁹ While it may be true that a 'homosexual' identity, as distinct from and opposed to a 'heterosexual' identity, did not emerge until the nineteenth century, one must recognise that emotional and sexual relationships between men did exist and were acknowledged previously. As Wayne Dynes and Stephen Donaldson remind us, ancient Greek art and literature often dealt with homoerotic themes. In addition, ancient Roman biographers routinely and candidly discussed their subjects' sexual involvements with both female and male partners.⁴⁰ Although it may be anachronistic to label such persons or their relationships as 'homosexual' or 'gay,' one cannot deny that they are the socio-cultural predecessors of today's understandings, articulations, and expressions of queer identities (at least in the West). Similar examples of same-sex activities and relationships are also available not only in the legends and literatures of other cultures, but also legal, medical/scientific, and historical documentation.⁴¹

Alan Sinfield asserts that "the quest for the moment at which the modern homosexual subject is constituted is misguided. I suspect that what we call gay identity has, for a long time, been always in the process of getting constituted."⁴² To talk of the 'creation' of the 'homosexual' without qualification is to ignore global historic realities. David Halperin's illustrative examples of such notions and practices as the classical Athenian ideal of the pederast and the ancient Spartan warrior-lovers, the Native American socially-sanctioned role of the *berdache* (or 'two-spirit' person), and the New Guinean ritualised practice of "orally inseminating" boys clearly demonstrate that these roles involved some notion of identity – otherwise they could not have been recorded or described.⁴³ That these culturally and historically diverse men did not exhibit (and would almost certainly not accept) "the same sexuality" as the

³⁹ See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, Robert Hurley, trans. (London & New York: Penguin, 1990).

⁴⁰ Dynes and Donaldson, "Introduction," ix-x.

⁴¹ See, for example, Norman Roth, "'Deal Gently With the Young Man': Love of Boys in Medieval Hebrew Poetry of Spain," *Speculum* 57.1 (1982): 20-51. Reprinted in Dynes and Donaldson, eds., *Homosexual Themes*, 268-299. Roth's well-documented article also references Medieval Islamic poetry of the Iberian peninsula, as well as Egypt, Syria, Turkey, and Persia.

⁴² Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics, Queer Reading* (Philadelphia & London: University of Pennsylvania Press & Routledge, 1994), 14.

⁴³ David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 46.

twenty-first century Western(ised) 'gay' male does not negate the fact that they were also different from today's heterosexual male in significant ways.

One could suggest that the availability of a new 'gay' identity is the 'gift' of colonial imposition. I would be reluctant to see this as the happy outcome of imperialism, but it is undeniable that contact between cultures has impacted on both sides. Thus, the hybrid postcolonial culture opens up the possibility of alternative identities and expressions. Indigenous activists would argue that they are not adopting Western models, but recovering and reinterpreting pre-colonial realities. It is a question of local alterity as opposed to global homogeneity (most often seen in the gay rights movements originating in, or sponsored by, Euro-American organisations). New Zealand's Witi Ihimaera, for example, consciously straddles and complicates the dual model of 'gay' versus 'straight.' Alfian Sa'at, however, represents the next generation; not so concerned with articulating his position but rather almost taking it for granted, presenting even contested and shifting identity constructions as part of daily life. Neither postcolonial nor queer theory is able to adequately explain or fully articulate the variety of such hybrid formations.

Queer theory is relevant or appropriate to my discussion in that it challenges preconceived and heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality. For example, the central, and I think most significant, aspect of Judith Butler's argument is that gender is performative, not expressive.⁴⁴ Similarly, Laurence Goldstein asserts that examining masculinities is a means of resisting the notion within Western societies that men have an essential nature imposed upon them by the immutable laws of biology.⁴⁵ As such, it is precisely this performance which interests me, particularly the transgressive or alternative performance of masculinity in non-Western postcolonial contexts, as seen in non-heterosexual men (or, not exclusively heterosexual, or in a positive formulation, men who love/desire men).

* * *

⁴⁴ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁴⁵ Laurence Goldstein, "Introduction," in *The Male Body: Features, Destinies, Exposures*, Laurence Goldstein, ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

A major feature of 'postcolonial' literatures is the preoccupation with place and displacement, as well as identity crisis – a concern and grappling with the relationship between self and place, and self & other. The sense of self is eroded through “cultural denigration,” the conscious and subconscious oppression of indigenous culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model.⁴⁶ As Fanon so aptly expressed it, “The fact that [an educated native] adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born is evidence of a dislocation, a separation.”⁴⁷ While this is certainly the case in Singapore and Sri Lanka (and was true during the colonial period in New Zealand), it no longer applies to contemporary New Zealand, where very few Māori still speak their original language, especially in urban centres. What is true, is that Western(ised), Eurocentric education has had the effect of diminishing, devaluing, and making irrelevant local, indigenous cultures.⁴⁸ Taking New Zealand, Singapore, and Sri Lanka as examples, it appears evident that learning the English language, Anglo-European literature, and Western history produces citizens who identify with Euro-American cultural values and traditions. Thus, for Ashcroft, et al, “alienation is [still] inevitable until the colonizing language has been replaced or appropriated.”⁴⁹ One of the aims of sociopolitical postcolonialism has been the project of decolonisation (described by Fanon, Said, and Nandy, among others). But this raises a conundrum: does, or should, the endeavour attempt to recuperate an original, ‘authentic,’ pre-colonial reality, or affirm and promote cultural hybridity as a unique strength and inevitable outcome of historical experience?

According to Jonathan Dollimore,

The subordinate know that, while theoretical critique is indispensable for their cultural struggles, the academic deconstruction of dominant ideologies tends not to change them very much – at least not very quickly.... So they have preferred other kinds of strategies, including ... the appropriation of dominant ideologies.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Garreth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* [1989], 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2002), 8-11.

⁴⁷ Fanon, 25.

⁴⁸ See Fanon, 145-150.

⁴⁹ Ashcroft, et al, 10.

⁵⁰ Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 45.

This can also be applied to writing strategies, and is evident with the authors presented here. Language and identity are interdependent, and an author's choice and use of language can be either political (i.e. 'real' or 'daily' English versus 'official' or 'standard' English) or market-driven (i.e. promotion as either exotic commodity or universal truth to the large English-speaking audience). However, marginalised authors who attempt to appropriate dominant categories may face certain dangers, such as losing their unique voice or expressive force. Fanon identifies this as a kind of mimicry, when the colonised subject becomes a "complete replica" of the coloniser.⁵¹

An excellent example of this idea of (post)colonial mimicry or imitation is V.S. Naipaul's protagonist Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men* (1967). For Naipaul, mimicry is an ambivalent state between accusation and justification. Singh appropriates the language, values, social and political institutions of the imperial centre; but his mimicry is not only a condition encouraged from the colonial point of view, it is also a kind of Indo-Caribbean nuisance for, an imposition upon, England. Since Naipaul, mimicry need not be self-conscious. The mimic-man is not always aware of his mimicry. On the other hand, the type of subservient mimicry practised by Singh has been replaced with subversive mimicry, which can highlight the performative aspect of the 'original' as well as pose a threat to the one being imitated.

In just such a way, the project of de-colonising language involves the denial or rejection ('abrogation') of the primacy and privilege of 'proper' or 'correct' English, and appropriates and reconstructs English to fit its non-native place and circumstances⁵² – thus, the use of English dialects or variations (englishes) in the writings of Alan Duff, Alfian Sa'at, and Rajiva Wijesinha, for example. One such technique is the use of untranslated (or untranslatable) words to "signify a certain cultural experience which they cannot hope to reproduce but whose difference is validated by the new situation. In this sense they are directly metonymic of that cultural difference which is imputed by the linguistic variation."⁵³ Not translating or

⁵¹ Fanon, 36. See also Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (Spring 1984): 125-133 and *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁵² Ashcroft, et al, 29-32.

⁵³ Ashcroft, et al, 52. See also Homi Bhabha, "Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism," in *The Theory of Reading*, Frank Gloversmith, ed. (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), 93-122. Bhabha argues that postcolonial texts should be read as

interpreting specific words and phrases conveys a sense of uniqueness and legitimacy. It compels the non-indigenous or outside reader into discursive exchange with the culture that produced (and produces) such terms and endows them with distinct meaning. "Ultimately, the choice of leaving words untranslated in post-colonial texts is a political act, because while translation is not inadmissible in itself, glossing gives the translated word, and thus the 'receptor' culture, the higher status."⁵⁴ Of course, sometimes words and phrases cannot be adequately translated into English because an equivalent meaning or nuance does not exist. On the other hand, using non-English words and phrases in a text can be a purely marketing technique, neither subversive nor inescapable but feeding Western desire for and consumption of the postcolonial exotic.⁵⁵

This project is conceived as an introduction, a challenge to other (particularly non-Western) students of postcolonial literatures to undertake more in-depth, comprehensive studies of transgressive masculinities in Anglophone post-independence fiction. Many important considerations (for example, the impact of traditional religions as well as Christianity on social morality; education and literacy before during and after colonisation; government structures; struggles for independence, civil wars, and international conflicts; capitalism and globalisation/Americanisation; Western popular culture; etc.) are barely touched upon here.

The present study is divided into three sections, each focusing on a different island nation and based on three fictional works by native/indigenous male authors. The first section on New Zealand/Aotearoa analyses *Both Sides of the Moon* (1998) by Alan Duff and Witi Ihimaera's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1995) and *The Uncle's Story* (2000).⁵⁶ The second section is on Sri Lanka and investigates Rajiva Wijesinha's *Servants* (1995) and Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994) and *Cinnamon Gardens* (1998).⁵⁷ The third section on Singapore examines *Peculiar Chris* (1992) by Johann S. Lee, *Glass Cathedral* (1995) by Andrew Teck Koh,

metonymical rather than metaphorical, which tends to minimise the socio-political influences that underpin the texts.

⁵⁴ Ashcroft, et al, 65.

⁵⁵ See Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁵⁶ Duff is a descendant of Māori (Ngāti Rangitihī and Ngāti Tuwharetoa) as well as Pākehā (European-origin). Ihimaera is of Te Aitanga A Mahaki, Rongowhakaata and Ngāti Porou heritage.

⁵⁷ Selvadurai is the product of a mixed (Sinhalese-Tamil) marriage and Wijesinha is Sinhalese.

and *Corridor: 12 Short Stories* (1999) by Alfian bin Sa'at.⁵⁸ Of the seven authors listed here Ihimaera and Selvadurai have come out in the press as 'gay;' Koh, Lee, and Sa'at are possibly 'gay;' Duff is not 'gay;' and Wijesinha remains mysterious. The male protagonists in the novels by Ihimaera, Koh, Lee, and Selvadurai are 'gay;' Duff's male narrator experiences a sexual relationship with an older man; many of Sa'at's stories revolve around or hint at alternative or transgressive masculinities; and Wijesinha's narrator remains mysterious and ambiguous.

The obvious drawback of a textual approach such as mine is what Edward Said calls the

common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human. The idea ... that people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes.⁵⁹

I acknowledge this as a limitation of my dissertation. I have been unable to travel extensively to the three countries or speak with all seven of the authors I examine. Furthermore, I haven't had the opportunity to interact with many indigenous men from these nations who have direct first-hand experience of what I attempt to describe and can provide valuable insights into, or explain subtle nuances and culturally-specific references in the works I examine. Therefore, I would prefer to position this endeavour as a kind of encounter rather than an investigation, exploration, or discovery (all terms redolent of colonialism); not intended to make definitive statements or draw authoritative conclusions, but just to meet with and converse. I come at this with a full awareness of my own hybrid reality, as well as my privileged position as a male in Western academia.

It is said that the authorial point of view is a political choice made by each individual writer. I do maintain certain social, political, moral, ethical, and even aesthetic, beliefs and ideas; therefore, I am reluctant to position myself as some sort of innovative and unbiased activist or an expert who makes authoritative pronouncements. I am wary of being rewarded for what Gail Ching-Liang Low criticises as "presumed knowledge of and alleged ability to

⁵⁸ Koh and Lee are of Chinese ancestry and Sa'at is Malay.

⁵⁹ Said, 93.

speak from within the native cultures” of formerly colonised peoples.⁶⁰ Consequently, I have chosen to chronicle my analysis in a rather informal first person critical/biographical mode. This reflects my desire to implicate myself in the study rather than pose as an impartial observer and reporter. Although the personal approach can and does serve as a theoretical methodology, “it is also an act of trespass upon the boundaries of academic discourse ... a reminder that the attempt to demarcate a line between inside [personal] and outside [theory] must fail.”⁶¹ By locating myself within my enquiry and exposition I self-consciously reveal my own cultural, political, theoretical, and ideological involvement and, hopefully, challenge the reader’s perceptions as well as her or his confidence in, and attachment to, ‘appropriate’ boundaries.

No Man is an Island?

Instead of Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities, socially marginalised or ostracised individuals often resort to “imaginable communities.”⁶² According to Elizabeth Guzik, such ‘imaginable’ communities often exist on or as islands. It is interesting that islands hold such sway over the imagination: one need only think of such mythic or fictional examples as Atlantis, Plato’s Utopia and Ithaca for Odysseus, Swift’s Laputa and the Medieval European conception of Serendip (present-day Sri Lanka), Hawaiki in Māori legend, and other more recent manifestations in novels and popular media (a recurring feature especially in the science fiction and fantasy genres).

While discussing Anderson’s theory Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick examines the depiction of weather maps published daily in *USA Today*. Anderson points out that the modern nation conceives of its territory as “fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimeter of

⁶⁰ Gail Ching-Liang Low, *White Skins/Black Masks: Representation and Colonialism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), 6.

⁶¹ Mae G. Henderson, “Introduction: Borders, Boundaries, and Frame(work)s,” in *Borders, Boundaries, and Frames: Essays in Cultural Criticism and Cultural Studies*, Mae G. Henderson, ed. (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), 11.

⁶² This is a term used by Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman in “Queer Nationality,” *Boundary 2*, 19.1 (1992). Cited in Elizabeth Guzik, “The Queer Sort of Fandom for *Heavenly Creatures*: The Closeted Indigene, Lesbian Islands, and New Zealand National Cinema,” in Hawley, 56.

[its] legally demarcated community," whereas in older conceptions "states were defined by centers, borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another."⁶³ Sedgwick notes that the "snappy graphics" in the American newspaper, which "give the weather map the illusion of projecting into three dimensions," reinforce that nation's sense of isolation (by excluding Canada and Mexico) through the visual suggestion that the "continent dramatically drops off into the sea across the top [and bottom] of the United States."⁶⁴ I would argue that this is precisely the national imaginary that exists in (and the geographical reality of) island nations. The island nation *is* and operates to its limits, up to and including the last square centimetre of its physical (soil) borders where it literally "drops off into the sea." As such, island nations are different from countries which share borders. Their distinctness or separateness is demarcated by their very shape as outlined by the sea shore. Their connection with what lies beyond is an act of will, a deliberate crossing of the sea. Like Swift's sky-bound island in *Gulliver's Travels*, islands have been conceived of, and depicted as, floating in the oceans, unanchored from (or tenuously tethered to) the stability of larger land masses. Stephanos Stephanides refers to the "particularity of islands as minority or peripheral cultures."⁶⁵ Throughout literary history fantastic and actual islands have occupied the imagination as utopias and dystopias, stepping stones or cultural crossroads, the location of dreams and nightmares, places of displacement, solitude, isolation, exile, or promise and reward.

Examining representations of masculinities in the contemporary literatures of three very different island nations such as New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and Singapore may seem as contrived and arrogant as earlier colonial attempts to classify, interpret, and (re)present non-European 'indigenous/traditional' cultures for Western study (scrutiny and consumption). Alfred Gell warns about the "intellectual pitfalls" of essentialising Polynesian culture in a kind of island-hopping implementation of "anthropological complacency" and

⁶³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* [1983] (London: Verso, 1993), 26.

⁶⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Nationalisms and Sexualities in the Age of Wilde," in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Summer, and Patricia Yaeger, eds. (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), 240-241.

⁶⁵ Stephanos Stephanides, "Translating Floating Islands," in *Beyond the Floating Islands*, Stephanos Stephanides and Susan Bassnett, eds., COTEPRRA Reader, Subproject 7 (Bologna: COTEPRRA and University of Bologna, 2002).

“ethnographic imagination.”⁶⁶ The same caution and scepticism should be applied to my own undertaking. Although I am interested in some type of comparison, it is not necessarily a similarities/differences analysis which I propose. Rather, my primary objective is to look at and acquaint myself (as well as my reader) with representations of what I am calling ‘transgressive’ and ‘alternative’ masculinities, fictional descriptions by non-European indigenous male authors of male characters who do not fit the Western(ised) traditional models of acceptable masculinity. Benedict Anderson asserts that promotion and propagation of imagined national identity and unity is built in large part on the realist manner of narration that occurs in most print media and much fiction. Therefore, the novels of indigenous peoples, minorities, or other marginalised groups and individuals can have the same function – whether within specific subcultures, local/national societies, or the global(ised) sphere – of creating a sense of (comm)unity and solidarity. In essence, then, communities of marginalised and minoritised people are like islands in the social seas of the nations which they represent.

It must be noted, however, that there is no singular model, no sense of a unified identity for the ‘gay’ subject in the texts discussed here. This is why I insist on the plural ‘masculinities’ to discuss the alternative and transgressive modes of expression within each (con)text. Although literature (especially that which is widely distributed and available in overseas markets) operates on the basis of global interaction, each island nation is different and each author represents a different perspective. For Ihimaera, a recovery and reinterpretation of traditional models is not only possible, but preferable. He writes of a “new gay tribe” in which one is not necessarily identified by one’s sexual preferences but by one’s familial and tribal associations. It is an almost utopian formulation: same-sex identified men and women free to marry, have children, and continue to maintain and be part of traditional Māori customs, beliefs, and family alliances. Alan Duff, on the other hand, has no ‘gay’ agenda or even perceptible interest in ‘gay’ people and their concerns. For him, (homo)sexuality is not the most important factor in alternative or transgressive masculinities, and homoeroticism is only a phase or situational, part of a fluid sexuality and not necessarily distinctive or

⁶⁶ Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 4; Edmund Leach, “Concluding Remarks,” for A. Hooper and J. Huntsman, eds., “Transformations of Polynesian Culture” in *Polynesian Society Memoir* 45 (1985): 222, cited in Gell, 4.

remarkable enough to constitute an 'identity.' Shyam Selvadurai deals with homosexuality through retrospective depictions from his childhood and from an earlier generation. While he does not necessarily address or offer future possibilities, his backward glance in *Cinnamon Gardens* does point to the option of a 'third' way, not exclusively 'gay' or 'straight,' which takes into account familial obligations and social responsibilities. In contrast, Rajiva Wijesinha represents homosexuality as the legacy of colonialism and the (transgressive) privilege of the upper classes, while servants, minorities, and the lower classes function as objects of political as well as physical desire. The authors from Singapore most clearly map the evolution of an adapted contemporary Western 'gayness:' from Johann Lee's *Peculiar Chris*, through Andrew Koh's *Glass Cathedral*, to Alfian Sa'at's *Corridor*, we follow the development from reluctant narrator/author, through the stages of denial and acceptance, and finally to a forthright depiction of the disaffection, alienation, and marginalisation of the individual in an urbanised postmodern society.

**II. ISLAND STORIES, ALTERNATIVE VOICES:
AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND**

DUFF AND IHIMAERA



Black Grace is an all male dance troupe from Aotearoa/New Zealand whose members are of primarily Māori⁶⁷ or Polynesian background. They perform dances that combine traditional, classical, and contemporary music and motion. In a 2003 show some of the movements seemed very 'feminine' in a classical European sense, yet the dancers also maintained an impression of 'masculinity.' One of the dancers, whose name was Tane, performed the most 'feminine' of roles, especially in a solo piece which seemed partly inspired by the death of the swan in *Swan Lake*. In another solo piece, also performed by Tane, his costume was reminiscent of eighteenth or nineteenth century European women's underclothing, complete with pantaloons and corset. It was a bit disconcerting to watch, but again, the movements were a blend of 'feminine' grace and 'masculine' strength. There was also a salsa and tango-inspired dance in which the two partners took turns with the traditionally male and female roles. The result was a subversive challenge to preconceived notions of masculinity and femininity and acceptable roles and behaviours. It also clearly demonstrated that not only are concepts of gender dependent on epoch and culture, but also that gender is a kind of performance. In the case of Black Grace as well as in the novels I will discuss below, various masculinities are simultaneously present, interacting and in conflict with each other, not as negations or subversion of femininity, and more than mere abstractions. They provide alternatives to the accepted modes of behaviour – they are transgressive masculinities.

What do we understand or imagine as masculinity in terms of contemporary Māori culture? A quick and informal survey of friends and colleagues comes up with the ideas of sport (particularly rugby) and domestic violence (as depicted in the 1994 film version of Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* [1990], for example). A recurring visual image is that of muscular or large (going-to-flab) semi-naked men stomping their

⁶⁷ A note on spelling: *Reo Māori*, the language of Aotearoa/New Zealand's indigenous peoples, has several dialects and different ways of depicting spelling. When not citing directly from the texts, I follow the spelling conventions and vowel markings in Cleve Barlow, *Tikanga Whakaaro: Key Concepts in Māori Culture* [1991] (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1996).

feet, beating their chests, and shouting rhythmically, i.e. performing a haka. For non-Māori such images are part of a long history of depictions in art, text, and film media since first contact with Europeans in the eighteenth century.

* * *

Ever since the emergence of an ethnic post-colonial fiction in the South Pacific in the 1960's, it has been the writer's imperative to exorcise the distorted images created and imposed upon them by white imperialist dominance and its colonial discourse. The question of an identity of one's own, often coupled with a general notion of dissent, was bound to become pervasive in the process of forging a new literature. Identity was no longer readily given. It had to be re-constructed and regained on personal, social, collective, ethnic and national levels.⁶⁸

In this chapter I examine alternative/transgressive masculinities, particularly depictions of 'gay' identities, in three novels from Aotearoa/New Zealand: *Both Sides of the Moon* (1998) by Alan Duff, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1995) by Witi Ihimaera, and *The Uncle's Story* (2000), also by Ihimaera. In the article from which the above quote was taken, Armando Jannetta asserts that Māori writers must produce new images to counter the prejudices and misrepresentations of the colonial past. However, when it comes to 'gay' Māori, they have the double task of confronting not only the distortions of Anglo-European culture but also the discrimination and intolerance of Māori patriarchal society. Pre-colonial Māori life was centred on the warrior. Identity was understood in terms of the tribe rather than as individual expression. The three novels I discuss deal with questions of individual identity, ethnicity, and sexuality.

⁶⁸ Armando E. Jannetta, "Textual Strategies of Identity Formation in Witi Ihimaera's Fiction," *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* 12.2 (1990): 17. Jannetta's analysis is most insightful, but is written from (within) a Western perspective. Many, if not most, of the critics, theorists, and other secondary sources to which I refer over the course of this thesis, are located or produced in a Euro-American environment and/or are influenced by Judeo-Christian principles. Hence, my approach seems to privilege Western points of view. While this is far from ideal, I am aware of the limitations of my positionality.

The first of the three 'Māori' novels I want to consider is Alan Duff's fifth novel, *Both Sides of the Moon*.⁶⁹ Duff shares several characteristics with Jimmy, his protagonist in the novel. Of Māori (Ngati Rangitahi and Tuwharetoa) and Pākehā (European) heritage, he was raised by relatives on either side after his parents split. Like Jimmy, he also spent some time in juvenile detention for theft and assault.⁷⁰ His first novel, *Once Were Warriors*, received the PEN award. In addition to two sequels (*What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* [1996] and *Jake's Long Shadow* [2002]), he has published other works of fiction and non-fiction, including a memoir, *Out of the Mist and the Steam* (1999) – a title reminiscent of Jimmy's hot-spring conversations with the tribal elder who tells him about his warrior ancestor. Duff is a journalist, social commentator, and media critic, whose most controversial book, *Maori: The Crisis and the Challenge* (1993), has been called "a poorly researched and sloppily written pamphlet" because it holds Māori responsible for their current condition in rather simplistic terms.⁷¹ Duff must not have been very happy with the film version of *Once Were Warriors*, which does not follow the concepts set out in *Crisis & Challenge*. Although he was more actively involved in the screen adaptation for *Broken Hearted* (1999), it was less successful.

Both Sides of the Moon is comprised of two intertwined narratives, the products of the protagonist's memory of his recent past and his imaginative reconstruction of his family's history. Jimmy Burgess, who (like Duff) is of mixed Māori and Pākehā parentage, recalls his adolescence during the late 1950s and early 1960s, though it is often related in present tense. The other narrative arises from Jimmy's conversations

⁶⁹ Alan Duff, *Both Sides of the Moon* [1998] (Sydney: Vintage, 2000). Further citations included parenthetically refer to this edition, abbreviated as *BSM*.

⁷⁰ Antonella Sarti, "Alan Duff," *Spirit Carvers: Interviews with Eighteen Writers from New Zealand*, Cross/Cultures: Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English, Volume 31 (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), 40. See also, A.M., "Alan Duff," *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* [1998], Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie, eds., reprinted with updated information in *Te Kaunihera Pukapuka o Aotearoa / New Zealand Book Council* (2002). Available online at <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/duffalan.htm>. 12 June 2003.

⁷¹ Otto Heim, *Writing Along Broken Lines: Violence and Ethnicity in Contemporary Maori Fiction* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1998), 51.

with an elderly woman, *kuia* (elder) Mereana, who belongs to his mother's tribal group. It is an imagined 'seeing' of a time in the ancestral past immediately preceding colonisation and revolves around the proud warrior Te Aranui Kapi. Jimmy struggles with identity issues, mainly ethnic/racial, but also gender/sexuality. The novel begins in the present and one reads Jimmy's resentment in the ironic descriptions of white culture, European settlers, and American tourists. Yet the reader can also sense the internalised antipathy towards Māori: "I see myself half-mirrored. I am proud. I am afraid" (*BSM*, 9).

Although Duff's novel includes the description of a sexual relationship between an older man and a youth, as well as other homoerotic imagery, it is not, strictly speaking, a 'gay' novel. As the biographical notes in his published works show, Duff is boldly and successfully heterosexual: he lives "with his wife and four children."⁷² In addition, his narrator Jimmy is neither overtly nor permanently homosexual. *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, on the other hand, is written by a 'gay' author (Witi Ihimaera) and narrated by a 'gay' man.⁷³ Its approach to the questions of alternative or transgressive masculinities is clearly different.

Ihimaera is of Māori descent with ties to several prominent North Island tribes and family clans (including Te Aitanga A Mahaki, Rongowhakaata, Ngati Porou and Ngati Kahungunu).⁷⁴ He has worked as a journalist and had a successful career with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He now lectures at Auckland University, in the Department of English. Over four decades, he has written numerous short story

⁷² Alan Duff, *What Becomes of the Broken-Hearted* [1996] (Sydney: Vintage, 1998) and *Maori: The Crisis and the Challenge* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 1993). See also, Sarti, 32.

⁷³ Witi Ihimaera, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (Auckland: Reed Publishing, 1995). Further citations included parenthetically refer to this edition, abbreviated as *NGS*.

⁷⁴ Witi Ihimaera, "Maori Life and Literature: A Sensory Perception," *New Zealand through the Arts: Past and Present*, Three Lectures reprinted from the Turnbull Library Record (Wellington: The Friends of the Turnbull Library, 1982), 45; Witi Ihimaera, "And Then There's Us: A Maori Perspective," *Poetica* [Tokyo] 50 (1998): 195; Paul Millar, "Witi Ihimaera," *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* [1998], 254-256, Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie, eds., reprinted with updated information in *Te Kaunihera Pukapuka o Aotearoa / New Zealand Book Council* (2003). Available online at <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/ihimaerawiti.htm>. 26 May 2003.

collections and novels, including *Pounamu, Pounamu* (1972), *Tangi* (1973), *The New Net Goes Fishing* (1977), *The Matriarch* (1986), and *The Whale Rider* (1987), which became a successful film (2003). Credited with writing the first Māori novel (*Tangi*), Ihimaera caused quite a stir with *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, whose protagonist is Pākehā (white, non-indigenous) as well as 'gay.' *Nights* has little to do with Māori culture. In *Bulibasha, King of the Gypsies* (1994), Ihimaera introduced a very minor character who was 'gay.' He was tormented by his macho cousins because he was a transvestite who dressed in tight miniskirts and tops, like a stereotypical prostitute. Thus, the homosexual was marginalised not only by society but also by the narrative. In *Nights*, the homosexual is centre-stage as narrator David Munro. Now, however, it is the Māori who is marginal in the narrative.

The third book included in this chapter is Ihimaera's *The Uncle's Story*.⁷⁵ We are no longer dealing with a conflicted, mixed-race, culturally and sexually confused teenaged boy (as in *Both Sides of the Moon*), or a 'gay' white man who wants to have his life both ways (*Nights in the Gardens of Spain*). Here we have a 'gay' Māori man who works through the issues of coming out very early in the novel and ends up an outspoken advocate for 'gay' Māori rights. *The Uncle's Story* is not necessarily a sequel, but it is connected to *Bulibasha*. This time we are dealing with a minor branch of the Mahana family, whose patriarch was Arapeta, a younger brother of the formidable Bulibasha Mahana. Like Duff's *Both Sides of the Moon*, *The Uncle's Story* blends two narratives; one in the present, narrated by Arapeta's grandson Michael, and one in the past, the story of Arapeta's 'gay' son, Sam. As in the Duff novel, Sam's story unfolds in a kind of imagined past through scraps of his journal and Michael's conversations with people who knew Sam.

⁷⁵ Witi Ihimaera, *The Uncle's Story* (Auckland: Penguin, 2000). Further citations included parenthetically refer to this edition, abbreviated as *US*.

Setting the Stage

In 1973, Laurie Kalman Gluckman wrote an article on homosexuality among Māori based on earlier sociological and linguistic research and her own studies in the 1960s. Her main assertion was that “Homosexuality in both male and female was unknown in pre-European New Zealand.”⁷⁶ She claimed that contemporary homosexuality among Māori is a result of dietary and environmental changes and ‘miscegenation,’ and substantiated this by providing evidence from Māori cosmology, history, and linguistics. She declared that Māori mythology has no references to homosexuality, despite the fact that according to Māori cosmogony the first gods were all male.⁷⁷ Using historical documentation she maintained that because Māori wore little or no clothing they were unembarrassed by their genitalia, thereby implying that homosexuality can be attributed in part to shame and European-style “moralistic modesty.”⁷⁸ Gluckman also argued that the extended family structure and comparative availability of women precluded any type of homosexual activity. Finally, she reasoned that because there were no known terms for ‘sodomy’ or ‘lesbian’ among pre-colonial Māori such actions or conditions must not have existed. Although some of her evidence is compelling, Gluckman’s motivations are fairly clear, especially by the end of the article. To the Freudian query, “What makes for homosexuality?” she replied, “Civilization and its associated degradations or advantages” including “alteration in diet and environment.”⁷⁹ She referred to homosexuality in general as a disorder, and particularly as a perversion. She

⁷⁶ Laurie Kalman Gluckman, “Transcultural Consideration of Homosexuality With Special Reference to the New Zealand Maori,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 8.2 (1974): 121.

⁷⁷ According to J. S. Polack, however, the inhabitants of Piroa (Doubtless Bay) believed in an *atua* (divinity) called Niturehu who preferred red-haired sexual partners of either gender. J. S. Polack, *New Zealand: Being a Narrative of Travels and Adventures During a Residence in that Country Between the Years 1831 and 1837*, v. II (London: Richard Bentley, 1838). Even though his tone is often condescending and dismissive towards the Māori (and therefore, unreliable), some of his observations are very interesting.

⁷⁸ Gluckman, 123.

⁷⁹ Gluckman, 123, 121.

concluded that “the aim of all child rearing should be the development of heterosexual attitudes in the child.”⁸⁰

Twelve years after Gluckman’s uncontested report was published, Manuel Arboleda and Stephen Murray challenged her conclusions.⁸¹ Quoting such luminaries as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Edward and Bambi Schieffelin, among others, they bolstered the counter-argument that “Absence of a word equivalent to ‘homosexual’ in some languages does not mean the absence of homosexual behavior.”⁸² They declared that the lack of Māori terminology only implies that there were no defined ‘gay’ roles rather than no homosexual activity (or rather, emotional bonds and sexual liaisons between members of the same sex). They rightly concluded that absence of any mention of same-sex sexuality can only be interpreted as that, absence of mention, not absence of existence. However, Arboleda and Murray provided no positive evidence or concrete facts showing that emotional and/or sexual relationships between men (or between women) *did* exist in traditional, pre-colonial Māori society.

In a 1988 social policy study commissioned by the New Zealand government, both *kuia* and *kaumatua* (female and male Māori elders) verified that their people had been familiar with expressions of same-sex sexuality prior to the European invasion, and that in some cases it was even accepted, or at the very least, tolerated.⁸³ Nonetheless, searching for evidence of homosexuality among the ancient Māori is a circuitous and often frustrating endeavour, which usually seems to lead to dead ends. Below is a brief outline of the journey.

⁸⁰ Gluckman, 125.

⁸¹ Manuel Arboleda G. and Stephen O. Murray, “The Dangers of Lexical Inference With Special Reference to Maori Homosexuality,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 12.1 (1985): 129-134.

⁸² Kenneth E. Read, *Other Voices* (1979), cited in Arboleda and Murray, 129.

⁸³ The Royal Commission on Social Policy, “Women and Social Policy: Part I, Maori Women,” *The April Report: Future Directions* v. 2 (Wellington: The Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988): 155-186.

“Institutionalised homosexuality [was] noted among the Maoris of New Zealand” by the German scholar and amateur anthropologist, Ferdinand Karsch-Haak (variously spelled as Kaarsch-Haak and Karsch Haack), according to *The Gay History of Planet Earth*.⁸⁴ However, no further information is provided. In 1911, Karsch-Haak published his ethnological study *Das gleichgeschlechtliche Leben der Naturvölker* (Homosexual Life in Primitive Cultures). I was somewhat confused about what this tome may have contained because, according to Thomas Olver of Universität Zürich, the volume reports on “same-gender relationships in traditional African society.”⁸⁵ Dr. Jens Damm, Freie Universität Berlin, states that the text “offered a surprising amount of information on the subject considering that Karsch-Haack was a ‘desk-bound ethnologist’ who carried out little empirical research.”⁸⁶ However, Damm’s article also does not discuss specifics regarding the assumptions, theories, or claims included in the Karsch-Haak book. There are no English translations and the last edition was published in 1975. Because I was unable to locate a copy, both Dr. Damm and Dr. Gert Hekma, chair of Gay Studies at the University of Amsterdam, provided me with copies of the relevant material. Mr. Olver also graciously provided a summary in English. At no point in the brief section on Māori does Karsch-Haak give conclusive proof of homosexuality.⁸⁷ He refers to the conjecture of other anthropologists based on such evidence as nakedness in warm weather and the lack of sexual shame, i.e. the need to cover the genitals – precisely the same ‘evidence’ used by Gluckman to illustrate the opposite conclusion!

⁸⁴ “Pacific Asia & Australia,” *The Gay History of Planet Earth* (August 2000). Available online at <http://pages.zoom.co.uk/lgs/gwSEA.html>. 26 May 2003.

⁸⁵ Thomas Olver, “Nomenclature and the Debate about Sexual Orientation in Africa,” *Text and Context: African Languages Between Orality and Scriptuality* (International Symposium at Universität Zürich: October 2001). Available online at <http://www.unizh.ch/spw/afrling/afrosympo/abstracts/Olver.htm>. 2 June 2003.

⁸⁶ Jens Damm, “The Life and Works of Ferdinand Karsch-Haack” (12 April 1999). Available online at <http://mitglied.lycos.de/tongzhi/old/karschhaack1.html>. 29 May 2003.

⁸⁷ Ferdinand Karsch-Haack, “Die Maori,” *Das gleichgeschlechtliche Leben der Naturvölker* (München: Ernst Reinhardt, 1911), 246-248.

The earliest European allusion to homosexuality comes from the shipboard journals of Sir Joseph Banks who sailed with Captain Cook on the Endeavour in the late eighteenth century. Banks considered himself an “observer of natural phenomena” and made detailed notes of the flora and fauna encountered in the Pacific islands along the voyage.⁸⁸ He also wrote about the beliefs and customs of the inhabitants of these islands, to whom he referred as ‘Indians.’ In October 1769, the Endeavour arrived in Aotearoa/New Zealand where it remained for several months. One day a sailor returned to the ship cursing the Māori whom he accused of being “given to the detestable Vice of Sodomy.”⁸⁹ Apparently he had been offered two boys for sex instead of a girl. Banks wrote that it was his “humble opinion” that the sailor had merely been the victim of a joke, rather than believing this incident to be evidence of “Vice.”⁹⁰

The attitudes of the British colonisers towards indications of same-sex desire and liaisons were varied. On the one hand, Victorian prudishness meant that they ignored ‘unpleasant’ evidence and were unwilling, or did not know how, to ask the right questions. This is apparent in the letters, journals, and writings of various people including Thomas Kendal, a missionary, who in 1819 reported to Commissioner Bigge: “Unnatural Crimes we have never heard of, nor do we know that [the Māori] have any name for them.”⁹¹ In 1838, ship’s surgeon John Watkins wrote in his journal that there was no known “Case of Sodomy discovered in New Zealand.”⁹² On the other hand, colonists were sometimes overly interested in what they saw as the moral failings of native peoples. With prurient detail they described sexual practices which would shock readers back in Europe. This was done for several reasons: it highlighted the supposed moral superiority of the settlers and

⁸⁸ Sir Joseph Banks, *The Endeavour Journals of Joseph Banks, 1768-1771*, Volume I, J. C. Beaglehole, ed. (Sydney: Angus & Robertson Ltd, 1962): 43.

⁸⁹ Banks, 461.

⁹⁰ Banks, 461.

⁹¹ Robert McNab, ed., *Historical Records of New Zealand*, v. I (Wellington: John Mackay, Government Printer, 1908): 443.

⁹² Cited in Harry Morton, *The Whale’s Wake* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1982), 214.

justified the invasion and occupation of foreign lands in order to civilise and Christianise the 'primitive heathens.'

Ormond Wilson alludes to same-sex relations when he describes another missionary, John Hobbs, as "mortified by this sympathy [from Māori who saw his celibacy as an "unfortunate condition"] and shocked by the frank speech and gestures of the young men who offered it."⁹³ Harry Morton also briefly touches upon the subject in his book on the history of the whaling industry in New Zealand. He states that "the sexual needs of [European] whalers and other sailors seem to have left Maori boys relatively unscathed," but then refers to Richard Davis, an early missionary, who was told by his native informants in 1836 that "homosexuality was not unknown in Maori society."⁹⁴ Though most polite Pākehā (white, European) society did not discuss the 'unnatural vice,' there was an infamous case of missionary misconduct in the late nineteenth century involving one William Yate who was banished from the Church because of accusations that he had affairs with numerous Māori men and boys. Wilson comments that the young men who "consorted" with the minister Yate did not show the same embarrassment about the subject as Mr. Hobbs. "They simply declared that they were unaware of any sinfulness in such practices and that Yate had not initiated them."⁹⁵

Samuel Marsden, William Yate's superior and chief prosecutor, visited New Zealand to make enquiries into the allegations of sexual misconduct, especially with Māori boys. He took depositions not only from other European Christian clergy there, but also from the young men involved, and forwarded these to the Missionary Society headquarters in England. Copies of his letters edited and published by John Elder allude to the charges against the English cleric, but do not clarify what these were.

⁹³ Ormond Wilson, *From Hongi Hika to Hone Heke: A Quarter Century of Upheaval* (Dunedin: John McIndoe Ltd., 1985): 69.

⁹⁴ Morton, 214.

⁹⁵ Wilson, 69.

"There are many things brought forward relative to Mr. Yate which delicacy forbade me to mention," Marsden wrote on 2 October 1837.⁹⁶ The investigation affidavits are not included in the book, and it is highly probable that Elder also omitted references which he considered 'indelicate.' In his book on Marsden, Eric Ramsden included a chapter entitled "The Downfall of the Rev. William Yate."⁹⁷ Though much was made of Marsden's involvement in the case, once again the charges were not elucidated. Ramsden insinuated that Yate had an inordinate "enthusiasm" for native youths and alluded to the "confessions of six of Yate's deluded victims," but otherwise his actions were described as "misbehaviour," "misconduct," and "gross immorality."⁹⁸ Like Marsden and Elder, Ramsden was constrained by his own sense of respectability and propriety, as well as the moral climate of his time. "One has no desire to recall a painful scandal in the early history of the Anglican Church in these southern lands," he wrote.⁹⁹ Reverend Yate's own writings, though opaque and far from conclusive, do contain some tantalising suggestions of his intimate relationships with native men. Included in his correspondence, which he published along with his journals after returning to England, are several letters received from various Māori men. One in particular has romantic overtones and is signed "from him who was once your boy, but is now married... Hongi."¹⁰⁰ It is believed that this was one of the youths with whom Yate was accused of having an affair.¹⁰¹

Arboleda and Murray, as well as Gluckman, offered a Māori label for sodomy, or a 'gay' role. The former inscribed it as *pohone*, while the latter rendered it as *pohane*. Arboleda and Murray referred to a nineteenth century dictionary by someone they

⁹⁶ Samuel Marsden, *The Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden 1765-1838*, John Rawson Elder, ed. (Dunedin: Coulls Somerville Wilkie Ltd., 1932): 533.

⁹⁷ Eric Ramsden, *Marsden and the Missions: Prelude to Waitangi* (Dunedin: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1936).

⁹⁸ Ramsden, 20-44.

⁹⁹ Ramsden, 34.

¹⁰⁰ William Yate, *An Account of New Zealand and of the Church Missionary Society's Mission in the Northern Island* [1835], reprinted with Introduction by Judith Binney (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1970), 267.

¹⁰¹ Hugh Young, "Reverend William Yate," *Queer History of New Zealand* (July 2002). Available online at <http://www.queerhistory.net.nz/Yate.html>. 18 July 2003. See also, "Letter XVIII, from Hongi to the Rev. W. Yate," *Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand* (LAGANZ) (Wellington: 21 June 2003). Available online at <http://www.laganz.org.nz>. 30 June 2003.

named Treager (whose name in some sources also appears as Tregar). This was actually Edward Tregear, a linguist and New Zealand's first Secretary of Labor, better known for a book titled *The Aryan Maori*, in which he attempted to link Aotearoa/New Zealand's indigenous peoples to the Vedic civilisation of ancient India, as well as to the Biblical twelve tribes of Israel. For this he was widely ridiculed. On the other hand his *Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary* (1891) was a highly acclaimed volume which includes Polynesian myths and legends.¹⁰² Thomas Olver points out that Karsch-Haak used Tregear's *Dictionary* as a source for his claims about same-sex behaviour among Māori men.¹⁰³

Pohane originally referred to the practice of shaking one's buttocks at an enemy, which was a form of insult. Apparently, during the translation of the Bible into Māori by English missionaries, this word became associated with buggery.¹⁰⁴ Tregear's dictionary does include the word *pohane* translated as "sodomy" or "to practise sodomy." Below that is the term *whaka-pohane* which is glossed, "to present the buttocks, as for *pohane*." A later dictionary, published in 1921, lists eight interpretations for *pohane*: 1. love or affection; 2. love song; 3. desire; 4. lust; 5. indecent; 6. to desire earnestly; 7. insult; and finally, 8. to practise sodomy.¹⁰⁵ Here, *whaka-pohane* (also *whakapohane* or *whakapohanehane*) means to "act in an excited or ridiculous manner" or to "expose the person." It is interesting to note that the same word, *pohane*, would have been used to denote concepts of love and desire as well as sexual intercourse between men.

The word *pohane* now seems as obsolete or obscure as King James Biblical

¹⁰² Edward Tregear, *The Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1891).

¹⁰³ Thomas Olver, personal communication, 29 September 2003.

¹⁰⁴ This is according to Gluckman, who writes that the term was first included in a dictionary by William Williams (*A Dictionary of the New Zealand Language* originally published by Williams & Norgate, London, in either 1844 or 1871; cited in Gluckman, 123); the actual date is unclear because it appears that Gluckman transposed the dates.

¹⁰⁵ Herbert W. Williams, *A Dictionary of the Maori Language* (Wellington: Marcus F. Marks, 1921).

terminology is in contemporary English. In use since the 1970s, *takataapui* (also spelled *takatapui*) is a general term indicating same-sex sexuality (both male and female). A 'gay' man is known as *takatapui tane* (man who loves men).¹⁰⁶ The authors of *The Gay History of Planet Earth* conjecture that the Māori legend of Tutanekai includes an implicit homosexual relationship between him and his friend Tiki. The Māori term used is *takataapui*, which the site translates as "intimate companions of the same sex."¹⁰⁷ However, none of the different versions of the tale available seem to suggest anything other than a close friendship between the two male characters. In fact, the story is told as a romantic example of true *heterosexual* love. Tutanekai is in love with the beautiful princess Hinemoa. In some versions his best friend Tiki assists in guiding Hinemoa to their island by playing his flute. In other versions Tiki marries Tutanekai's sister. Both the Tregear and Williams dictionaries gloss the expression (spelled *takatapui*) as a close or intimate friend or companion of the same sex.¹⁰⁸ It is only in the last few decades that the term *takataapui* has come to mean 'homosexual,' and like the word 'gay' it began as a euphemism. None of the early European accounts referred to above mention or use the terms *pohane* and *takataapui* to describe the same-sex activities or bonds in which male Māori may have been involved, even when transcribing informant testimonies. Although the terms *takataapui* and *takatapui tane* may not have as wide a currency among Māori today due to the almost universal acceptance of the American term 'gay,' social activists (including Witi Ihimaera) are working hard to change this. Their initiative is not just about supplying a native lexical alternative, but primarily aimed at providing a Māori alternative for men (and women) who find themselves beyond the margins.

¹⁰⁶ Witi Ihimaera, interview by author (Auckland, 10 July 2003). See also "Hui Whakatipu 1997 Report," *Te Kaunihera Rangahau Jauaora o Aotearoa* (Health Research Council of New Zealand: August 2001). Available online at <http://www.hrc.govt.nz/download/pdf/huiwhakatipu.pdf>. 1 June 2003.

¹⁰⁷ "Pacific Asia & Australia," 26 May 2003.

¹⁰⁸ In an interesting aside, the Greek word for homosexual is *omophylophilos*, which can be literally translated as 'same sex friend,' while the street term *poushtis* in the Greek Cypriot dialect has no English translation, but would probably be analogous to the current understanding and usage of words such as 'queer' or 'fag.' Another euphemism, *anomalos*, literally means unstable or uneven.

Ihimaera: Autobiographical Fiction

As indicated earlier, Ihimaera chose to write *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* from a Pākehā perspective. This was an interesting and controversial choice for something as personal as a 'coming out' novel. But as the author explains, "I wasn't ready to write a book with a central Maori character as a gay person.... because I was also trying to work out my own identification."¹⁰⁹ In a way, there would have been too many issues involving ethnicity and sexuality to tackle in one volume. "So it was important for me first of all to write about cultural identity [in the early novels].... I could then look at the role which sexual identity played in the making of a person."¹¹⁰

In interviews, lectures, conferences, and his own non-fiction writing, Ihimaera is forthright about his personal involvement with the fictions he creates, the (auto)biographical basis for his narratives. This makes it easier to justify reading Ihimaera's two novels presented here as his published self-explorations; easier, in any case, than doing the same with Duff's novel. For example, The Noble Savage character functions as Ihimaera's alter ego and voices some of the author's opinions throughout the narrative. During an interview in 1998, Juniper Ellis asked if The Noble Savage was "the character in [*Nights*] who would most closely line up" with Ihimaera's position and concerns. Ihimaera responded with an emphatic, "Yes, yes."¹¹¹ In response to a question about being Māori and 'gay' Ihimaera asserted: "I am Maori, I was born Maori, I have lived Maori, and when I die a Maori my people will come and collect me and they will bury me as a Maori.... So for me my cultural registration has always been more important than my sexual registration."¹¹² This is a recurrent theme in both of Ihimaera's novels discussed in this chapter. The same phraseology is used when The Noble Savage (Tane) explains his philosophy to David

¹⁰⁹ Juniper Ellis, "The Singing Word," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 34.1 (1999): 179.

¹¹⁰ Ellis, 178.

¹¹¹ Ellis, 178.

¹¹² Ellis, 178.

in *Nights* (NGS, 234-235). The speech is repeated with the protagonist, Michael, in *The Uncle's Story* (US, 295). (I will return to the symbolic significance of Tane/The Noble Savage later.) Furthermore, the 'gay' organisation Te Waka Awhina Tane which The Noble Savage is said to have founded (in *Nights*) is an actual support group Ihimaera established in 1990.¹¹³ In *The Uncle's Story* Tane is intrigued and excited by Sam's tale. "You know, if his story was known, he could become a pretty potent symbol. He would prove that you can be gay – and a warrior" (US, 294). Ultimately, this is Ihimaera's goal, and writing is his weapon. After tackling issues of ethnicity in his earlier works and establishing himself as a leading figure of the Māori literary and arts scene, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and *The Uncle's Story* have allowed Ihimaera to turn his attention to sexuality and explore different facets of his own alternative or transgressive masculinity.

Witi Ihimaera is a proponent of all types of artistic expression. In addition to novels, he has produced films and written libretti for operas. In 1984, Ihimaera's Māori opera *Waituhi: The Life of the Village*, was performed at Victoria University. Ihimaera and his oldest daughter Jessica were in the chorus. (Dancers included Taiaroa Royal, who went on to perform with Black Grace.) Ihimaera has also edited collections of Māori fiction and non-fiction, and collaborated with photographers. One such alliance resulted in *On Top, Down Under* (1998), a book of photography by Sally Tagg featuring various New Zealand personalities, some of whom appear in, let us say, interesting or revealing poses. Ihimaera provided the text for each photo and even modelled for a session with Tagg. The resulting picture is a very tasteful, almost coy,

¹¹³ Lesbian and Gay Staff Association, "Knitting Circle: Witi Ihimaera," *The Knitting Circle* (South Bank University, London: 29 January 2003). Available online at <http://www.sbu.ac.uk/stafflag/witiihimaera.html>. 22 May 2003. In November 2000, the New Zealand Ministry of Research, Science & Technology (MoRST) had a news item on its website concerning Ihimaera and the establishing of Te Waka Awhina Tane (www.morst.govt.nz/creating/bios.html), but this is no longer available. At the time, the story indicated that the organisation was founded for the "advocacy, education, community, health and research services" of young 'gay' Māori. Ihimaera confirmed this in a personal communication (2 August 2003). He no longer heads the group, which has been renamed Te Waka Tane Takataapui (roughly translated as Men Who Love Men Support Network).

nude showing the author in the best possible light.¹¹⁴ He could be mistaken for a modern-day equivalent of *The Noble Savage*. However, Ihimaera asserts, “I was never happy [embodying the] ideal of the Noble Savage...”

Nor did I like being framed by Daniel Defoe in his escapist *Robinson Crusoe* as some kind of Man Friday, the unknown, unintelligible Other.... Countless authors of fiction and non-fiction made me into a cannibal. Paul Gauguin painted [me]. In most narratives I was typecast.¹¹⁵

Rather than inhabiting a Gauguin painting, Ihimaera embodies a contemporary revision and re-examination of that myth – one in which the subject is in control. He argues, “We must ... subvert the Main discourse, derail Western narrative in all its forms ... put ourselves in the middle of the stories.”¹¹⁶ While Ihimaera is ‘never happy’ with the Noble Savage idealisation when imposed by others, he has employed the label to reclaim the image and recast it with dignity and pride. Although he may still be a marginal figure, like the original Tane he pushes against the boundaries to create a space where he and his people can stand free.

Both Sides of Duff’s Moon

Both Sides of the Moon begins with the narrator asserting his right to speak on behalf of both sides, Māori and Pākehā: “I am torn; yet I am more whole, since I am of both understandings, though of no singular one. I am two races, two cultures and, most of

¹¹⁴ Sally Tagg, *On Top, Down Under: Photographs of Unique New Zealanders* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 1998). Copy of photo available online at <http://www.sallytagg.co.nz/gallery3.html>. [8 June 2003]. In the photo Ihimaera wears a *paua* over one of his eyes – the brightly coloured greenish-blue abalone shell associated with Maui, god of change (though it is difficult to detect in Tagg’s sepia-toned print). Ihimaera (as an agent of change himself) consistently refers to, identifies with, and seeks to emulate Maui: “In my life I have always liked to take what I call a “Maui-esque” approach. Maui was a god who liked to confront the status quo.... I have always been a political person ... always wanting to change things, ever since I was born.” Witi Ihimaera, personal correspondence (2 August 2003).

¹¹⁵ Witi Ihimaera, “Masculinity & Desire: Rewriting the Polynesian Body,” in *Joseph Keen Chadwick: Interventions and Continuities in Irish and Gay Studies*, John Rieder, Joseph H. O’Mealy, and Valerie Wayne, eds. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 128.

¹¹⁶ Ihimaera, “Masculinity & Desire,” 129.

all, two different thinkings" (*BSM*, 7). He takes us back into his childhood in an attempt to explain his origins, and discovers the truth about his maternal Māori ancestry. Jimmy feels as though he belongs in neither world, yet seeks acceptance within the Māori community. This could be attributed to his longing for a mother, someone who will love and nurture him unconditionally. He is tolerated, at best, by his maternal relatives, many of whom see him as a half-caste. Interestingly, we never meet any of his paternal Pākehā relatives, and do not see or hear their reactions to and impressions of the biracial marriage or the children. It is a telling oversight, given the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand's colonisation and the racism still present within the dominant Pākehā society. Duff is not interested in the injustices perpetrated by and on behalf of the predominantly British settler majority, but on the activities of Māori and their inability to adapt to European culture.

In the Māori village hot-spring pools Jimmy finds the warmth he misses in his relationship with his mother. It is there where he also develops a relationship with kuia Mereana, the old woman who in some ways becomes his surrogate mother. She is a kind grandmotherly type who tells him stories and gives him a sense of his heritage. She seems to be the only one to entertain his questions and her reluctant answers shape his understanding of the past that has shaped his present.

A chance encounter with Chumpy (a village man of no relation who hates Jimmy) causes Jimmy to question his origins and the assumptions of a warrior past. It is at this point that the alternate narrative, an unwitnessed yet vividly imagined history, comes into being. The two narratives are juxtaposed so that we see the past not exactly mirrored in the present so much as clarifying the present. "You run just like your cowardly ancestor did!" Chumpy taunts (*BSM*, 48). Jimmy confronts Mereana with the accusation and the legend of Te Aranui Kapi begins to unfold.

Kapi is the bravest, fiercest warrior in the village. After combat it was customary for

the victors to come back with the heads of vanquished enemies to be displayed on stakes. Following one such battle Kapi returns carrying six heads, while most of the others bring one or two (*BSM*, 107-108). Kapi also does not spare his own family from his brand of harsh justice. Kapi punishes his brother Tamatea for raping Kapi's favourite woman Tangiwai – he impales Tamatea and exhibits him, still alive, as a warning to other wrongdoers (*BSM*, 62-66). He was a hero, and Jimmy feels proud.

Following one particularly successful massacre, Kapi sees a little boy and his mother floating down the river. They have thrown themselves in hoping to escape detection. Kapi decides to watch them drown instead of trying to kill them – and the doubts begin to set in. He is impressed by the mother's determined silence and unvoiced imprecations but keeps willing the child to drown. As he watches the drama unfold his thinking begins to shift – his blood lust, his hate for the enemy regardless of age, sex, or even action, his blind faith in the rightness of his beliefs, are shaken. The death of a little boy is utterly pointless – meaningless only in the sense that it cannot indicate some heroic deed, has absolutely nothing to do with Kapi's manhood, and provides no satisfaction, no reason for celebration. He feels utterly humiliated. He knows he fears death; he cannot face it as the boy does, he cannot accept it as the mother does. His understanding of masculinity is put in doubt; his entire existence is called into question. The serene smile of an innocent, drowning child finally accomplishes Kapi's defeat. In a Western context we, men especially, often receive contradictory messages about weakness and strength. We are explicitly taught that physical weakness or vulnerability is not the same thing as cowardice, while the implicit ideologies of sporting fields, playgrounds, corporate boardrooms, and nationalist movements reinforce the opposite. And while we profess today to believe compassion a desirable trait, in the traditional Māori warrior culture as depicted by Duff, such sentiments were not acceptable for a man, particularly in relation to an enemy, even if that enemy was merely a child.

After the boy drowns Kapi realises his accepted way of life is seriously flawed. Eventually, he is unable to lead his men into battle, and the enemy, alerted by Kapi's swift retreat, attacks and decimates his company. When word reaches the village, the inhabitants decide to split into two factions. One, led by the village chief, commits the honourable, acceptable, and expected action of mass suicide. The other group, led by Tangiwai, escapes into the forest to live in self-imposed exile as outcasts. Kapi also remains in hiding for over a year until he also joins a group of outcasts. Jimmy realises that he is descended from Kapi and Tangiwai.

Jimmy suggests that one of the main problems or deficiencies of Māori both in the past and the present is that they do not think critically, they do not question long-held beliefs and assumptions, and they do not analyse perceptions. They are characterised as unthinking, unfeeling, beast-like. Early on Jimmy learned not to question inherited thoughts and dictated beliefs. His uncle confronts him about not believing in ghosts. "There's things you can't say," the uncle admonishes – and Jimmy thinks, "Can't question, can't ever know the truth, therefore" (*BSM*, 15). "No one will give answers. No one seeks them.... They show distrust, even hatred for questioning minds" (*BSM*, 12).

This lack of thought or serious mental activity is seen as not only a contemporary problem but also one inherited and possibly even genetically programmed. Mereana chides Jimmy, "Aee, more questions I s'pose ... when you gonna stop questioning everything, child? How many times I have to tell you, this is not the place for a questioning mind – go back to your father's people" (*BSM*, 50). The implication, of course, is not only that there is no room for doubts in Māori culture, but that Pākehā society is more tolerant of questions.

Jimmy expounds on the stereotype that Māori men are fun-loving happy-go-lucky people, responding that they are happy because they are simple, in other words,

stupid. “[Simple of] mind, of not seeing into future only to this day.... Warrior men stand around making good humour, mild tease of each other, easy to laugh, easy to giggle. From easy of mind. Unthinking, unseeing, unfutured mind. Fuckin’ warriors, too fuck-stupid to know they’re cursed. Too fuck-dumb to know their children are cursed with them” (*BSM*, 246).

Kapi sees a man from the village they have attacked jumping into the river, either to save himself or drown himself. “Kapi sighed and gave no more thought to that self-extinguished existence. None” (*BSM*, 129). The irony is that not much later on the same day (and within just a few pages) he sees someone else drown – this time the little boy and his mother – and his thoughts become plagued by that child’s existence. His every waking moment and every sleeping dream are haunted by unwelcome thoughts. He eventually convinces himself that he can regain his old peace of mind, or mindlessness: “No place for the thinking man and nor, he told himself over and over again, should it be.... He is what he is and cannot be any other” (*BSM*, 138). He copulates furiously with his woman and (unsuccessfully) re-asserts his position in the larger scheme of things.

Jimmy has inherited Kapi’s belief that there is “no place for the thinking” person in Māori culture. One can infer from the text that the Pākehā (white people) were/are represented as superior because they reason(ed), question(ed), and debate(d). Jimmy especially idealises the tourists he encounters: “The Americans are fabulously, successfully, what they think. Whilst here we are modestly of what little we think” (*BSM*, 12). He assumes that travelling helps them broaden their minds by providing a wealth of new and different experiences. Jimmy gives the impression that education and a logical, analytical mind are futilely opposed to Māori ways. He characterises his Māori mother as ruled by “ignorance that thinks itself superior to [the] enlightenment” represented by his Pākehā father (*BSM*, 8). For Jimmy, the Māori mind is unfathomable. His mother “not only didn’t understand logical

thought, she despised it. [It was] how the minds of all of them, more or less, work. [I] figured out the rule ... don't-try-and-reason-with-them" (*BSM*, 94-95). The text does not clarify who "all of them" are, but the context makes it obvious Jimmy is referring to Māori.

Unlike his Māori relatives, Jimmy's father is a "good" man:

He wanted much for us. He urged us always to look people in the eye when we were speaking or being spoken to and not be like so many of our browner cousins, spending life staring at the ground.... He explained everything to us, from ant colony social infrastructure to Einstein's Theory of Relativity, or any definition we asked for and then more of his own. (*BSM*, 93, 95)

However, many Western societies have not and do not encourage challenging traditional or deeply-held beliefs, or contesting the status quo. European history includes such episodes as the Spanish Inquisition, the labelling of scientists (such as Galileo) heretics, and the rise of fascist politics in Italy, Germany, Spain, and Greece that led to repressive regimes. Even the current political climate in many Western nations, including Australia and the United States, discourages independent thought, and (since 11 September 2001) vocal opposition to the government's foreign policy is often attacked as unpatriotic. Religious institutions and communities have also been notorious for discouraging doubts or the questioning of accepted beliefs, no less so in this era of sectarianism and fundamentalism. Misguided European missionary efforts around the globe often "enforced Eurocentric education" on indigenous children and were responsible for the "suppression of native languages and cultures."¹¹⁷

Occasionally, Jimmy also recognises that the Pākehā/European culture does not have all the answers. At times there is a deep sense of irony when he talks of the enlightenment of his father. He is ambivalent about his love for his father, and

¹¹⁷ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* [1994] (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 76.

certainly does not respect him. Jimmy calls his father “inadequate” and wishes he would “punch his way back to us respecting him more” – in other words, to be more like his Māori relatives (*BSM*, 95, 94). In a few instances, Jimmy identifies some positive aspects of his Māori ancestry and culture. During one of his initial conversations with kuia Mereana, in his imagining of the past, he glimpses a time of peace: people playing games, music of flutes and shells, eloquent poetry and oratory, storytelling and intricate weaving. But even here, his cynical self intrudes: “There are moments of philosophical thought and times of tenderness. (But not enough.) ... I see a people with too much of themselves on the dark side of the conceptual moon” (*BSM*, 33).

Jimmy often chooses to wander at night. Early on we learn that he enjoys the traditional hot-spring communal baths, but out of fear or shame for his half-caste status, he prefers to use them before dawn, before any of his relatives arrive. “I don’t want to live on the dark side of the conceptual moon,” he intones (in a phrase that is repeated several times); and here the moon represents his “unread and uninterested cousins” (*BSM*, 13). His night-wanderings turn into spying on other people’s private lives – he becomes a peeping tom – and eventually he begins stealing. There is no grand plan, no sense or reason for where he goes and what he takes - but all the time he’s seeking, driven by the desire to possess that which he does not have. “It must be you’re trying to steal the spirit, the essence from their lives, or just borrow it, partake of it for a while, or so you tell yourself,” he rationalises (*BSM*, 117). Jimmy’s roving leads him through the nighttime city and finally into the parks, those places of illicit activity where he now becomes sought after, the object others desire.

Given the title of the book, it comes as no surprise that the moon figures as an important symbol, almost a character. In classical Greek mythology the moon was seen as feminine, and in this sense the moon seems to play the role of Other to the muscular masculinity of the Māori warriors. In one instance the enemy is described

as being “from the moon, from another world hostile to these” (*BSM*, 110). When Kapi attempts to banish his haunted thoughts and disturbing new notions he asserts, “I do not dwell on the moon ... where man may be different” (*BSM*, 138). In a sense, Kapi here is disowning the ‘feminine’ aspects of his personality. However, Kapi’s statement also contradicts Jimmy’s representation of Māori as conceptually belonging to the moon.

In its feminised role, the moon could also be seen as providing an Other to the daylight of battles, a time of peace and rest, and a time of love (such as it may be). “[T]ouched by moonlight, warrior men and listening villagers sit on hard earth” (*BSM*, 110) as stories of recent combat and legendary heroes are told. The feasting and celebrating, beneath the “same coating of moonlight” is followed by “sexual makings and takings in the night, of tender coupling with wife, or rough claimings of slave” (*BSM*, 111). But it is also this feminine moon which shines down on Tangiwai’s greatest act of courage, the murder of her second rapist, Hakere. “[U]nder the full chosen moon, with a flicker-over of dying campfire, she roared a call,” to signal her deed (*BSM*, 286). The fullness of the moon implies ripeness, fecundity – her plan comes to fruition. Notice that the moon is not only full, but also chosen. She has planned and longed for this act of revenge. She has chosen her time carefully and it is not in the blazing sunlight of masculine force, but in the subtle evening which has often been thought of as woman’s domain. The moon itself aids her and her band of loyal followers: “Such fullness of moon circle lighted down upon them” (*BSM*, 287). She seems draped in a “soft greenwhite cloak of moonlight” (*BSM*, 287); she becomes avenging Hekate (whose opposite is Helios/the sun) and the huntress Artemis (whose brother is Apollonas, god of the sun) combined.

The moon, however, is only a reflector of the sun. It is a poor substitute for the real thing and its light creates more shadows. Besides, in moonlight everything appears as shades of grey. There is no colour, no vibrancy. And while the moon is out almost

everything sleeps. So, for Duff, the moon also becomes a metaphor for the unthinking. Their beliefs are cast in shadows and can't stand up to the brilliance of the sun's reason and logic. Therefore, to be of the moon is bad enough. But to be from the dark side must be worse, for the dark side does not even benefit from intellect's reflection. This truly is the archetypal dichotomy of light and dark, wisdom versus foolishness, good against evil.

It is interesting that Duff depicts Māori thinking as belonging in darkness. Māori philosophy includes the concept of *te ao marama* (the world of light), associated with maintaining a connection to the past and preserving cultural authenticity through the telling of stories. This concept has been taken up by contemporary activists who regard this an important aspect of decolonisation:

For the Maori, the inheritors of a millennial culture, theirs is a struggle without end into the world of light. They know that the sun has set on the empire that colonised them. They know too that it will set on the coloniser even if it takes a thousand years. They will triumph in the end, because they are the tangata whenua [people of the land, i.e. indigenous].¹¹⁸

Kapi is renamed "Moonlight" by the group of outcasts. "This is the other side of the conceptual moon, the side you see in the sun's light" (*BSM*, 227). We see that in a sense Kapi parallels Jimmy. The book's title, *Both Sides of the Moon*, refers not only to Jimmy's mixed heritage but also to Kapi's before and after existences. So it is not necessary to think of Jimmy's sun (Pākehā) and moon (Māori) as diametrically opposed forces, but as the complementary sides of 'Māoriness' as represented by Duff – the mindless adherence to tradition and the enlightened freedom of the outcast. One could also argue that, as symbols of masculine power and feminine grace, the sun and moon can also represent the dual forces within each human. In many people, one or the other of these celestial bodies is pre-eminent. But in the well-balanced person both the sun and the moon should have equal value. There is no day

¹¹⁸ Ranginui Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End* (Auckland: Penguin, 1990), 287.

without night, there is no wisdom without foolishness, no joy without sorrow, and no male without female. The essence of both can be found in a unified whole.

At the end of Kapi's narrative, he and his partner Mihi (the term 'wife' does not seem to fit in with the outcast group's ideology) decide to meet the new white tribe. As they approach the white settlement they are apprehensive yet eager. "But look, Moonlight, the dwellings of the newcomers have many even-sided shapes dazzling like tiny suns!" Mihi exclaims (*BSM*, 312).

The novel ends on a note of (what appears to be) optimistic entreaty: "Urge him, child, to come this side of the moon.... not only is there light to the eyes, but singing can be heard. And they are strong, powerful, harmonized Maori voices, singing European hymn.... Love is light. Light is love" (*BSM*, 314). Although the idea that love brings enlightenment is pleasant (even admirable), it is somewhat disturbing that the Māori choir is singing a European song. Is this how Jimmy has reconciled his two sides? This is a reflection of Duff's ideology – that the savages can be civilised. Read in conjunction with Duff's political tract *Maori: The Crisis and the Challenge, Both Sides of the Moon* can be understood as a fictionalised version of his social theories. Duff implies Māori culture is best filtered, channelled, expressed, tempered, and mediated through Western education and a capitalist work ethic. While he does not deny that colonialism was a violence committed against his ancestors, he sees no point in dwelling on it. "[To] hell with the past, get on with the future," he exclaims. "There's a way out and it's really simple and it's free – it's education."¹¹⁹

Sex & Violence

Duff asserts, "sex can be an act of love, it can be all sorts of things, but one thing it

¹¹⁹ Sarti, 34.

can't be is an act of violence or revenge."¹²⁰ Nonetheless, in *Both Sides* the graphic violence of the ancestral Māori culture is often depicted in sexual terms – and sex often assumes the violence of battle: “rough claimings of slave woman, low-ranked woman, quick and brutal and so urgently violent it takes slave woman low woman along on its thrusting wave, so like the taking of enemy man” (*BSM*, 111). It is interesting the killing of a man should be described as “taking” in the same sentence where the word “take” is associated with sex and rape. Kapi watches,

smiling at the young woman being run down by Te Wheke, a promising young fighter, flipping her on her back (oh, how a man is taken by his lust in time of battle and blood being shed) and taking her there on the track, his tattooed buttock-muscles flexing his sweet savagery, heaving sweated shine into the enemy woman's wetness, the place of her very being, as his men ran past, howling laughter at his sexual ravaging, laughter at the slaughter before. (*BSM*, 128)

It is also Kapi who “was renowned for his skill and strength at driving his best fighting taiha up under an enemy's groin and lifting him aloft, a living, screaming trophy of flailing, impaled enemy manhood now gone” (*BSM*, 59). Here we also have another facet of the sex/violence dichotomy – the homosocial, and often homoerotic, aspect.

The description of Kapi's expertise with his weapons echoes the reminiscences of the warriors' descendants, who regale each other and anyone else within earshot with memories of combat in Italy. “Maori soldier with English-made bayonet pushing into Italian flesh, same as enemy German flesh, eh Mapu? Yeah, all the same, Hemi, like women, eh? Yeah, about the same: soft flesh yielding to irresistible hard object. Cock into cunt, pote into tore. Italian soldier-flesh easily punctured by Sheffield-fired steel rammed by tough Maori hand” (*BSM*, 25). One cannot deny the strongly sexual nature of such comments, nor escape the homoerotic undertones of substituting Italian soldiers for pliable women. Sex and violence are interchangeable in the text –

¹²⁰ Sarti, 39.

they are one – with the goal always being the assertion and acknowledgment of one’s masculinity.

In his discussion of Heretaunga Baker’s *Behind the Tattooed Face* (1975) Otto Heim makes several observations which are also relevant to Duff’s novel. The “all too familiar male pattern” of violence and sexuality are bound in an indefinable yet undeniable relationship:

This eroticised reading of pain is quite prominent [in the novel].... Together with the frequent association of violence with virility this eroticisation of pain forms a disturbing subtext ... hinting at a paradoxical collusion between perpetrators and victims of violence, grounded in sexuality.¹²¹

He further maintains that pain resists verbalisation for it is “tantamount to the breakdown of language.”¹²² The narrative of survival is about recovering voice and language, and entails forming relationships, reconnecting with a world beyond and outside the site of pain, the body. In this way, Heim argues, Māori literature such as Duff’s can be seen as forming a narrative of survival, a reaction to the pain of colonisation.

Nonetheless, there is a violent homoeroticism in the act, as well as the description, of consuming enemy flesh. Kapi “hacked the tender rump meat from the cooked human carcass and made poetic statement of appreciation how good this man’s tattooed behind tasted, laughing that it was surely better than when the contemptible slave was alive” (*BSM*, 60). And again, the punishment of Tamatea takes on a violently homoerotic aspect: “Was this how your penis entered Tangiwai, with such powerful, final thrusts?” Kapi asks after he pushes the stake “up through his bowel hole ... avoiding the vital organs ... [until it] emerged out of Tamatea’s mouth” (*BSM*, 62-63). Meanwhile, we are told that it was Kapi’s discipline which helped him

¹²¹ Heim, 18.

¹²² Heim, 19. For more on pain and language see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

“ignore the pleasure of what he did” (*BSM*, 62). The phrases “a protrusion like a penis coming from [Tamatea’s] mouth” (*BSM*, 66) and “wood-occupied mouth” (*BSM*, 67) are more than just highly suggestive. They are overt images of sex between men – even though in this novel such acts are depicted as dirty, unbecoming, dehumanising and, ultimately, deadly. Use of the term “wood” conjures an association with ‘woody,’ common slang for an erection; thus, the image evoked by the expression “wood-occupied mouth” is of a person in the act of fellatio, or ‘gagging on it’ in certain circles (literally, in this case). Interestingly, this entire episode so arouses Kapi that he chooses a beautiful teenaged girl and has sex with her (or rapes her) twice. This is an obvious attempt to re-assert Kapi’s masculinity, not only in his own mind or for the villagers watching, but also for the storyteller – and, most importantly, for us, the listeners/readers. No pansy-boy homo stuff here. See, he’s a virile man, a real man, who can do his civic duty and still enjoy the loving of a good woman, the narrator/author seems to be saying.

The homoerotic aspect makes its appearance in another skirmish, yet is swiftly dismissed as signifying respect for a worthy opponent. Kapi admires a “fine young enemy’s face” and wills him to fight well. He watches as the enemy and one of his own men circle each other in battle dance, “like two bird lovers” (*BSM*, 129). Kapi notices the adversary’s buttocks and thighs shiver in pain when slashed and thinks, “If the situation were less immediate he could be considered for adoption into this tribe worthy of his obvious manhood” (*BSM*, 130). The two rivals manage to kill each other and their blood mingles together. “Kapi was not sure for whom the tears formed in his eyes” (*BSM*, 131). Mingling blood is a highly romantic image and romanticised idea – blood brothers, blood oaths, and the two shall become one. Kapi thinks, “Farewell, good warrior, we shall remember you tonight and many nights to come” (*BSM*, 131). It is not entirely clear to whom this is addressed. In addition, the promise of nightly memories can be read in two ways. The first and most apparent interpretation is that the brave warrior’s deeds will be sung at the traditional post-

battle feasts. But there is also the idea of remembering a lover, resurrecting a fantasy – a common concept in the sexual imaginings of both ‘gay’ and straight representations.

The only positive representation of homosexuality, the only indication that homophilia may be acceptable, is in a discussion among the outcast group Kapi joins. For him, we are told, the idea that two men can sexually enjoy each other or love each other in the way he loves his woman is completely foreign. “He witnessed man exchanging kiss with another and saw them moving off to do the obvious in private.... [H]is entire life’s conceptions contained not even thought of such union” (*BSM*, 278). The phrase “man exchanging kiss with another” evokes the New Testament passage in the apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans: “Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men” (Romans 1:26-27, *NIV*). Fundamentalist Christians often use these verses to prove that homosexuality is a sin.

What connections is Jimmy, the narrator, making? What is Duff himself trying to say? “Moonlight had argued that men [having sex] was bad enough, but as to women loving with one another, surely this was the greatest affront to any tribe’s fundamental value?” (*BSM*, 278). How is it significant that it is Kapi who expresses these Judeo-Christian-sounding sentiments? Kapi represents the old ways of thinking (or not thinking). Kapi is portrayed as brute warrior, unenlightened savage. He was all that traditional Māori men were and aspired to (until he ran). It is the Māori outcasts who show progressive thinking, who are tolerant and open-minded enough to see that love is love no matter how it is expressed or who shares it. “A person is what she is,” explains a woman *like that*, i.e. a lesbian, or woman-loving-woman (*BSM*, 279). “As she is born with certain physical attributes or flaws, as she is born with certain intelligence or less of it, so she is born with her sexual preference”

(*BSM*, 279). What a surprise this is for Kapi: such a revolutionary and enlightened view from someone so low in the social order.

Nevertheless, it is important that a woman, rather than a man, makes this speech. The author is still reluctant to admit that loving between men is valid. He gives only a perfunctory nod in that direction with the inclusion of the outcast discussion, and makes a big deal of Kapi's 'conversion' to this new way of thinking. However, he portrays Jimmy's sexual experimentation with an older man as ugly and dirty, a sub-standard kind of love.

Adolescent (Homo)Erotic Anxiety

Despite the narrator's (or Duff's) apparent disdain for same-sex desire, there is not much discussion or description of the sexual relationship between Jimmy and his neighbour Edith, an older housewife. The infrequent acts are treated in a very superficial manner and quickly dismissed. Jimmy's 'affair' with Dan, however, is given more space and eloquence. It begins when Jimmy wanders through the parks at night and is followed by an older man whom he thinks of as fate (*BSM*, 120). 'Fate' wants Jimmy's youthful beauty and innocence. 'Fate,' in the form of this older man is "uglyed by birth and events, [a] predator gone past the point of being prey, [a] monster who has never been desirable" (*BSM*, 120). However repulsed Jimmy feels, he is also attracted. He wants love, even if it is a "warped form of it" (*BSM*, 121). He feels a kind of empathy – a part of him does not want to accept that these men of the nighttime park world are "all and only monsters and perverts" (*BSM*, 121). Jimmy's curiosity leads him into the public toilets where he reads the messages of longing, compares himself to the crude drawings, and sees himself "sketched there amongst the telephone numbers [and] the cocks" (*BSM*, 142). His feeling of nervous, nauseous excitement is compared to an upset stomach and what threatens to spew from his

erection is vomit. "Guess it must be self-disgust. Self-hating. Or unbearable excitement," he thinks (*BSM*, 142).

The man lures Jimmy out of the locked cubicle by talking about his awful home life. Jimmy can identify, but he goes away without doing what he considers to be eventually unavoidable. The man does not call or chase after him. Jimmy is well aware of what's going on: "It's called seduction, I think. Not sure by whom" (*BSM*, 144). He may be innocent in the sense that he has not had sex with another male before, but he is not so innocent as to not know what he is doing or what he is wanted for. He is very aware of the park's night life. He is still ambivalent, however. Jimmy has been socialised to 'know' that sex with a man is not acceptable, while sex with a woman is. "What will the act do to my essential being?" he wonders (*BSM*, 144).

Days later, Jimmy returns and allows Dan (the man) to perform oral sex. There is a protracted interplay, a back and forth transaction of pleading (Dan) and refusing (Jimmy) until Jimmy gives in. Had he not wanted it he would have, could have stopped the interchange, refused to go along with Dan's suggestions, run away. "I could leap up and run and none of this then happens. But I'm far gone myself, I'm the same male he is, as we all are. Melting in the touch of a hand not my own" (*BSM*, 146). Jimmy keeps denying that he wants this interaction, yet is enthralled by (perhaps even proud of) the idea that he's the main attraction in this show. "I'm the event, the arrangement of every written plea and open invite to date male to male" (*BSM*, 146). He is the reason this grown man is panting and breathing and begging – he's the fulfilment of Dan's fantasies.

Nevertheless, Jimmy is also repulsed by Dan's need. He thinks of himself as being swallowed up by the beast Dan has become and is full of self-revulsion and despair. "[T]his is obscene, it is altogether terrible in itself if one can disengage his soul, his

sensibility from the act and take the act itself for itself... I'm in a dream being smothered in sperm, I'm drowning in mother's period blood ... I'm a public toilet boy" (*BSM*, 146). He is full of remorse and disgust at what he is doing, what he has done. And when it is all over he despises Dan. "You liked that didn't you, kid," Dan asks basking in the afterglow, but Jimmy cannot answer (*BSM*, 148).

Though full of self-loathing, Jimmy keeps going back to the park and Dan. He finally admits, "All right I liked it, I liked it, I like it, Dan" (*BSM*, 150). His feelings and reason keep waffling between acceptance and rejection of who he is or what he is doing. In one breath he says he is sorry for being bad and in the next declares, "I am what I am" (*BSM*, 150). He cannot decide whether sex with Dan is a mistake or a discovery. The next two paragraphs are reminiscent of Molly Bloom's famous 'yes' monologue (from James Joyce's *Ulysses*), ending in Jimmy's climax and metaphorical union with Dan. It is an affirmative build-up; Jimmy is his desire and nothing else. And it is good: "God. God! (God! God!) Good. So good. No other place to be. Rather be nowhere else but here, in this place in time. Come now, come now, come, come, boy, come, man – Oh! (Oh!)" (*BSM*, 150). Then, once again, the doubts set in; Jimmy fears discovery and feels remorse over "wasted babies" (*BSM*, 150).

Dan teases Jimmy about a threesome with another boy. The idea excites Jimmy because this could be the way in which he will meet someone his own age, a boy with problems like his, someone he can love as an equal. Jimmy craves love, but remains afraid of labels. "We're not homos, we're loves trying to find self and selves.... two boys, two young men, two lovers under the moonlight" (*BSM*, 152).

It is not clear whether Jimmy does meet another boy or whether this remains an unresolved fantasy. "[W]e haven't met," Jimmy says of his dream-lover, yet in the next sentence this seems a kind of lie: "But if it happened (and it will and did)..." (*BSM*, 152). We are at the mercy of an unreliable narrator, one who keeps doubling

back over his words so that none and all can be true simultaneously. Jimmy's (and Duff's) reasons for obfuscation are not entirely clear. Obviously, Jimmy feels there is something wrong with having a sexual relationship with a man (or another boy). And Duff, as a straight man, remains equivocal on the issue. He seems to vacillate between aversion toward sex between men and (subconscious?) fascination.

Jimmy stays away from the park and Dan for a while. Then his mother runs off with another man and Jimmy spies on them at their new home, content in domesticated bliss. His mother is happier than he's ever seen her, and this makes him more miserable than ever. He returns to the park, half in denial about what brought him there, half in anticipation of an encounter and tension-easing release. Jimmy sits in his cubicle listening for the approaching footsteps of a lover, someone to occupy his time. "[P]lease don't let it be him (but let it be him, or let it just be someone like me like this)" (*BSM*, 172). Dan arrives as if summoned to a pre-arranged date. But then again, Dan apparently always arrives this way, in this park, in this public toilet. He is not necessarily in search of Jimmy – any boy will do – yet Dan is happy to see Jimmy.

Yet again Jimmy is ambivalent, unable to recognise the catch in his voice as fear, lust, a mixture of both, or self-loathing. The self-loathing is always present, always an active participant in this affair. Once more, Jimmy feels nauseous, but desire (for sex or love) wins out. "[S]urely even cocks mean more than just blood engorgement and sexual excitement, surely? It's symbol meaningful in the rigid arrogance and yet hapless surrender to terrific need. Oh well, oh, God" (*BSM*, 174). The nausea, however, is still present. "[T]his is ridiculous, this ain't love, this isn't anything but wretchedness of me and a warping of him, whatever has made him like this" (*BSM*, 174). We've come across the formulation before; "like this," of course, means 'gay,' – someone who enjoys sex with others of the same sex, someone who craves love from the same sex. And Jimmy remains in denial about his involvement in the act. "I'm not a homo but I'm doing like a homo, so I'm a homo becoming one. Or something"

(*BSM*, 174).

Being a “homo,” being ‘gay’, is obviously not acceptable. It is something Jimmy fears. He still feels the need to apologise, to rationalise, to distance himself from responsibility. He pities himself for succumbing to Dan, for lowering himself to the level of a pervert. He feels despicable and worthless. In Jimmy’s mind this moaning and urgent thrusting in the darkened toilet cubicle is the same as murder. He condemns his mother for not protecting him, for not loving him, for deserting him and the rest of the family. The Freudian impulse to blame the mother is more than just Jimmy’s adolescent compulsion. Despite protestations to the contrary, Duff holds Māori women responsible for the fate of their people: “They’re our strength, our hope, our life,” he gushes.¹²³ Duff has been accused of being a misogynist. Certainly much of the language he uses to describe women and what they do is not very flattering. Describing the relationship between his parents, Jimmy says, “she crawled and mauled all over him, and took part of our respect away from him for not being the man circumstances required. Duff, however, insists that he is neither sexist nor a misogynist because, “I really care; I’ve got daughters.”¹²⁴ Yet he uses sexist language and imagery when discussing the “more and more intelligent” women whom he meets and ‘encourages’, or in describing women’s groups as “sit and have a cup of tea” gatherings.¹²⁵

When Jimmy returns home from this latest escapade, he is afraid of discovery. He imagines that his sleeping brothers will be able to tell he has had sex – with a man. With deepening disgust not only towards Dan but also his own body, Jimmy finds that he cannot sleep. “Smell him on me, his body odour, his semen, the strong smell of his cock, his tobacco breath, his stinking predator existence” (*BSM*, 176). He feels as though he has contaminated the room, he has violated the sacredness of the home,

¹²³ Sarti, 39.

¹²⁴ Sarti, 39.

¹²⁵ Sarti, 39.

the trust of his family. He looks at his brother Brian (who will one day grow up to become a criminal, a murderer) as “even worse than” Dan – he thinks this with a kind of astonishment, as if nothing could be worse (*BSM*, 175). Though the word ‘abomination’ is not used, this section evokes that term familiar within most conservative Christian discussions regarding homosexuality (see Leviticus, 18:22, 20:13).

Eventually, Jimmy meets Althea, a girl his own age to whom he thinks he is attracted. As they make out in a bus shelter Dan appears. Jimmy is afraid of discovery – he does not want Althea to think he is ‘gay.’ His mind is full of emphatic disclaimers, even while he acknowledges the pleasure sex with Dan had given him. “And here I am, about to be exposed for being a homo, which I’m not. Before God I’d say the first few times were exciting and yes, God, I did enjoy it. And yes, for being bad, illegal, illicit, and yes all right, to reenact my mother. But a homo, absolutely not” (*BSM*, 249). This internal denial, this defiance in the face of a confrontation, this humiliation of being caught between the man with whom he’s had sex many times and the girl with whom he wants to have sex, lead to a murderous, yet very contained, rage. Jimmy resolves to kill Dan or be killed. He convinces Dan to leave them alone, but Althea works out a confession from Jimmy, and Jimmy finds his way back to Dan.

On his knees, with Dan’s penis in his mouth, Jimmy imagines ways in which he can dispatch this man whom he loathes as much as he loathes himself. But Jimmy is not strong enough to fight, not strong enough to kill, and realises that he is not willing to die trying. He cannot even bring himself to bite off Dan’s penis – so he runs away.

Duff undoubtedly wants us to read Jimmy’s running as analogous or parallel to Kapi’s. After all, Kapi did set the precedent. Kapi ran away from impending battle, Jimmy ran away from committing murder. Kapi ran away from unenlightened

thinking, Jimmy ran away from unchecked lust. However, Kapi's running had dire consequences for his village – what will be the consequences for Jimmy's family or community? By running away Kapi became an outcast from his society. Jimmy casts himself out of the world of public toilets and men like Dan. Is he also closing himself off to the possibility of finding love with another man? Kapi eventually learns how to think for himself, to analyse the world around him, to examine preconceived notions, and to be open to differences in opinion and lifestyle. Kapi realises that the experiences and desires of same-sex identified people are as valid as his own. By running away is Jimmy denying this validity? "I've just had enough, I want to be free" Jimmy thinks before he runs (*BSM*, 253). Free from what, Dan or homosexuality? What is Jimmy really running from? "I have thought that this is where I belong, deserve to belong, nowhere other and better than here" (*BSM*, 253). Maybe therein lies the truth, the tiny grain of honesty amidst the denials and recriminations.

Duff may not condemn homosexuality outright, but the text makes clear that it is not the optimal expression of sexuality or romantic sentiment. According to the novel, the formal expression of love among Māori declares a lover has no need of stars, when the light of the sun shines from the partner's face. Duff uses the phrases "the different smile of the moon" (*BSM*, 151) and "the moon up there smiling, a little bothered frown there too" (*BSM*, 152) in the description of Jimmy's imagined threesome and subsequent finding of a compatible (male) lover his own age. However, as Jimmy and Dan climax, Jimmy realises that they are living/loving on "the bright lit side" of the moon (*BSM*, 150). And in Jimmy's fantasies of a boy his age, the two make promises under the moon and stars (*BSM*, 152). This harks back to the feminine moon of Jimmy's Māori past – the moon of peace, of "sexual makings, and ... tender coupling" (*BSM*, 111), and of Tangiwai's courage. Though Jimmy ends up with no one (neither man nor woman) at the end of the novel, there may be hope for him yet. Maybe society does not consider Jimmy's love as good as the sun, but the

moon's reflection is good enough. The fact that Jimmy has not had a satisfying relationship with a woman is undeniable. The fact that his relationship with a man ended badly, though, does not negate the pleasure it brought.

Ultimately, Jimmy's 'affair' with Edith ends in disgust as well. He is revolted by the ease with which she betrays her husband – too much like his mother. If Edith represents Jimmy's mother, then who does Dan represent? He is not exactly a father figure, though at one point Jimmy does imagine their impossible offspring. In a way, Dan is like both mother and father. He is sexually indecent and needy, like Jimmy's mother, but he is a man, with scratchy whiskers like Jimmy's father. Jimmy also sees himself as his mother, who is never clearly pictured or fully realised in the text. She remains (and represents) the mysterious, unknowable 'feminine' principle throughout the novel. Furthermore, by comparing himself to her Jimmy participates in (self-)feminisation, or psychic emasculation. As his hand brings Dan to climax he remembers witnessing the same thing between his mother and some man at a party. Thus, not only does he replicate history by whoring himself like his mother (as he sees it), but he also exacts a twisted kind of revenge. These images serve to sicken Jimmy and therefore ruin any chance for his encounter with Dan to be anything more than a despicable act of animalistic urges. Jimmy cannot acknowledge any other possibility.

Performing Masculinities: Tattoos in Duff

Tattooing was an important aspect of the pre-colonial Māori society. Men had their faces (as well as other parts of the body) tattooed during their teen years or in early adulthood in order to make them look more fierce in battle. These tattoos, *ta moko*, denoted manhood, and were a sign of courage, strength, and honour. Though I have used the widely understood term 'tattoo,' it must be noted here that there are

important differences which distinguish *ta moko* from Western-style tattoos. The Māori male facial tattoo is called *ta moko*, from *ta*, meaning ‘to strike’ (the method of application) and *moko*, meaning ‘mark.’ Traditional *ta moko* were more than mere pictures or designs inked on skin by multiple needles; they were intricate patterns chiselled into the flesh and filled in with pigment usually made from a soot mixture.¹²⁶ The process of receiving *ta moko* was long, arduous, and painful. The marked warrior was respected for tolerating the excruciating procedure, and *ta moko* was not only symbolic of his bravery and prowess, but also a constant physical reminder of his fortitude. Kapi proudly recalls, “these markings were endured without cry ... not one sound of pain, not in the days and days of tohunga tattooist hammering and chiselling them ... they are of beauty” (*BSM*, 257).

Tattoos and faces are a recurring theme in Duff’s novel. In Western societies, tattoos are usually considered a type of decoration, an embellishment. Europeans have been taught to think of tattooing among non-Western peoples at best as a kind of primitive beautification, and at worst as an example or confirmation of savagery.¹²⁷ Nikki Sullivan points out that in the West many researchers and theorists have assumed that tattoos are indicative of deviance and/or psychosis.¹²⁸ According to Duff, however, in the classical, formal language of the Māori, tattoos were referred to as

¹²⁶ Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* (Oxford & New York: Clarendon Press & Oxford University Press, 1993), 246. (Women’s facial tattoos were called *ta ngutu* (from *ta* and *ngutu*, ‘lips’), and were worn around the mouth and on the chin.) For more detailed descriptions of this practice see Ngahua T. Awekotuku, “Ta Moko: Māori Tattoo,” in *Goldie*, Roger Blakely and David Bateman, eds. (Auckland: David Bateman, 1997), 109-114; Michael King, *Moko: Maori Tattooing in the 20th Century* (Wellington: Alister Taylor, 1972); Ronald Scutt and Christopher Gotch, *Skin Deep: The Mystery of Tattooing* (London: Peter Davies, 1974), especially 27-37. Scutt and Gotch also quote from Sidney Parkinson’s *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas* (1773) which includes one of the earliest Western observations of the application of *ta moko*.

¹²⁷ An early twentieth-century example of this is illustrated in Albert Parry’s *Tattoo: Secrets of a Strange Art as Practiced Among the Natives of the United States* [1933] (New York: Collier, 1971). (‘Native’ here does not refer to the various Native American nations which practiced some form of tattooing, but rather to white Americans of European descent.) Parry cites an 1881 letter in the London *Saturday Review*, which refers to the “brainless indolence” of “the untutored and childish savage” (Parry, 22).

¹²⁸ Nikki Sullivan, *Tattooed Bodies: Subjectivity, Textuality, Ethics, and Pleasure* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001). Sullivan cites J. Yamamoto, et al., “The Tattooed Man,” in *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disorders* 136 (1963): 365-367; and N. Gittleson, et al., “The Tattooed Psychiatric Patient,” in *British Journal of Psychiatry* 115 (1969): 1249-1253; among others. For a fascinating analysis of tattooing in America in the early twentieth century see Parry, who theorised that tattooing in America had a predominantly sexual basis. He compared the act to having sex, with an active inserter and a passive receiver, and explored the (homo)erotic potential and sadomasochistic overtones of pleasure involved in the pain (Parry, 2 and 21-36).

“man’s true face” (*BSM*, 257). Following a raid on a neighbouring (presumably peaceful) village, Kapi watches from across the river as his men hunt down and slaughter the remnants of the tribe. “His face was with sneer to see an older man with proud tattoo markings and surprising speed bring up short at his precious waters.... Upriver, on a fine-sand patch, a fine young enemy’s face turned calm as he made the decision to fight his last” and “combat was announced by facial feature” from one of Kapi’s men (*BSM*, 128, 129). When his brother Tamatea rapes Tangiwai, Kapi’s favourite woman, Kapi metes out punishment – by impaling Tamatea on a long stake and parading him, still alive, through the surrounding villages. Kapi jabs at his impaled brother’s full facial tattoos and tells him that he has shamed his warrior markings. He also mocks Tamatea, asking why he had been unable to predict this outcome: “For surely foresight is also the untattooed mark of a great warrior?” he taunts (*BSM*, 64).

While I have not come across evidence specific to Māori practice, Alfred Gell indicates that throughout traditional Polynesian societies festivities to honour the newly tattooed individual(s) often included erotic dancing and other performances.¹²⁹ According to Gell, there is a clear link between tattooing and expressions or representations of sexuality among the various island cultures of the Pacific. Simplistically explained, tattooing beautifies the body which elicits or excites admiration and desire:

Marked ... skin draws in the gaze of the onlooker, exercises the power of fascination, and lowers certain defences. The eye isolates and follows the mazy pathways of the design and eventually, so to speak, enters the body of the other.... Thus to view a tattoo is already to be in a position of seduction; it provokes, not an aesthetic response but a kind of bodily looking which is intrinsically sexualized.¹³⁰

This fascination and desire is documented in the writings of many early European

¹²⁹ Gell, 35.

¹³⁰ Gell, 36.

explorers and settlers. In 1769, Joseph A. Banks, a scientist and historian aboard the Endeavour with James Cook, wrote in his journal about his encounter with Māori men who had their faces tattooed:

[It] is impossible to avoid admiring the extreme elegance and justness of the figures traced, which on the face are always different spirals ... resembling somewhat the foliage of old chasing upon gold and silver. All these are finished with a masterly taste and execution.¹³¹

In the nineteenth century adventurer and artist Augustus Earle remarked, “whenever we have seen a New Zealander whose skin is thus ornamented, we have admired him.”¹³² While these are examples of the coloniser’s desiring gaze, and there is no documentation of similar feelings by Māori men, it would be naïve to suggest that *ta moko* were never eroticised. Therefore, we can imagine that Kapi’s admiration of the young warrior’s “proud markings” is a look not only of respect (for the process, the pain undergone, the design, etc.) but also an eroticised gaze analogous to sexual intercourse and associated with images of the tattooing process itself as sexual subjection and penetration. As Gell points out, “even as the onlooker’s eye is drawn into the body of the other through the fascination exerted by the design, the ‘fringe’ of resonances of the tattooing process reinforces this sexualized looking.”¹³³

It is important to note that desire and sex do not always or necessarily imply, or are associated with, physical attraction and/or emotional attachment. One possible goal of desire is to dominate, to exert mastery over another, and sex can be the means of achieving that objective through force or violence. When Kapi impales his brother for the crime of rape, he is also committing symbolic or metaphorical rape. The imagery is eroticised; and is evoked later when Tangi is orally raped by the outcast leader. There is also sexual tension, a sense of erotic anticipation and potential, in the scenes

¹³¹ Sir Joseph A. Banks, *The Endeavour Journals of Joseph Banks, 1768-1771*, volume I, J. C. Beaglehole, ed. (Sydney: Angus & Robertson Ltd, 1962), 13-14.

¹³² Augustus Earle, *Augustus Earle: Narrative of a Residence in New Zealand, Journal of a Residence in Tristan Da Cunha*, Eric Hall McCormick, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 124.

¹³³ Gell, 36.

of one-on-one combat between men. Though none of the men captured in *Both Sides* is actually sodomised, this is symbolically performed through such acts as eating the flesh from a prisoner's buttocks. Gell indicates that in Māori thought men are considered virgins because they cannot be "deflowered" in the way women are.¹³⁴ Therefore, sexually penetrating a man against his will, whether literally or symbolically, would be humiliating not only for the one thus penetrated, but also for anyone facing such a threat. Like all things in the natural world according to Māori spirituality, various parts of the body are governed and regulated by the concepts of *tapu* (sacred) and *noa* (that which negates the sacred), which go beyond Western notions of holy and profane. *Tapu* can be good or bad and involves restrictions and prohibitions.¹³⁵ Ihimaera points out that the penis is *tapu* while the anus is considered *noa*.¹³⁶ Thus, anal intercourse with either sex was traditionally considered an outrage. Violating a man's tattooed body in such a way would not only be asserting one's supremacy and dominance over him, but would also be a degradation of, and offence against, the *moko* which had failed in its purpose to protect its wearer. As Ihimaera notes, "anal rape was sometimes applied to captured prisoners to desecrate their mana [prestige, (self-)respect] ... as the supreme act of derision and contempt."¹³⁷

As indicated earlier, faces themselves (not only the tattoos they may bear) are also important in the text. Many of the outcast people have facial deformities which indicate disease or mental deficiencies – the reason they were cast out of their tribes in the first place. Principal among those in the group Kapi encounters is Mihinui Taikato, the daughter of a chief, expelled because of an apparent stroke. Half her face seems to be sliding off: "That loose skin beneath the eye socket ... looked worse than might an old woman's vagina" (*BSM*, 255). Interestingly, this vulgar description is

¹³⁴ Gell, 268.

¹³⁵ For a fuller discussion see Barlow, 128-129.

¹³⁶ Ihimaera, "Masculinity & Desire," 123, 125.

¹³⁷ Ihimaera, "Masculinity & Desire," 125.

reminiscent of the Mbangu mask in the Pende cultures of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Mbangu is a comedic character afflicted by the gods, or cursed by sorcery. Kapi seems to interpret Mihi's disfigurement in the same light. He describes her as "damned ugly" (*BSM*, 257), "hideously featured" (*BSM*, 258), and braces himself "for the stench of her, the foul smell she was certain to carry" (*BSM*, 255).¹³⁸ Based on anthropological research, Z. S. Strother speculates that the Pende mask's disfiguration indicates facial palsy, the result of any number of maladies, from tumours and epilepsy, to syphilis, and even diabetes.¹³⁹ Mbangu's disability is his own fault, and his face is not only a reflection of his inner corruption, but also a cautionary tale to those who would try to obtain power fraudulently through the use of magic. Similarly, in the Maui version of the origins of *ta moko* discussed below, tattooing can represent the disfiguring strike by a god (analogous with the mark of Cain, or Jacob's limp in Biblical tradition), divine retaliation for trying to outdo one's superior (the ancient Greek sin of ὑβρις [hubris]).

Beauty and ugliness, and the contrast between tattooed and un-tattooed, appears throughout the novel. Tangi and her followers meet a group of outcasts which also includes several repulsively malformed members. Significantly, the first person they meet is a middle-aged man with no tattoos indicating he is not a warrior, implying he is despicable or a coward. He has "missing teeth and stumps from putrid gums" (*BSM*, 229). The leader of this assembly is a huge, filthy, hairless man covered in scabby sores, yet finely tattooed; his name, Hakere, means grotesque. And here we

¹³⁸ It is passages such as this, as well as Tangi's brutal rape and other violent, demeaning, or offensive descriptions involving women that have earned Duff the charge of misogyny, alluded to earlier in the discussion regarding Jimmy's relationship with his mother.

¹³⁹ Z.S. Strother, *Inventing Masks: Agency and History in the Art of the Central Pende* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 141-153. An examination of other ritual masks from around the world reveals a similarity between Mbangu and the Balinese mask of the witch Jaran Guyang, with one squinting eye and a misshapen lopsided mouth. See Judy Slattum, *Masks of Bali: Spirits of an Ancient Drama* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992), 84-85. In addition, a figure in Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* (1907) bears a striking resemblance to the Pende and Balinese masks; his *Las Meninas* variations (1957) also play with diagrammatic figures, the interlocking profiles which highlight the hybridity of beauty and ugliness. See Jonathan Brown, ed., *Picasso and the Spanish Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 28 and 135. Compare also to Ralph Steadman's *The Virgin Mary in Paranoias: from Socrates to Joan Collins* (London: Harrap, 1986), 20.

have the conceptual shift of the tattoo from being a sign of honour, bravery, and beauty to being associated with perversion, immorality, and abnormality; for Hakere is not only physically grotesque but also spiritually or intellectually abhorrent. He rapes Tangi, kills for pleasure, and exults in his meanness and ugliness. For Tangi and her people, he becomes a parody and the logical extension of the proud Māori warrior, a mirror and foil of Kapi.

Despite having run away from battle (leading to the massacre of his fellow warriors and the destruction of his village), despite living in hiding for over a year, and despite the shocking (for him) thoughts which show him the flaws of his traditional way of life, Kapi still finds pride in his tattoo markings. He assumes that the leader of the outcast group he encounters is a tall, muscular, young man, “rather handsome, if it weren’t for absence of facial tattoos, without which no man can be considered truly handsome. No man” (*BSM*, 217). He still finds it difficult to acknowledge or comprehend the new ways of thinking within the band of outcasts he meets. He still looks for the familiar trappings of his culture, for the acceptable beliefs, for the social conventions. But Kapi is surprised that the apparent leader is a middle-aged, unmuscular, unimposing man who further stretches Kapi’s incredulity by assuring him that this collective is leaderless. Wild Hair (as he calls himself) is merely acting as the group’s spokesman. They have no chief, no priest, no elders’ council, and women have the same right to speak as men. But one of the most startling revelations for Kapi is that the group has no respect for warriorhood, and killing is not part of their ways. Kapi decides to stay with this odd assortment of misfits.

Mihinui is unimpressed by Kapi’s tattoos. She says they are only adornments; they cannot and do not reveal the true nature of the man behind them (*BSM*, 258). According to one of the mythological traditions associated with the origins of Māori tattooing, Maui, the trickster god, was jealous of his human brother-in-law, Irawaru, who, on a fishing trip, caught an enormous amount of fish, while Maui caught none.

Maui turned Irawaru into a dog and beat him on the snout with a burning stick. Irawaru was condemned to eating excrement as a result.¹⁴⁰ It is interesting that an old form of facial tattooing prevalent in the south was known as *moko kuri* (dog tattoo) and that one ethnographic text states that a special type of soot was fed to dogs, whose excrement was used as tattooing pigment.¹⁴¹ So, in a sense, there is more to Mihi's ridiculing of Kapi's tattoos. When she mocks his "proud markings" she is laughing at the idea that his face is smeared in dog shit, and insulting him as nothing more than a mindless beast. Rather than denoting masculine dignity and courage, Kapi's tattoos betray inhuman fierceness and cruelty. Mihi overturns the traditional appreciation and admiration for the tattooed warrior and the protracted pain he had undergone to receive his *moko*, and focuses instead on the violence he has perpetrated as a fighter: "[W]hat had he done to deserve these markings he was so proud of? ... [T]o gain them it is assumed you give much excruciating pain to others" (*BSM*, 277-278).

Mihi's perceptiveness and eloquence, her evident good breeding, her ability to reason, and her lack of fear or subservience impress Kapi. As they continue their conversations, Kapi (renamed Moonlight) gains a new understanding of the world around him and his place in it. It is as if he has awoken from a dream, as if he has recovered from serious illness. And he begins to perceive Mihi's beauty; not only the physical attractiveness still evident in the undamaged half of her face, but also the inner radiance of wisdom, intelligence, and compassion – Moonlight looks into her face and knows love as never before. He uses the traditional Māori way of declaring his love: "Why stars, when I have the light of ... the sun, in my face?" (*BSM*, 276). The use of romantic, metaphorical language by a warrior indicates a transition in Kapi/Moonlight; just as his new name indicates, his enlightenment reflects the

¹⁴⁰ Gell, 252-253.

¹⁴¹ Gell, 248. Gell refers to Edge-Partington, *Album of Weapons, Tools, Ornaments and Articles of Dress of Natives of the Pacific Islands*, 3 vols. (Manchester: private publication, 1890); cited in H. Roth, "Maori Tatu and Moko," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* 31 (1901): 29-64. See also King, n.p. (chapter 3: "Chisel Tattooing").

attitudes and wisdom learned from Mihi. Significantly, Kapi's conception of a 'Māori' masculinity (which fits the colonial, Western model) is challenged not by contact with the settlers, but by contact with the Māori outcasts, especially an outcast woman.

Kapi/Moonlight's group of outcasts becomes aware of a new tribe of people arriving – it is the time of the first European colonists. One of the outcasts acquires a mirror, “a shiny piece of smoothest, hard material, which gave off most frightening images back at whosoever gazed upon [it]” (*BSM*, 276). They decide it is a kind of magical water reflection which tells a clearer truth than water can. Moonlight wants to see his tattoos and is disappointed with the less-than-handsome face peering back (*BSM*, 277). For the first time in his life he sees himself as others (particularly outsiders) see him: his scarred, inked, unattractive face as either menace or spectacle. He becomes the object of his own gaze, and the awareness of how he is seen by the Other will inform his future (inter)actions.

Mihi's troupe also obtain some books, curious objects made of thin white layers covered in black symbols and inexplicably bound together. They believe that these items and their markings hold the essence of the white people's way of life. Many of the outcasts decide to make contact with the strangers. Mihi tells Kapi/Moonlight that now he can justifiably be proud of his tattooed face, for *his* markings will be unique among the white men. She assures him that he will have “tales [to] enthrall them with” (*BSM*, 311). While this can be seen as a failure to anticipate the difference or the range of possibilities in the European view (the coloniser's gaze), given the possibility of multiple, and even contradictory, interpretations it is important for the marginalised subject to be heard, to regain or reassert one's voice. Kapi's *ta moko* will be a link to his past, a visual record of his courage, a kind of badge of honour. Although Gell asserts that a tattoo has meaning only in relation to the specific “external social milieu” which it reflects and in which it was produced, it is possible,

I would argue, for that meaning to be communicated outside the boundaries of the generating community.¹⁴² Mihi empowers and emboldens Kapi to assert or reclaim his voice and his ability/right to speak rather than to be read and interpreted by others, especially strangers. In other words, Kapi can be (pro)active in telling his story instead of passively allowing the colonists/settlers to imagine and tell stories about him.

In the postcolonial (Westernised) present of the novel most Māori no longer wear *ta moko*. In addition, the tattoo markings a few Pākehā have usually signify a lower class or criminal status. The symbolic order of the Pākehā prevails over that of Māori, who are no longer in control of how their bodies will be read. According to Samuel Steward, “Since a tattoo to certain levels of society is the mark of a thug, it becomes also the sign of inarticulate revolt, often producing its only possible result – violence.”¹⁴³ This seems particularly apt in the case of the modern-day gang members in *Both Sides* (and even more so in Duff’s Heke family trilogy, which begins with *Once Were Warriors*). In general, today’s mainstream Pākehā society considers full body or facial tattoos as thuggish and anti-intellectual.¹⁴⁴ However, in a possibly ironic twist, violence usually lands a criminal in jail where, more often than not, he will get a tattoo. In an interview with Antonella Sarti Duff comments,

the original warriors never made a sound and [*ta moko*] was done with taste and dignity.... To me, the tattoo of the original Maori warrior

¹⁴² Gell, 37. Just such a project has been undertaken by the University of Waikato Māori & Psychology Research Unit. Headed by Professor Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, this comprehensive study aims not only to examine the significance of *ta moko* since pre-colonial days through to the present, but also make available oral histories, as well as record contemporary practices, attitudes, and representations. See MPRU Staff, *Ta Moko: Culture, Body Modification and the Psychology of Identity* (University of Waikato: 21 January 2004). Available online at <http://psychology.waikato.ac.nz/mpru>. 19 November 2004.

¹⁴³ Samuel M. Steward, *Bad Boys and Tough Tattoos: A Social History of the Tattoo with Gangs, Sailors and Street-Corner Punks, 1950-1965* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1990), 66.

¹⁴⁴ See Linda Waimarie Nikora and Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, “Cultural Tattoos: Meanings, Descriptions, and Attributions,” and Puawai Cairns, “He Taonga te Ta Moko ki Tauranga Moana: A Survey of Attitudes, Opinions, Whakāro Noa Iho, Towards Ta Moko During the Tauranga Moana, Tauranga Tangata Festival (Labour Weekend 2002),” in *The Proceedings of the National Māori Graduates of Psychology Symposium 2002*. See also Linda Waimarie Nikora, Mohi Rua, and Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, “In Your Face: Wearing Moko – Māori Facial Marking in Today’s World,” presented at the Tatau/Tattoo: Embodied Art and Cultural Exchange Conference, Victoria University (Wellington, 21 January 2004). Available online at <http://psychology.waikato.ac.nz/mpru/moko>. 19 November 2004.

came because he was adequate, wholly adequate as a warrior, whereas a gang-member was getting tattooed because he was wholly inadequate.¹⁴⁵

In the novel one of Jimmy's brothers, Brian, ends up killing a rival in a fight, and instead of being honoured as a warrior by getting a facial tattoo, he is jailed. As a convicted felon Brian will bear "a taboo scar signifying the damage he's done to others – and himself" (*BSM*, 313). His prison tattoo will act as a signal of his identity as an offender (one who has transgressed the law) and obscure other identities (brother, friend, lover, student, etc.). The "taboo scar" is both the literal and figurative marking Brian receives in prison. The word taboo comes from the Māori/Polynesian *tapu*, denoting ritualised and formulaic law. *Tapu* also means "touched by the gods," or set apart, not only in the sense of being sacred but also meaning marked, contaminated, or off limits.¹⁴⁶ Its use here is doubly significant as it links and contrasts the debasement and disgrace of contemporary Māori with their ancient *mana*, pride and honour. It also brings to mind Hakere's corruption, and relates his debased *ta moko* to Brian's criminal tattoo.

For the modern social outcast, getting tattooed can be regarded as "a voluntary act of social self-stigmatization."¹⁴⁷ In a very real sense the tattooed body is 'tortured,' 'marked,' and forced to 'emit signs' of its subjection.¹⁴⁸ This is certainly the case with Brian: his tattoo will indicate that he was a prisoner; it is a self-inflicted mark-of-Cain which will forever brand him as a felon, a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy setting him apart as an outsider among law-abiding citizens. It also represents an act of will over his own body which is paradoxically constrained (incarcerated), and may be objectified and used by others (prison rape), against his will. Duff refers to prison rape in his Heke family trilogy (especially in *Once Were Warriors* and *What Becomes of*

¹⁴⁵ Sarti, 35.

¹⁴⁶ Barlow, 128-129.

¹⁴⁷ Gell, 37.

¹⁴⁸ See Michel Foucault, "The Body of the Condemned" (from *Discipline and Punish*), in *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, ed. (London: Penguin, 1991), 170-256.

the Broken Hearted). Though it is not mentioned here, one could easily assume that a handsome young man like Brian would become the object of such assaults in the prison's homosocial environment. His taboo scar suggests and elides more than he may be willing to disclose verbally.

That tattoos serve as non-verbal communication is evident throughout the pre-colonial portions of Duff's text.¹⁴⁹ Kapi reads and interprets these messages based on his cultural experience and knowledge. He finds it difficult to acknowledge or comprehend the new ways of thinking within the band of outcasts who take him in. For Kapi it is the absence, rather than a multiplicity, of tattoos that marks deviance. The lack of facial tattoos on the virile young man he had assumed was their leader is an interruption or occlusion of the message, which, like a blank (or even missing) page, leaves its reader confused; it provides a negative message and Kapi initially interprets its absence accordingly – until he is able to decipher this new message not as lack or deficiency but as alternative.

Seen/read as pictures, tattoos have stories to tell. In the West it is often taken for granted that tattoos speak for the person who possesses/wears them. Though the subject may be silent, or silenced, his body markings tell of who and what others imagine he is: savage, uncivilised, criminal, rebel, pervert, etc. Thus, as Elizabeth Grosz would put it, Kapi's tattooed face is transformed into text, "fictionalised and positioned within those myths that form [the Māori] culture's social narratives and self-representations."¹⁵⁰ Referring to Alphonso Lingis, Sullivan proposes the tattooed body be read as a map, but cautions that "tattooed bodies, and the stories they

¹⁴⁹ Sullivan uses Elisabeth Ostermann's phrase, "communication without words" from the introduction to Chris Wroblewski, *Modern Primitives* (Vienna: Verlag Christian Brandstatter, 1988), 7. Cited in Sullivan, 38-39.

¹⁵⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, "Inscriptions and Body-Maps: Representations and the Corporeal," in *Feminine, Masculine and Representation*, T. Threadgold and A. Cranny-Francis, eds. (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990), 65-66. Cited in Sullivan, 184.

seemingly tell, are duplicitous.”¹⁵¹ Gell also suggests that the skin can be considered as a kind of “external biographical memory, a kind of ever-present, inbuilt system ... for reconstructing the person as a locus of remembered events.”¹⁵² This can also be read in light of Foucault’s conception of the body as ‘imprinted by history’ where the face bearing *ta moko* is literally the ‘inscribed surface of events.’¹⁵³ Thus, Kapi’s *moko* “is a registration of the causal factors which produced it ... a symbolic residue of the totality of causal factors, events, social obligations, individual and collective relationships impinging on the social person.”¹⁵⁴ In the West, the primary reason cited for getting a tattoo is to assert or create a personal identity. *Ta moko*, on the other hand, places the subject within a society, not necessarily as an individual but as a member of the group. When such group identification is no longer viable or possible for Kapi, his tattoos take on new meaning and significance because they *do* create a personal identity for him within a new context.

Nicknames as Camouflage in Ihimaera’s *Nights*

Although faces and tattoos are not central in Ihimaera’s *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, names and naming take on a similar significance. In many cultures, personal names are indicative of character traits or illustrate a hope for the child. (Re)Naming ceremonies are often performed when a child reaches puberty or adulthood, and again after some momentous occasion such as a major accomplishment or the death of a parent or leader.¹⁵⁵ In Western societies we usually do not think of names as

¹⁵¹ Sullivan, 177. For more on tattooing as “bodily inscription” see Alphonso Lingis, “Savages,” in *Excesses: Eros and Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983): 17-46.

¹⁵² Gell, 36.

¹⁵³ See Michel Foucault, “Right of Death and Power over Life,” *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* [1976], Robert Hurley, trans. (New York: Vintage, 1980), 135-159.

¹⁵⁴ Gell, 36.

¹⁵⁵ My childhood playmate Angelos was renamed Panikos after his father, who was one of the first men killed during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974.

meaning something particular.¹⁵⁶ Many of the characters in *Nights* are given monikers rather than names, illustrative epithets which say almost as much about the namer as the named. This is especially true of most of the 'gay' men who populate the nighttime city. They are compartmentalised (or labelled as types) and, in a sense, de-personalised even though each carries his own appellation. There is "The Bald One" who avoids sitting under light fixtures (and whose nickname evokes the author James Baldwin¹⁵⁷); "Wet Dream Walking," with his washboard abs and popping pecs; "Hope Springs Eternal," who wears glasses and never gets approached for sex; "Snake Charmer," of Indian heritage with hypnotically suggestive eyes (and a not very subtle hint about other snake-like attributes); "Always a Bridesmaid" and "Fat Forty And a Fairy," the two perpetually present and often sexually uninvolved 'aunties' of the baths; "Oh My Goodness," David's exaggeratedly well-endowed Canadian lover; and a host of other major and minor players.¹⁵⁸

Such nicknaming can be considered as marginalising those named, but on the other hand, it could also be seen as a kind of masking, a way of protecting their 'true,' or private, identities. Masks are also a means of homogenising difference, or of concealing individuality in order to highlight a certain attribute. Masks were employed in ancient Greek theatre in order to identify specific characters, types, and emotions. The same was and still is true of many forms of traditional performances, from Japan to Indonesia to Central Africa, as well as in Native American nations and many others. Throughout her beautiful pictorial on performance in Bali, Judy Slattum elucidates the way in which various masks expose the nature and personality of the characters they portray: Rama's "refined features ... reflect his

¹⁵⁶ However, many immigrants to (post)colonial settler nations such as Australia and the United States were (and in some cases still are) renamed either by the authorities or themselves as an indication of future (hoped for and expected) assimilation into the (white, Anglo) mainstream. My great-uncle Stylianos became Stanley and my father Dimitris became Jim; while my friends Chie-Ching and Bao-Lun chose Jason and Barry respectively.

¹⁵⁷ This may be an elaborate inside joke. In some ways, Ihimaera's novel echoes *Giovanni's Room* (1956) by James Baldwin.

¹⁵⁸ One of the few 'gay' characters who actually gets a name beyond the alias is "Hope Springs Eternal," Jack Alwyn-Jones, who is unmasked about one third of the way into the novel (*NGS*, 113).

supreme grace and nobility,” while Rawana’s “bulging eyes” and other grotesque features “betray his wickedness,” and Wibisana’s mask “reveals his soul.”¹⁵⁹ The audience instantly knows who is on stage, what role is being performed, and what response or reaction is expected and acceptable. Mikhail Bakhtin asserted,

the mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself. The mask is related to transformation, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful element in life; it is based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles.¹⁶⁰

At Western masquerade balls, carnival festivities, and Halloween parties the object is often to disguise the individual. Many of the available masks and outfits are stock characters. At Halloween these are usually princesses, witches, devils, vampires, and cute little animals; and at the Sydney Mardi Gras they can be princesses, fairies, devils, cowboys, or sailors. But sometimes we see representatives from politics (such as George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden, John Howard or Saddam Hussein in recent years) or popular entertainment (Madonna and Kylie Minogue, or characters from *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and *Harry Potter* film series). In comedic representations much is made of the confusion of identities when more than one person wears the same costume. Shakespeare often employed this device in his romances, which also play with gender confusion, disguise, and illusion.

By obscuring the names of many of the men he meets, David (and ultimately, of course, Ihimaera) presents us with caricatures, stock characters within the ‘gay’ subculture, stereotypes which we can instantly identify as any number of individuals where individuality is not so desirable. This often takes the form of exaggerated

¹⁵⁹ Slattum, 54, 72, 60.

¹⁶⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* [1965], Helene Iswolsky, trans. (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1968), 39-40. See also, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind” [1960] in Galen A. Johnson, ed., *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 121-149.

masculine or heterosexual attributes, a kind of hyper-masculinisation of certain 'types.'¹⁶¹ 'Gay' subcultures are plagued by the 'clone' phenomenon in which types inhabit not only media representations but also the real-life social gatherings and 'gay ghettos' of almost every major Western(ised) city: the military dude, the leather daddy, the hunky labourer, the gym rat or 'muscle mary', the fat and hairy 'bear,' the young and cute 'twink,' the artisté, etc. – adequate variety, yet limited enough to create a perpetual cast of that iconic '70s disco group, The Village People. In essence, the mask is of more importance than the individual who is behind/within it and who animates it. So it is that in *Nights* we do not need to know much about the pair of "cowboys" or "Italian Stallion" to realise that they are infinitely more desirable than "Beer Gut," "Once a Beauty," and "Hope Springs Eternal." We get pulled into the culture of superficiality and quick sex where hard bodies, cute faces, and amazing technique are prized above good character traits and long-term committed relationships. According to Butler, such anonymity through veiling "conceals loss, but preserves (and negates) this loss through its concealment."¹⁶² Thus, the constant search for excitement and incredible sex is itself a mask behind which many of the 'gay' men depicted here hide their anxieties and loneliness.

This is also evident in the 'gay' transactions described or suggested in Alan Duff's *Both Sides of the Moon*. The relationship between Jimmy and Dan is not based on love or mutual admiration. It is a hunger, a need for something that is missing. For Jimmy, contact with Dan provides an emotional as well as a physical release. But it is also a form of retribution on two different levels. Jimmy is ultimately on a Freudian quest for love and acceptance. He is searching for the nurturing his mother has never provided. By having sex with Dan he penalises himself for wanting the unattainable and for being weak. In addition, Jimmy is punishing his mother for abandoning him, for not caring where he is or what he does. His Oedipal fixation is distorted, bent back against itself, and in his mind he commits the ultimate revenge – he 'becomes'

¹⁶¹ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁶² Butler, 50.

his mother by having loveless sex with a virtual stranger.

In *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* David confesses that most of his experiences with men were “anonymous bouts” (NGS, 38). In the early part of the novel, this somehow allows him to believe that his homosexuality is just a phase: “When having sex with a man I would put up a wall between the physical act and emotional involvement” (NGS, 38). Here the ‘wall’ can also be read or (re)interpreted as a façade – an obstruction behind which David hides, that conceals himself from himself. However, the wall to which he refers in the above quotation is not the only one he has constructed. Such façades are disguises, which function as a “means of transgressing boundaries because [they] provide an avenue for selective personification in manipulating certain recognised paradoxes.”¹⁶³ David assumes different disguises as he crosses the boundaries between ‘gay’ and ‘straight.’ Around his family and co-workers he hides behind the façade of normality and social conformity, a wall constructed on denial and his fear of discovery: “I felt that with the right woman I could give up men and become a responsible, contributing citizen” (NGS, 38). He has convinced himself that he is actually heterosexual because he has been capable of loving women and because he has dreamed of having a family (as if ‘gay’ men do not want or cannot have the same desires for parenthood and domesticity).

In some respects, the nicknames in *Nights* operate as façades that camouflage various identities, but they are also revealing. Paradoxically, perhaps, these appellations disclose more about the narrator (and author) who attributes them, than about the characters who are described. There are only two Māori characters in *Nights*, and both have only minor speaking parts. We never learn their ‘real’ names. The first is a classmate of David’s at Saint Crispin’s College. It seems all the other boys called him “Nigger” – and this is the name David continues to use when referring to him (NGS,

¹⁶³ A. David Napier, *Masks, Transformation, and Paradox* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 17.

97).¹⁶⁴

It is currently accepted among the younger generation in certain cultures (particularly within the hip-hop and rap subcultures) that people of colour (especially African-Americans) may use this term as a way of reclaiming and reconstructing it in the affirmative (though this is an arguable point). Nonetheless, it is also widely held that this usage is not available to non-black people, especially whites of European descent, because they represent the oppressors who originally brandished the word as a slur. An episode of the popular television program *Boston Public* dealt with this very issue.¹⁶⁵ As the program pointed out, use of the word is still highly controversial, with many people fiercely divided on this volatile topic. One of the show's central characters declared that if one has not been on the receiving end of the epithet as a form of racism one cannot know the pain it causes. This is somewhat similar to the fairly recent appropriation of the terms 'fag' and 'queer' by members of Western (mainly English-speaking) 'gay' communities, or 'wog' by immigrant ethnic minorities in Australia. Use of the offending term is an unfortunate projection of David's racism, made worse by the fact that he is completely unaware of it. One could argue that by being Māori, Ihimaera is able to use the term without negative repercussions. There are two reasons, however, that I do not believe this to be the case. First, Ihimaera has chosen a Pākehā as his spokesperson and second, the term is not used in a friendly or endearing way. A third possibility, however, is that Ihimaera uses this as an indirect comment on subconscious, or unacknowledged and barely concealed, racism still present in New Zealand society.

In his seminal exposition on orientalism, Edward Said demonstrated the existence of gender stereotyping within colonial discourse. The colonial impetus and its

¹⁶⁴ Having lived for many years in the United States, I find this epithet highly offensive. I do not even like to use the word and find it very difficult to write, let alone say.

¹⁶⁵ David E. Kelley, *Boston Public*, Season 2, Episode 37 (Fox Television Network, 2002) television series.

justification was often couched in gendered and even sexualised terms, with the imperial power often described as masculine, strong, and forceful, while the colonised place was viewed as “a geographical space to be cultivated, harvested ... as something inviting ... penetration [and] insemination.”¹⁶⁶ The non-European male was portrayed as either lascivious and driven by animalistic urges he could scarcely control, or ‘effeminate,’ weak, and passive. “The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness,” according to Said.¹⁶⁷ Although he was not using the word ‘queer’ with its current connotations of transgressive or alternative sexualities, the statement can be easily read and interpreted in those terms. For Europeans (the ‘West’), the ‘East’ was rife with ‘queer’ activity. An example of this is the feminised depiction of the male figure in Gauguin’s 1902 painting, *Marquesan Man in a Red Cape*, whose stance curiously mirrors that of the woman in *Te nave nave fenua* (The Delightful Land, 1892).¹⁶⁸

David refers to the second Māori character as “The Noble Savage.” The implications of that soubriquet may cause the reader to cringe. If we are to ignore the negative suggestion of the Māori man as uncivilised or primitive, we are left with several options. David suffers from the inbred condescension (albeit a ‘positive’ prejudice) of his European forebears, or the author is using irony to highlight the present-day status of Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand.¹⁶⁹ Ihimaera’s Noble Savage is the perfect

¹⁶⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* [1978], reprinted with a new Afterword (New York: Penguin, 1995), 219.

¹⁶⁷ Said, 103.

¹⁶⁸ This could have been an authentic representation of a Tahitian *mahu*, a member of the ‘third sex’ – males who “may be morphologically ‘feminine’ or they may be ‘masculine’ in appearance though feminine in psychosocial identity.” Stephen F. Eisenman, *Gauguin’s Skirt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 106. However, Nancy Mowll Matthews asserts that the red ‘cape’ worn by the young man is actually a *pareu*, the skirt-like garment worn by Tahitian men: “In Gauguin’s rearranging of the man’s garments, the *pareu* is now inexplicably draped over his shoulders as a cape, leaving his legs visible and his shirt just barely covering his genitals. This suggestion of sexual availability ... [the] long hair and the startling discovery of a tiare, the flower of sexual invitation, tucked over his ear and another held out in his hand toward us give a final clue to Gauguin’s daring eroticization of the figure.” Nancy Mowll Matthews, *Paul Gauguin: An Erotic Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 244-245. The painting is also reminiscent of *Vahine no te Tiare* (Tahitian Woman with a Flower, 1891), in which the woman is wearing a flower in her hair as well as holding a flower in her hand. Included in Eisenman’s book are photos taken during the nineteenth and early twentieth century which show ‘native’ men and women in very similar and alluring ‘come-hither’ poses.

¹⁶⁹ Alternatively, one could posit that Ihimaera is displaying a kind of internalised racism, or is guilty of self-

man – attractive, intelligent, friendly, passionate. He has long black hair and looks as though he belongs in a Gauguin painting: “[He] wears a red flower behind his ear in unaffected delight” (NGS, 16).¹⁷⁰ He is an activist on behalf of ‘gay’ Māori and, therefore, David regards him as out of reach: “It is bad enough to be gay in his cultural milieu, but it is doubly disempowering to have a white lover ... His people have already been fucked by whites. First as imperialists. Then as second-class gays within our own white-driven gay networks” (NGS, 17). The Noble Savage is fetishised, and his nickname alludes not only to the romantic (even erotic) fantasies of colonial Europeans in an earlier era, but also to the contemporary fascination/repulsion with the mysterious and exotic Other.

By employing the Noble Savage label Ihimaera highlights the ambivalent present-day status of Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand as well as their position and representation in the popular media.¹⁷¹ Based on the author’s body of work, both fiction and non-fiction as well as speeches, interviews, and personal correspondence, it is clear that Ihimaera is making an indictment of New Zealand’s dominant Pākehā culture (and the predominantly white ‘gay’ subculture). “The Pakeha ... is my primary target. He, more than anybody else, is squarely in my sights,” Ihimaera confirms.¹⁷²

Ihimaera has always maintained that all his writing is highly autobiographical. In a personal communication he indicated that he chose a Pākehā narrator as the protagonist in *Nights* as a deliberate strategy to create a space in which he would be heard, to distance his ‘Māoriness’ from his message, even though David Munro and

promotion in the form of idealisation. However, I do not think the former is the case, especially after my conversations with the author. He is very self-assured and proud of his heritage, as well as being aware of his position as a social innovator and cultural champion. Whether he is guilty of self-idealisation I leave to the reader to decide.

¹⁷⁰ I maintain that Ihimaera makes a conscious reference to the artist’s exoticisation of the Southern Pacific native. Interestingly, Gauguin liked to think of himself as a ‘savage.’ See, Lawrence and Elisabeth Hanson, *Noble Savage: The Life of Paul Gauguin* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954).

¹⁷¹ One need only think of films such as *The Piano* (1993) or the appropriation of moko-style tattooing by celebrities such as singer Robbie Williams and boxer Mike Tyson.

¹⁷² Ihimaera, personal correspondence (2 August, 2003).

his situation mirror Ihimaera's: "I wanted to create a hero who was an everyman."¹⁷³ He had to wait until a later stage in his life before he felt able to focus on a Māori central character who is also 'gay' (Michael Mahana in *The Uncle's Story*, also discussed in this chapter).

While it is true that Ihimaera was not using a *nom de plume* to disguise his identity, it is significant that he adopted a Pākehā narratorial persona. It appears that by consciously placing himself in the role of the white man (as David the narrator) Ihimaera detaches himself from his experiences as Māori in order to criticise Māori communities within which he does not feel free to express himself as a 'gay' man. This strategy also allows his readers to look critically at the narrator. It is easy to assume that *Nights* represents a complex sort of disengagement in which the conflicted author falls into the trap of writing himself out of his own story.¹⁷⁴ Ihimaera wants to articulate the reality of his homosexuality yet feels he cannot do so within the constraints of his ethnicity. By downplaying (or ignoring) his background he becomes free to talk about his sexuality. Nevertheless, adopting a white narratorial point of view does not necessarily mean that the author is rejecting his background. He is, in fact, dramatising another point of view, one with which he feels his target Pākehā audience can better identify. Rather than accepting or identifying with the Pākehā point of view, his use of David as narrator allows Ihimaera to also look back at himself, to provide an image of himself from the outside. The irony is that in the process, his ethnicity *does* become marginalised and cannot occupy a more important position within this new narrative.

After reading the chapter titled "Bunga in a Bucket" in *Growing Up Maori*, the volume edited by Ihimaera, as well as notes in Ihimaera's archive, I am convinced that Māori

¹⁷³ Witi Ihimaera, interview by the author (Auckland, 10 July 2003), tape recording and subsequent private communication.

¹⁷⁴ As stated previously, this is reminiscent of the Baldwin novel. Note that the narrator in *Giovanni's Room* is also called David.

entertainer Mika provided at least partial inspiration for the character of The Noble Savage.¹⁷⁵ Mika's onstage persona is a fusion of tradition, gaudiness, and drag. In the Mika Haka show (2003) he appeared shirtless, in a grass skirt, with top hat, bowtie, and sequined tuxedo jacket. Mika also happens to be an outspoken activist for Polynesian and 'gay' rights. His dance troupe, Torotoro, features mainly male gender-b(l)ending Māori and Polynesian dancers who perform in a variety of hybrid styles including break dance/haka and hip-hop/hula. The name of his group means 'vanguard' and has been described in the press as a 'cutting edge tribe.'¹⁷⁶ Elements of Mika's performance are also incorporated in Ihimaera's discarded screenplay version of *Nights*, as part of the dance routine performed by Chris (protagonist David Munro's boyfriend) towards the end of the narrative.¹⁷⁷

Peter Pan in the Gardens of Spain

Nights in the Gardens of Spain, Ihimaera's 'coming-out' novel, is not set in Spain, nor does it refer to a restaurant (as one of the characters seems to believe). "Gardens of Spain" is what the narrator's friend, Jack Alwyn-Jones, euphemistically and affectionately calls the saunas, bars, theatres, and beaches where 'gay' men meet (NGS, 113). It alludes to an orchestral rhapsody by Manuel de Falla, "Noches en los jardines de España" (1915).

David, the narrator in Ihimaera's novel, often refers to his former home as the "Ship of Dreams," which could be an allusion to Peter Pan, but is more likely just a term which evokes fairytales in general. Dean Morrissey has written a children's book

¹⁷⁵ See Mika, "Bunga in a Bucket," in *Growing Up Maori*, Witi Ihimaera, ed. (Auckland: Tandem Press, 1998), 268-269.

¹⁷⁶ See for example, 'Reloaded - Mika Haka,' *Moving Image Centre Interdigitate* (July 2003). Available online at http://www.mic.org.nz/public_html/mika.html. 15 July 2003.

¹⁷⁷ The film was never produced. Ihimaera's screenplay is housed in his archives, in the Beaglehole Room at the Victoria University Library in Auckland. I had access to this material in July 2003.

called *Ship of Dreams* (1994). However, the Titanic was also referred to as the Ship of Dreams. Whether consciously or not, there is a parallel. David's home life is like a doomed ship, his family blissfully unaware of the impending disaster. And when David comes out as 'gay,' then files for divorce, his wife and daughters are left drowning in sorrow and anger. Interestingly, "Ship of Dreams" (1999) is also the title of a self-produced album by Nova Scotia vocal ensemble DonnaWendyAndy. (The name Wendy is also evocative of Peter Pan.) The only ship referred to in J. M. Barrie's classic is Captain Hook's pirate ship. Hook's presence is also discernible in the novel. In fact, the Peter Pan theme runs throughout *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, at first in more subtle ways and eventually in very overt identifications.

This idea of the "Ship of Dreams" is a recurring one. The phrase "full sail toward the shining star second from the right, and straight on till morning" is repeated several times. In one instance David uses it to seduce Annabelle, his future wife. In the Barrie play and novel, Peter Pan gives directions to his Neverland home: "Second to the right, and straight on till morning," he tells Wendy.¹⁷⁸ In the first chapter, David is on his way back to his flat after a night at the steam parlour, a sex-on-premises 'gay' hangout. He stops by the house where his wife and two daughters live: "Silhouetted against the sky, the house is a Ship of Dreams, a galleon set full sail toward the shining star second from the right. The forward sails are luminous with the moon ... sprinkling stardust as they billow and swirl ... the sound of tiny bells tinkles in the wind" (NGS, 14). The imagery of this description is redolent of children's fairy stories and allusions to the Peter Pan tale.

In Western 'gay' subcultures Peter Pan is somewhat of an icon, the boy who never grows up, an eternal youth. Significantly, some of the most famous actors to portray Peter Pan on stage have been women (such as Mia Farrow and Cathy Rigby). There is a subversive nature to what has become a modern myth. Here is a boy who refuses

¹⁷⁸ J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* [1911] (Leicester, England: Brockhampton Press, 1971), 56.

to grow up, who wears tights and flies and speaks in a funny way, who prefers to live with the “lost boys” (itself another label used to describe ‘gay’ men). In fact, the phrase “lost boys” takes on new significance in terms of Ihimaera’s novel. Who are the lost boys, Wendy wants to know in Barrie’s original. Peter explains that they are children who fell out of their prams but were not claimed by their parents.¹⁷⁹ Thus, the idea of ‘gay’ people being “lost boys” implies that they are the discarded and unwanted members of society.¹⁸⁰

Even details which may not have any connection with the Peter Pan story gain a glow of allusion because of the prevalence of other indications and suggestions in the novel. David and Charles would make love “with one eye on the clock” (*NGS*, 220) lest they be caught out by David’s parents. Ticking clocks marking out the time seem to be a natural enemy of one who longs to remain in a lover’s embrace, or to stay young forever. But clocks are also important in the Peter Pan story. The alligator who bit off Captain Hook’s hand also swallowed a clock. The ticking sound alerted Captain Hook to the presence and relative nearness of the alligator, always giving him enough time to escape – that is, until the clock stopped.

The question of masculinity seems more central, more of a conscious concern in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* than it is in *Both Sides of the Moon*. In *Nights*, Ihimaera seems to be operating from a constructionist’s point of view. David, the protagonist, implies that there can be a ‘how’ one’s (homo)sexuality develops rather than a ‘why,’ even though the two questions are closely linked and the responses can be reasoned either way. At several points in the narrative David attempts to answer this ‘how.’ For example, he recollects his days at boarding school where “unceasing collisions would occur between myself, authority and religion.... much of the battle would be played on the dangerous ground dealing with masculinity and sex” (*NGS*, 95, 97). He

¹⁷⁹ Barrie, 46-47.

¹⁸⁰ Duff’s protagonist, Jimmy, also uses the term “lost boys” to describe the “wasted children” of his unfruitful climax with Dan, and to allude to his relationship with his as-yet-undiscovered lover (*BSM*, 150, 152).

declares that "Masculinity in adolescence is all about physical strength.... [The] boy who is king by virtue of his physical or sporting prowess" is the one who achieves dominance (NGS, 101).

As a boarding student David lived in the "worst" house with all the other misfits and outcasts, "that disparate band of loners crippled in some way by lack of sporting abilities, intelligence, by wrong race or religion" (NGS, 96). The house was called Harrow, and one could think that it was obviously named after the famous college in London. It is interesting to note, though, that the verb *harrow* means to torment, or cause someone to suffer. And that is precisely what happened to the inhabitants at Saint Crispin's Harrow House. The teachers harassed them and the other students bullied them. David constantly fought the bullies and exasperated the masters with his questions. Looking back at his experiences, David realises that many of the teachers were sexually repressed. "In that place of ... boys in the company of boys, it was important to enforce an acceptable heterosexual code of sexual conduct... To enforce gender roles and masculinity. To combat homoeroticism" (NGS, 105). David, who already knew he was 'different,' was determined not to be exposed. But another Harrow boy was not so lucky.

"Choirboy" had an attractive face and an even more beautiful voice. When the headmaster gave a lecture condemning homosexuality on the basis of the Sodom and Gomorrah story in Genesis chapter 19, "Choirboy" dared to contradict his assertions. The other boys discovered that he had been sent to Saint Crispin's because his father wanted to cure him of his self-confessed homosexuality. Eventually, the bullies assailed "Choirboy;" they beat him, raped him with a broomstick, covered him in excrement. It was a savage attack, but the boys implicated were pardoned: "It was not their fault that they had been provoked into this assault by a sexual deviant" (NGS, 110). Towards the end of the novel we discover that "Choirboy" grew up to be "Hope Springs Eternal" (Jack Alwyn-Jones), David's friend and colleague who

commits suicide; the same boy who crawled into David's bed one night at Harrow to comfort him as he lay crying.

For David, Jack's quiet grace in the face of opposition by the headmaster and his eventual brutalisation were a watershed moment in his development. "Choirboy" represented all that David was afraid to be. It would be years, however, before David could muster the courage to identify as 'gay.' Along the way, he met Charles, whom he refers to as "The Love Of My Life." By this time, David was at university and in a sexual relationship with Annabelle, his future wife. She was not ready for commitment, though, and this propelled David into the arms of someone who was – and who happened to be a man. But the relationship with Charles did not last and soon after David and Annabelle married.

Families and a New 'Gay' Tribe

In *Both Sides of the Moon*, Jimmy is redeemed from a life of abjection through the intervention of the Law: "A magistrate saves me from Dan, from myself even though I don't know it at the time" (*BSM*, 288). In the chapter following this declaration, Jimmy explains how he became involved with a gang, modern-day frustrated warriors who end up beating another group of boys for no apparent reason except that they (the other boys) seem to 'belong,' to be in the acceptable inner circle rather than at (or outside) the margins. His gang resorts to violence to release a lifetime of pent up anger for being on the outside, for the loss of innocence in their miserable existence. Jimmy's oldest brother commits suicide while another of his brothers ends up committing murder. Jimmy obviously equates being 'gay' with being a vandal, thief, attacker, or murderer. For him, they're all outside the law, all are lower forms of being. Of course, Dan would be considered a criminal, a paedophile, for Jimmy is only fifteen. So in a sense, Jimmy must be rescued from Dan. Yet I can't help feeling

that it is more than just being saved from a potentially abusive relationship that Jimmy has in mind. The association with Dan was never violent or cruel or coercive, even though one could argue that there is a power imbalance because of the age difference. Dan never really forced Jimmy to have sex, nor was Jimmy in a situation from which he could not escape (such as with a teacher or relative). So why does Jimmy think he needs to be saved from Dan? Is it because of what Dan represents as a man who likes to have sex with other men (boys)? Does Jimmy think that prolonged exposure or practice will 'make' him homosexual and that by stopping the contact early he will be liberated?

There is an echo of this sentiment in David's heterosexual marriage in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*. "Our marriage was supposed to save me," David muses (NGS, 42). He and Annabelle were supposed to live happily ever after. Yet a nice house, two beautiful daughters and a satisfying sex life with his wife, all the trappings of conventional family life, are not enough to keep David happy: "I sometimes ask myself whether it was a mistake for me to marry" (NGS, 43). It is difficult to have tolerance for the ambivalence of that statement. On the face of it, it seems obvious; of course it was a mistake. But this sentiment may be conceived as too judgmental, not showing enough compassion for the moral dilemmas faced by countless men who are attracted to other men. Although it seems wrong for a 'gay' man to marry himself 'out' of his homosexuality, Ihimaera provides another possibility: an alternative for same-sex identified men (and women) to establish biological families if both parties going into the marriage are honest with each other and aware of the sexual issues. Such is the case with a relatively minor character in *Nights*, who finds his way into a more prominent role in Ihimaera's next novel, *The Uncle's Story*.

There are many kinds of families, and many ways to be a family. In *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* we are given the example of The Noble Savage who leaves the city for an arranged marriage. The difference is that Leah, the woman he is to marry,

knows he is 'gay' but is not interested in 'changing' him. She believes they can offer each other a kind of partnership which will benefit them both. Having children is important in Māori society, and so they reach an agreement. "I've made my choice," The Noble Savage informs David, "The choice not to be selfish ... I guess, when it comes to the crunch, my cultural registration is more important than my sexual registration after all" (NGS, 234-235). He will not stop his activities on behalf of 'gay' Māori, he will not withdraw his support from the AIDS centre where he volunteers. This is not a form of sexual denial. This is recognition that sexuality need not define one's life, an acceptance of a wider variety of existences than what either the dominant, primarily straight, society or 'gay' subculture consider possible or acceptable.

'Gay' people are often left out or excluded not only from the families into which they were born, but also from the social concept of having a family. Marriage is still seen as a powerful symbol of the family, so it is not surprising that, along with other important family events and gatherings, weddings become the site of 'coming out.' At the beginning of *The Uncle's Story*, the present-day protagonist, Michael Mahana, comes out to his family on the eve of his sister's wedding. This leads to the revelation that Michael had an uncle, a man no one discusses, someone who was disowned and written out of the family history. Michael's family deals with his coming out in typical ways. His sister Amiria asks, "So how did it all happen?" (US, 19); as though being 'gay' is an event, an occurrence triggered by something which can be pinpointed or explained, an accident, disease, or misfortune, the effect of some discernible cause. Along this same line of reasoning, Michael's father asks, "Can you change? ... Can you be fixed?" Michael responds that this is not something that happens, "It just is" (US, 19).

"You don't want to change, is that it?"

"I can't" (US, 19).

The family is horrified: "You can't *like* what you do with other men."

"I do" (*US*, 20).

Later on Michael's father calls him a pervert and again focuses on the sexual acts between men, calling them abhorrent and an anathema. He implies that even murder can be forgiven, while being 'gay' relegates one to the scrap heap. When the personal insults don't work, the truth emerges: the family is worried about its standing in the community, about its reputation as a leading clan.

Despite Michael's protestations that he was born this way and cannot change, he also slips momentarily into the mindset that 'gayness' is caused. "Maybe it dates from the time I was molested," he tells his aunt (*US*, 28). Bitterly yet briefly, he remembers being raped by two uncles, but that episode is not explored further or revisited. To his credit, he never again implies that anyone or any thing produced his (homo)sexuality.

"What matters most to you, Michael? Being Maori, or being gay?" asks his aunt (*US*, 28). Michael responds, "I don't believe any of us should be made to choose ... It's not a matter of choice. I am who I am" (*US*, 29). His last statement is similar to Jimmy's declaration in *Both Sides* (*BSM*, 150). Here it is a reworking of an idea from *Nights*. In that novel, The Noble Savage tells the narrator, "I've made my choice.... If I was to choose between being Maori or being gay I would have to choose to be Maori.... [M]y cultural registration is more important than my sexual registration" (*NGS*, 234-235).

It is obvious however, that Ihimaera is not happy about being forced to make a choice, either by the Māori community or by the predominantly white 'gay' subculture. Although Ihimaera has assured me that he was not struggling with his own homosexuality at the time he wrote *Nights*, he was obviously struggling with issues regarding his own identities, as he indicated in his 1999 interview with Juniper Ellis. On several occasions, as well as in the two novels discussed here, Ihimaera

asserts, “our people are among the most homophobic in the world.”¹⁸¹ He was trying to reconcile his ethnic identity with his (homo)sexuality, and struggling to find ways to depict the realities and challenges of being ‘gay’ and Māori, while also dealing with heterosexism within Māori circles. In the ensuing time, he evidently worked through some of those earlier issues and conflicts. So he re-works his previous idea regarding identity choices and presents a response in *The Uncle’s Story*. In *Nights The Noble Savage* states that he was born Māori and will be buried as such, “Not as a gay person. But as one of the iwi [clan, kin group]” (NGS, 234). Towards the end of *The Uncle’s Story*, Michael takes it a step further as he argues along similar lines for the right of a young man to be buried among his people: “He is a Maori as well as gay. We’re here to make sure his right is honoured” (US, 364).

In *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, the Māori character is the marginalised and de-faced, even though idealised, Noble Savage with whom David, the Pākehā protagonist, can never have an intimate relationship. In *The Uncle’s Story*, however, not only does a Māori character become central, but he also has a relationship with a Pākehā deemed impossible in the earlier novel. Unfortunately, Michael’s relationship with Jason is unequal. In the beginning it is clear that Jason is uncomfortable with the fact that Michael has not come out to his parents. Jason feels unacknowledged, as if the relationship is not only hidden but also inconsequential or not of great importance for Michael. One could sympathise with Jason – arguments about coming out are often part of relationships in which one partner is openly ‘gay’ while the other is not. However, when Michael takes the big step of telling his parents that he is ‘gay’ and in a relationship, Jason has already left him. Jason is Pākehā, a white boy who does not seem to realise that his attitude towards Michael is often condescending and even racist.

Jason did not pursue Michael. Even though Michael had been the pursuer, we are not

¹⁸¹ See, for example, Ihimaera, “Masculinity & Desire,” 123.

told why Jason relented. "Jason used to boast that I couldn't believe my luck when I finally caught him" (*US*, 24). There is an underlying sense of contempt and one can imagine Jason sneering as he said this. "If I do come back to you, it would be nice to know that you'll be waiting" Jason declares (*US*, 26). But why should that be so? Why should Michael wait patiently while Jason is off 'discovering' himself? At a later stage, Jason repeats, "As I said before, this has got nothing to do with you. It's about who *I* am and what *I* want.... I asked you to wait for me. Please be here when I come back" (*US*, 135). This seems contradictory and selfish. Jason does not seem to understand and appreciate the sacrifice Michael made in coming out to his parents. He doesn't even care about how Michael has been affected – even though for Michael this was the ultimate proof of his love. Jason is presumptuous in expecting that Michael has nothing better to do than wait around for him. He takes for granted his own assertion that Michael is lucky to have him; as if Jason is doing Michael some great favour. However, a more disturbing question is why Michael thinks waiting for Jason is such a good thing. He declares, "I truly believed Jason. I wanted to believe him" (*US*, 128).

It is not clear what we are to make of Jason's therapist Margo, or his new lover Graham. It is through their encouragement and with their support that Jason leaves Michael. Both seem to think that Michael is suppressing Jason in some way and it becomes an interesting comment on oppression and racism. Graham connects Michael to racist screen images of savage natives by charging that "all [Jason] ever was to you was another scalp you could hang on your belt" (*US*, 130). Typical of colonial discourse, the tables are turned and the Māori (Michael) is regarded as the aggressor, while the Pākehā (Jason) is the victim. Jason says that their relationship was based on ownership, implying that Michael was the possessive one. Margo has convinced Jason that he has a lot of identity issues to deal with. It seems ironic that Jason should be dealing with questions of self-identity. Maybe it is some kind of inherited guilt at the treatment of Māori peoples by his ancestors. Or maybe it's his

idea that Michael, as a Māori, is somehow beneath him, unequal and therefore unworthy of his love – Jason is debasing himself by being with Michael. In the end, though, Michael refuses to accept responsibility for Jason’s actions.

This provides an interesting counterpoint to the assertion that loving a white man is a betrayal of one’s ‘Māoriness.’ David acknowledges this in relation to The Noble Savage, in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (NGS, 17); and the sentiment is echoed and expounded upon by Michael’s lesbian best friend Roimata. She is angry that he always seems attracted to white boys. “[Y]ou’ve been colonised twice over,” she tells Michael. “First, by the Pakeha. Second, by the *gay* Pakeha” (US, 131).¹⁸² It is bad enough, we can infer, to have had no choice in the first colonisation by Europeans, but to willingly subject oneself to any subsequent colonisation is more than stupidity, it is a kind of disloyalty. However, (small consolation) the subjugation of ‘gay’ Māori is often as stealthy and initially unrecognisable as the defeat of their ancestors. “Even in the gay world the White majority holds the power, the money ... it is their images which tell you what is desirable, what you should be like and what you shouldn’t be like” (US, 131). In essence, there is a Western(ised) white ‘gay’ neo-imperialism taking place. It would appear that Ihimaera is claiming that ultimately, Māori-Pākehā relationships are untenable, or undesirable. This is particularly evident in Roimata’s reversal after Carlos, Michael’s new partner, reveals he has Māori ancestry. She now approves of the relationship. With Roimata’s blessing, and a sense that he is now doing the right thing, Michael feels free to make a complete and final break from Jason.

The Noble Savage from *Nights* makes an appearance in *The Uncle’s Story* as Roimata’s cousin. He is the same attractive, social and political ‘gay’ activist character as before,

¹⁸² Ihimaera also maintains this view that ‘gay’ Māori have been doubly colonised. See, for example, Ihimaera, “Masculinity & Desire,” 122-131.

but this time he gets a name, Tane Mahuta, and we learn more about him.¹⁸³ It's a few years after his marriage to Leah and he has children. He still thinks marriage and parenthood are compatible with loving other men. Again he asserts that his ethnic identity as Māori is an essential part of his identity, ultimately more important than his (homo)sexuality: "I was born a Maori and that is how my people will bury me.... I thank Leah every day for having given me my sons. They and she are more important to me than anything else in the whole world," he tells Michael (*US*, 295). Tane also takes on the traditional role of a go-between for Roimata and Michael; he proposes that the two marry. Traditionally, arranged marriages were used mainly for political alliances among tribes. What Tane suggests is no less political:

Marriage should be an option for gay Polynesian men and women. With it we can establish a tribe – a tribe based not just on sexual identity but on family. A tribe must have children to survive. It must also have parents, grandmothers and grandfathers. Even though the children may not be gay by practice, they will be gay by genealogy through their fathers and mothers. When my children grow up, I want them to think of themselves as belonging to a great new gay family, a wonderful new gay tribe. (*US*, 296)

While this statement also imagines heterosexual marriage outside the prevailing Western ideology of romantic love, it is the type of pronouncement that social conservatives and religious fundamentalists seize upon as evidence that 'gays' are on a recruiting mission, out to convert and pervert innocent children. It is politically counterproductive or strategically unwise to imply that recruitment is part of a 'gay agenda' (whether from the 'gay' media, porn-rights extremists, lobbying groups, radical militants, or even playful but tactless Sydney Mardi Gras participants). But this is not what Tane implies. It may be only an idealistic fantasy, a utopian projection, but the concept of belonging to a tribe based on family, not age and sexual preference, is appealing. In the earlier novel, *The Noble Savage* and his followers are

¹⁸³ The name Tane Mahuta is synonymous with the "God of the Forest" and is the name given to the tallest tree in New Zealand (Barlow, 13). This clearly links Ihimaera's character to the Māori god responsible not only for the symbolic separation of male (Sky Father) from female (Earth Mother), but also creating a space for people to stand up. Ihimaera's Tane does the same; he creates a space for his people to stand tall.

called a “new gay tribe” (NGS, 17, 64), which includes “all Maori and Polynesian homosexuals, bisexuals, transvestites, and lesbians” (NGS, 64).

In this sense, *The Uncle’s Story* represents a new level of understanding and acceptance in the struggle to reconcile one’s sexuality and ethnicity, as well as a step forward in (re)claiming space within Māori culture as well as the wider society. In *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, the narrator reaches a point where he realises that he belongs to the ‘gay’ tribe: “I am among my kind and this is where I want to be. All these brave gay men and lesbian women, all seeking a brave new world. But that world is not waiting for us.... We have to go out and claim a space and build it” (NGS, 300). There is a kind of epiphany, a recognition of his new place in the world, a moment shared by many ‘gay’ people, especially when they first come out. But there comes a time for many same-sex identified people when the ‘tribe’ is no longer enough, the parties and clubs lose their sheen, the excitement wears off. In New Zealand, as in Australia and the United States, the ‘gay scene’ is notoriously sexist and racist. Younger white men dominate – and an interest in anyone else is regarded as a kind of fetish. In addition, women are in the minority while children and the elderly are noticeably absent from ‘the scene.’

Tane says he made the choice not to be selfish. His attitude towards marriage and family is more mature because it not only allows for, but also embraces, differences. This vision includes all ages, accepts diverse sexualities, supports the rights of same-sex identified people to have biological families, and represents the coming of age of an indigenous ‘gay’ rights movement. Rather than privileging heterosexual marriage or heteronormative models, Ihimaera’s articulation of the “new gay tribe” privileges production, renewing the generations in *te taura tangata*, that great continuum of existence.¹⁸⁴ As Roimata argues, while “The Western model [of family] de-privileges any notions that gay men or women might have children.... [the] Maori model is a

¹⁸⁴ This was the topic of debate following a paper I delivered at The Politics and Aesthetics of Refusal conference, The University of Sydney, April 2005.

tribal one. It should therefore include the possibility of growing a tribe. Of having children" (*US*, 131). This is not about pairing off male and female while ignoring sexual preference, but about ensuring the continuation of *whakapapa* [genealogy, ancestry], ensuring there will be future generations to whom 'Māoriness' can be transmitted.

Tane/The Noble Savage gestures to a tribal alternative, which not only challenges the traditional Māori point of view but also subverts the expectations of Western society. Even though he will get married and have children, he does not stop his activities on behalf of same-sex identified Māori. His marriage is neither conventional nor a form of sexual denial. Rather, his actions suggest that sexuality or sexual preference need not define one's life and choices. This allows an acceptance of a wider variety of identities and subjectivities than either the dominant, primarily straight, Pākehā society or the 'gay' subculture consider possible or acceptable. As Ihimaera points out, "defining being gay primarily by sexual practice, and by applying Western notions of (individual) identity may be the way in which the imperatives of Western culture run; but indigenous people have been trying to escape this kind of colonialism for years."¹⁸⁵

The Symbolic Significance of Tane, The Noble Savage

It is no mistake that Ihimaera's fictional idealised alter ego is steeped in symbolism. Ihimaera comes from a proud heritage. His ancestors refused to sign the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), which they considered a threat to Māori sovereignty. He grew up with stories of resistance and a faith combining Christian elements and traditional Māori beliefs. His region gave rise to the charismatic rebel prophet Te Kooti (c. 1832-

¹⁸⁵ Ihimaera, personal communication (2 August 2003).

1893), founder of the Ringatu church.¹⁸⁶

In *Nights* the character is only known by the appellation The Noble Savage. In *Story* we learn his name is Tane Mahuta. This name is also the title by which the tallest tree in New Zealand is known: The Lord (or God) of the Forest. This clearly links Ihimaera's character to the Māori god responsible not only for the symbolic separation of male (Sky Father) from female (Earth Mother), but also for creating a space for people to stand up and walk upright. According to Māori cosmology, Tane is one of the original seventy male gods, children of Mother Earth (Papatuanuku) and Father Sky (Ranginui). Papa and Rangi were joined together and their children were caught in between. Tane, god of forests and birds, was able to pry earth and sky apart. But Tane was dissatisfied and longed for a mate. None of the existing elements was suitable, so Tane created a female being from the mud and breathed life into her and mated with her. Their children were the first Polynesians, ancestors of the Māori. As the father of humanity, the original Tane is thus regarded as the first man. For his creation of humankind as well as the birds and forests he is associated with creative *aroha* (love/sympathy) and procreation; and for his act of rebellion against his divine parents he is also identified with change and transition.¹⁸⁷ In addition, *tane* is a generic term meaning 'male' and 'husband.'

In Western or Judeo-Christian terms, Tane is comparable to both God the Creator who created humans out of dust, and Adam, the first man and father of the human race (whose name also means 'man' or 'male'). In the biblical New Testament, Jesus is referred to as the new or second Adam whose coming heralds a new age. Jesus, of

¹⁸⁶ Ihimaera, "And Then There's Us," 198-199.

¹⁸⁷ The information in this paragraph comes from various sources, including: (1) Robbie Whitmore, "Tane and Hine," *New Zealand in History* (15 May 2003). Available online at <http://history-nz.org/Maori9.html>. 19 May 2003; (2) Jane Resture, "Maori Mythology," *Polynesia* (19 August 2002). Available online at <http://www.janeresture.com>. 19 May 2003; (3) Windows to the Universe team, "Papa," *Ecosystems* (Boulder, Colorado: 2000-01 University Corporation of Atmospheric Research [UCAR], 1995-1999; 2000 The Regents of the University of Michigan, September 1, 2000). Available online at <http://www.windows.ucar.edu>. 22 May 2003. (4) "Maori Culture & Mythology," *A Touch of New Zealand* (June 2000). Available online at http://www.atonz.com/new_zealand/Maori.html. 19 May 2003.

course, is the Christ, whose followers comprise a new chosen people. Jesus, brings new life and reverses the spell of death caused by the first Adam's mistake (see, for example, I Corinthians 15:21-22). It is important to point out here that even though I freely admit my own Judeo-Christian positioning, I am not randomly imposing a 'Christian' reading on Ihimaera's work. Given Ihimaera's strongly Christian heritage and links to prominent historical and contemporary figures in the Church it is appropriate to make these kinds of comparisons. In addition, Christian imagery and allusions are scattered throughout his fiction and non-fiction work. In the novels, therefore, Tane can be seen as a kind of mythic or heroic figure, a new queer messiah. Like his divine namesake, Ihimaera's Tane also struggles to create a space for his people (the men and women of his new gay tribe) to stand tall, not only through his activism and leadership of the Māori 'gay' rights and support group, but also in his personal undertaking of establishing his own family and producing his own children.

All messiahs need prophets and apostles. If Tane Mahuta, *The Noble Savage*, is a messiah, in *The Uncle's Story* Michael becomes his mouthpiece, the voice calling in the wilderness; not, Repent, for the day of the Lord is coming, but, Make way, we are coming through. Michael is the missionary of the new gay tribe. At a conference in Canada to promote First Nations arts, Michael is chosen to introduce a resolution recognising the contributions of 'gay' indigenous artists. With newly found courage, he gives a rousing yet scathing speech and is launched into a course of outspoken activism and purpose. At the end of the novel Michael is transformed. Whereas the mythic Tane separated earth and sky, Michael represents the new Tane by calling for the oppressed and marginalised to unite. He chants, "Tuia i runga, tuia i raro. Tuia i roto, tuia i waho.... Ka rongo te Ao, Ka rongo te Po. Tuia" (*US*, 371). Unite above, unite below. Unite within, unite without.... The day hears, the night hears. Unite.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Translation by R.N. Himona in "He Powhiri: A Maori Welcome," *From Hawaiki to Hawaiki: the Maori People of Aotearoa* (2001.) Available online at <http://maaori.com/misc/Maoriwel.htm>. 22 May 2003.

Ihimaera translates *tuia* (unite) as 'bind,' and paraphrases the song in more poetic terms (repeated in English twice during the course of the novel):

The top and the bottom, bound together by the light.
Now the outer framework and inner framework, fixed firmly, the knots
soldered by the shafts of the sun. (*US*, 44, 193)

The first occasion on which we 'hear' this *waiata* (song) is when Sam arrives in Vietnam and wakes up with the realisation that the rising sun is the same as the one he's seen back home. We have an indication that Sam will begin to identify with the Vietnamese against whom the war is being waged. All people are one, bound together by the same light. The second time the song is heard, Michael has just finished reading the fragments of Sam's diary and of Cliff's letters. In both instances Ihimaera prefaces this hymn of creation and re-creation by stating, "The world was being constructed again" and concludes, "The promise of life, the impulse of history, was reborn" (*US*, 44-45, 193). Tane's primeval act of (human) creation must be repeated as each generation supplants the former and discovers or asserts its place in the world. At the beginning of his speech to the First Nation conference audience, Michael reinterprets the legend:

Many people have seen, in this myth, a metaphor applicable to all kinds of situations. That independence does not come without sacrifice. That fighting for space and for light, the universal image of knowledge or enlightenment or freedom, is the continual challenge for all peoples who cannot see the sky. (*US*, 343)

The seventy original male gods may have been freed through the separation of mother/female earth and father/male sky, but Michael says that 'gay' people were still relegated to the deepest, darkest crevices. It is time for this underclass, these outcasts, to finally walk upright and free.

One could argue that Tane's vision (indeed Ihimaera's) as articulated by Michael is

not all-inclusive. Tane and Michael are not overly concerned with opening up the new tribe to Pākehā. This 'tribe' begun by Tane (*The Noble Savage*) is composed of Māori and Polynesians. Roimata contends that Pākehā cannot even conceive of such an idea because they are so individualistic. But this does not worry Michael, because his target for inclusion as well as acceptance are Māori, who are "among the most homophobic in the world" (*US*, 343). His aim is not necessarily to make the world a better place for all 'gay' people: his goal is to establish a space for men (and women) of non-traditional sexualities within Māori culture. In the world of the novels (and in the real world, Ihimaera argues) 'gay' Māori are usually cast out, ostracised, cut off from family and tribe. This is a serious problem in a society which values ancestry. Tane and Michael's new tribe will be one considered equal with the other family clans, able to participate in (and even initiate) all the traditional rituals.

Like his characters, Ihimaera actively works to create a space for the 'new gay tribe.' In addition to the two novels discussed here, another way in which he accomplishes this is to provide opportunities for 'real' voices to be heard. One such undertaking, *Growing Up Maori* (1998), is a collection of childhood reminiscences edited by Ihimaera, and includes well known 'gay' Māori such as Anton Blank ("Post-Modern Maori"), Clive Aspin ("Finding a Place in the World"), and the notoriously flamboyant performance artist Mika ("Bunga in a Bucket").

Exit: Centre Stage

In my earlier discussion of family and tribal identity I alluded to the concept of *te taura tangata*, the rope of man.¹⁸⁹ Ihimaera describes that rope as "woven [from] all the generations of man from creation to the present day. It's the rope which forms the

¹⁸⁹ See Jane Wilkinson, "Interview with Witi Ihimaera," *Kunapipi* 7.1 (1985): 100; Mark Williams, "Interview with Witi Ihimaera," *Landfall: A New Zealand Quarterly* 45.3 (1991): 284; Ellis, 181.

basis of the search for *whakapapa*, the union with the universe.”¹⁹⁰ One way in which he helps to maintain that rope is through social activism, which he has done since the early days of the Māori Renaissance.¹⁹¹ For the first decade or so he was involved with efforts to familiarise or re-acquaint young, especially urban, Māori with their culture, to help them reconnect with their heritage. Part of that initiative was his own attempt to discover who he was as Māori, and not only what it meant for him to be Māori, but also what ‘Māoriness’ is:

The point is that although the Maori core to that rope has become but a few strands, other strands of different colours and textures have been added to it. The rope is still Maori and always will be as long as we remember that we haven’t become part of Pakeha history but it has become part of ours.¹⁹²

This is clearly a postcolonial concern. “Who are we?” is a central question of formerly colonised subjects as well as minorities within a larger dominant culture. Māori are both a minority in their own homeland and (formerly?) colonised subjects. While some people on both sides of the ethnic divide would prefer a stricter definition of ‘Māoriness,’ Ihimaera’s view is that the concept of ‘Māori’ encompasses many things. It is not a static notion or way of life. Ihimaera calls for an “organic” approach, one which allows for external influences and modernising impulses.¹⁹³ He believes that Māori culture has survived because of its flexibility and adaptability.

Another way in which Ihimaera helps to maintain *te tauro tangata* is through his own art. The rope model is an important feature in Ihimaera’s writing. Not only does his work help strengthen the few strands remaining, but they are also purposely linked together. Thus, The Noble Savage makes his appearance in both *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and *The Uncle’s Story*, and Michael Mahana is part of a large clan whose

¹⁹⁰ Wilkinson, 100.

¹⁹¹ Nan Brown Albinski, “Glimpses of Childhood,” in *International Literature in English: Essays on the Major Writers*, XVI, Robert L. Ross, ed. (New York: Garland, 1991): 40.

¹⁹² Williams, 284.

¹⁹³ Ellis, 181; and Ihimaera, personal communication (2 August 2003).

various members populate Ihimaera's other narratives. "This is a reflection of my tribal identity and, in particular, the Maori belief in genealogy. At some subliminal level I am creating a fictional tribe, an iwi. And I am connecting them through me to the rope of man," the author explains.¹⁹⁴

The arts, especially all types of writing, are important forms of cultural expression. Thus, Ihimaera advocates the use of film, opera, rap, the internet, and even video games to provide a Māori context. To those who would accuse him of conforming to Pākehā standards, Ihimaera responds that he is in fact utilising Pākehā systems to further expand Māori visibility in an increasingly shrinking and homogenising world. For example, writing in English allows him to "ransack wherever it's been" and plunder whatever influences an Anglo-European education provides "within that whole postmodern pastiche tradition."¹⁹⁵ It's an appropriation of narratives and conventions that have been added to the Māori *taura tangata* because of the process of colonisation.

In an interview with Iain Sharp for the *Sunday Star Times*, Ihimaera declared that art "should also be provocative. Art should be wielded like a *taiaha*; the further in you push the spear, the better."¹⁹⁶ Elsewhere he asserts his novels are "an attempt to shine the torch on [bigotry and prejudice], find the beast lurking within and kill it."¹⁹⁷ This corresponds to Dollimore's proposition that socially aware novels are political "interventions," not merely "passive reflections" of, or entertaining diversions from, reality.¹⁹⁸ Thus, Ihimaera's texts (like Dollimore's conception of art) perform an active intrusion into their audience. *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and *The Uncle's Story* help challenge stereotypes of Māori in general, and specifically of alternative or

¹⁹⁴ Ihimaera, personal communication (2 August 2003).

¹⁹⁵ Ellis, 175.

¹⁹⁶ Iain Sharp, "Still Smiling," *Sunday Star Times* (Auckland, 5 November 2000): Features, 2. The title is a play on the author's English surname, Smiler, a missionary 'corruption' of Ihimaera (Ishmael in Māori). See Ihimaera's explanation in "Maori Life and Literature," 49-50.

¹⁹⁷ Julian Slade, "Writing to Leave a Mark," *North Shore Times Advertiser* (North Shore City [Auckland], 9 November 2000): 9.

¹⁹⁸ Dollimore, "The Dominant and the Deviant," 186.

transgressive masculinities. Ihimaera might agree with Trudy Steuernagel that while “art cannot make a revolution ... it can prepare the ground for one.”¹⁹⁹

Postscript

Twilight of the Gods (1995), directed by Stewart Main, “portrays a doomed love between a Maori warrior and a European soldier.”²⁰⁰ While this short summary sounds similar to Sam’s narrative strand in *The Uncle’s Story*, it takes place during early colonial times and bears little resemblance to Ihimaera’s fiction. Ihimaera denies that this film short provided any inspiration for his novel, although he admits to having worked to develop the idea with Main at one point. Ihimaera suspended the collaboration because he did not agree with Main’s feminised depiction of the Māori youth:

My objections ... were based on presumptions of presenting two characters, one of which was Pakeha, the other a deliberately feminised “Exotic” or “Other.” So my objection was specific to those discussions and arose out of those discussions in which I argued against the perpetuation of passive feminine-male stereotypes for the “Other” ... [With] *The Uncle’s Story* ... the difference is in the approach and the agenda. One of the discourses I was critiquing was the issue of Maori masculinity and the warrior image. Although Sam is the receptive partner in the sexual act, he is not a feminised man. Both he and Cliff are masculine, and they do not give up their masculinity. But when Sam falls in love with Cliff, and later has sex with Cliff, it puts him on a collision course with his traditional cultural beliefs. I could have made him the active partner in the exchange – sometimes men think that if they are the ones who fuck they’re not gay – but I wanted to up the ante for Sam.²⁰¹

Several years ago Ihimaera wrote a screen adaptation of *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*

¹⁹⁹ Trudy Steuernagel, “Contemporary Homosexual Fiction and the Gay Rights Movement,” in *Journal of Popular Culture* 20 (1986): 125; reprinted in Dynes and Donaldson, eds., *Homosexual Themes in Literary Studies*, 339.

²⁰⁰ Lindsey Schell, “Gay and Lesbian Filmography” (Perkins Library, Duke University: 16 November 2001). Available online at <http://www.lib.duke.edu/lilly/glbtfilm.htm>. 28 May 2003.

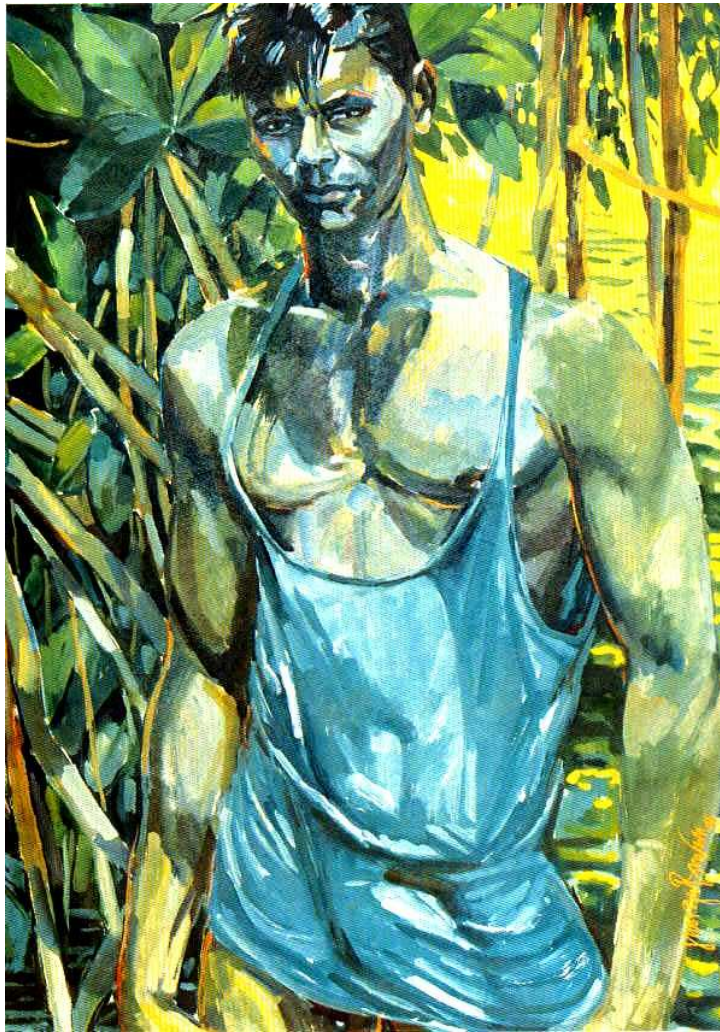
²⁰¹ Ihimaera, personal communication (2 August 2003).

which was never produced.²⁰² The plot is condensed and there are a few significant changes from the novel. There are no flashbacks to childhood or protagonist David's first 'gay' relationship. David's friend Jack Alwyn-Jones does not work at the university, but his father Clive (a new character in the screenplay) is head of the Film Studies/English Department in which David teaches. Clive is also a good friend of Harry Munro, David's father. David's boyfriend Chris is of Māori heritage. He is a combination of the "Bright Eyes" character from *Nights* and Karl, Michael's new boyfriend at the end of *The Uncle's Story*. Chris is also the cousin of The Noble Savage, who is now called Rawiri (Ra, for short). David and Ra are good friends, and Ra rescues David from a vengeful Warren (Jack's abusive lover). The relationship between David and Chris evolves slowly. Their lovemaking is delayed until near the end of the script – after Chris has recovered Miranda's wand. In fact, the public sex of the baths and steam rooms is largely implied rather than explicitly depicted. Several scenes are devoted to Ra's wedding, in which David is the best man. The penultimate scenes are of Jack's funeral in which David gives an emotional speech about courage, honour, and love. His father, Harry, seems to gain a renewed respect for David and makes a move towards reconciliation. The closing scenes are of the annual Hero Party in Auckland. At the end, David drives by his old home one last time before heading off into the sunrise (and, presumably, a life with Chris).

²⁰² Witi Ihimaera, "Nights in the Gardens of Spain Script," (no date) archived in the J. C. Beaglehole Reading Room, Victoria University Library, Wellington.

III. ISLAND STORIES, ALTERNATIVE VOICES: SRI LANKA

WIJESINHA AND SELVADURAI



When he reached the end of his street, he began to walk along the railway line, away from his property.... In a couple of minutes his eyes adjusted to the dark and he looked out at the sea. It shimmered in the moonlight

like black silk. Against the horizon, he could see the lights of a ship and far ahead of him the illumination of the Fort area. He walked about a mile, not meeting anyone. The railway tracks, popular with strollers in the evening, were now deserted. Balendran finally rounded a bend and saw ahead of him the Bambalapitiya railway station. Though long closed for the night, the platform was busy with men, cigarette butts glowing red in the dark....

... Balendran avoided the railway platform. Instead, he walked quickly along the deserted outer edge of the wall, his head lowered. He saw ahead of him the one he always went with, Ranjan, a private in the army. The young man was leaning up against the wall....

"Good evening," he said in English as Balendran came up to him.

"How are you, Ranjan?" Balendran replied softly in English, for he knew that Ranjan liked to practise his English with him. "How is your mother? Did she finally see a doctor about her problem?"

"Thanking you very much, sir," Ranjan replied.

The last time Balendran was here, he had learnt about Ranjan's mother's illness and given him money to take her to a doctor.

They began to walk away from the others, and Balendran asked him a few more questions about his mother's health. Balendran was fond of Ranjan in a disinterested way. Mostly, he felt gratitude because Ranjan was extremely discreet. The one time he had seen him in public, he had taken the initiative and ignored him. Further, he never haggled over money, took whatever was given to him. Occasionally he would mention something, like his mother's illness. When Balendran gave, he did so generously to ensure Ranjan's tact.

... After a while, Ranjan put his hand on Balendran's crotch and began to gently massage it. He undid the buttons on Balendran's trousers, and Balendran lifted himself slightly, so Ranjan could slide his trousers down his thighs. Ranjan bent over him and, at the feel of Ranjan's breath on his arousal, Balendran sighed and lay back on the rock.

Shyam Selvadurai, *Cinnamon Gardens* (81-82)

In this chapter I discuss transgressive or alternative masculinities in Sri Lanka as portrayed in Rajiva Wijesinha's *Servants* (1995), and Shyam Selvadurai's two novels *Funny Boy* (1994) and *Cinnamon Gardens* (1998). In *Servants* expressions of male same-sex desire and activity are presented as British predilections or diversions of the landed classes. Homosexuality functions as a metaphor for the figurative penetration of an effeminated Sri Lanka by a masculine Britain, and also exemplifies the unequal relationships between ruling classes and ruled, majority and minorities, government and populace following independence. Wijesinha indicates that homosexuality itself is a residue of colonialism. For Selvadurai, however, (homo)sexuality is an intrinsic and natural aspect of one's character, but nevertheless troubled by social obligations and expectations. To paraphrase Terry Goldie, these narratives are not merely excursions into the 'brown world' but explorations and explanations from *within* the 'brown world'.²⁰³ Wijesinha is an academic and politician who still resides in Sri Lanka, while Selvadurai fled to Canada with his family as a result of the inter-communal violence in 1983. Though Selvadurai wrote both novels from the distance and relative safety of Canada, he did return to Sri Lanka for research in 1997.

Setting the Scene

In Sri Lanka and among foreign scholars of the country there is a tendency, indeed a well-established and unquestioned practice, of conflating race or ethnicity and religion, so that discussion of minority categories always crosses these borders, overlaps barriers, and muddies the waters to such an extent that there is little agreement about how many groups exist or who belongs to which one. This would not necessarily be such a bad thing if all the various peoples lived in harmony and saw their family background merely as a matter of identification and pride. However, Sri Lanka is torn by ethnic and religious strife, and one's cultural label could mean harassment or even death in some circumstances. The two main ethnic groups are the majority Sinhalese (mainly Buddhist) and the largest minority Tamil (mainly Hindu) populations. These are followed by the Moors (also identified as 'Muslims'), Burghers (usually considered as the descendants of Dutch colonists, but can also include Portuguese), Malays, and other assorted divisions and break-downs, such as 'Christians' (who can be from any of the ethnic groups) and Eurasians, and

²⁰³ Terry Goldie, "Introduction: Queerly Postcolonial," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 30.2 (April 1999): 23.

finally the Veddha (Sri Lanka's indigenous, and some would say extinct, peoples).

In New Zealand, the indigenous Māori population is in the minority while the vast majority are European-background immigrants and the descendants of the British colonisers. In Singapore, as I discuss in the next chapter, the Malay minority is the most likely to be considered its indigenous population, though there is less certainty or even proof, and many Malays are immigrants themselves. In addition, the three main ethnic/racial groups live in relative harmony, however tense and legislated that may be. Unlike these two nations, Sri Lanka has been at war with itself over which community can lay claim to being original or older, and therefore the rightful owners and heirs of the island. As Senake Bandaranayake points out, Sri Lanka has been settled and inhabited primarily by a constant stream of Indian migrations, as well as through intermarriage with other migrant and indigenous groups.²⁰⁴ However, Sinhalese trace their presence back to at least the third and possibly the fifth century B.C.E. Many of the more radical and chauvinistic Sinhalese treatises on ethnicity portray the Tamils as invaders, even though Tamil landowners are mentioned in Sinhalese documents from the third century B.C.E. to the first century C.E.²⁰⁵ Tamil kingdoms were in the ascendancy from the third to the twelfth centuries C.E. Sri Lanka's colonial history includes a brief period of Chinese occupation followed by several centuries of European domination (first Portuguese, then Dutch, and finally British). Kumari Jayawardena maintains that "all the major groups in Sri Lanka belong to a similar ethnic mix of migrants from various parts of India ... to which there have been Southeast Asian, Arab and European admixtures."²⁰⁶ In fact, the debate about ethnic/racial heritage is still not settled. While inter-communal violence erupts frequently, historians continue to argue about the origins of Sri Lanka's various groups, primarily the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples. Some even contend that there is no such thing as a separate Sinhala ethnicity; that the Tamils were the first settlers from mainland India. When Buddhism was introduced, those who converted to the new religion took on a new identity which evolved into Sinhalese identification.

Until the British forcibly unified the island under one colonial administration in the nineteenth century, many of the various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups seem

²⁰⁴ Senake Bandaranayake, "The Peopling of Sri Lanka: The National Question and Some Problems of History and Ethnicity," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* VII.1 & 2 (Special Double Issue, 1987): 3-10.

²⁰⁵ See K.M. de Silva, "Historical Survey," in *Sri Lankā: A Survey*, K.M. de Silva, ed. (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1977), 31-85. See also Asiff Hussein, "Forgotten Ties: Sinhala-Tamil Relations in the Past," *Sunday Observer* (Colombo, n.d.) cited in *Eelavar Networks* (Sri Lanka: n.d.). Available online at <http://www.eelavar.com/eelam/pageview.php?ID=15&SID=1003>. 21 May 2004.

²⁰⁶ Kumari Jayawardena, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Regional Security," in *Info Lanka* (October 1987). Available online at <http://www.infolanka.com/org/srilanka/issues/kumari.html>. 17 May 2004. See also Jayawardena's *Ethnic and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Centre for Social Analysis, 1985); and Bandaranayake, "The Peopling of Sri Lanka."

to have coexisted in fairly tolerant and diverse, yet separate, kingdoms: the Tamil kingdom of Jaffna in the north, the primarily Sinhala kingdom of Kandy in the central region, as well as various colonial protectorates in the east and west. Kamalika Pieris argues that “the concept of ‘race’ was introduced to the country during the British period in the 19th century.”²⁰⁷ The arrival of the British also brought with it contemporary discourses of linguistics and cultural anthropology which were based on Eurocentric and racist ideologies. In particular, Friedrich Max Müller’s theories on the Aryan invasion of India led to a division of South Asian peoples into two general racial groupings (northern light-skinned Aryan and southern dark-skinned Dravidian) which were then manipulated and exploited by the colonisers to further their own expansionist goals.²⁰⁸ In Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese were designated as Aryan, while the Tamils were categorised as Dravidian, based on certain linguistic idiosyncrasies of their respective languages. Many contemporary scholars, however, have pointed out that the very terms used to separate these two ‘ethnic’ groups are nothing more than linguistic speculation, complex manoeuvrings of tenuous linkages which were not well researched or understood, but rather were used as proof of unfounded theories.

The British (and generally European ‘Enlightenment’) preoccupation with categorisation led to a division of Sri Lanka’s people along religious and linguistic lines. During the struggle for independence various myths of origin were developed for and by each group, and these ‘rediscovered’ identities were strengthened. In the late nineteenth century a nationalism based on revivalist Sinhala Buddhist ideology emerged, resulting “in the denial of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of Sri Lankan society,” which was also anti-Western (associated with Christianity and foreignness) rather than anti-colonial.²⁰⁹

In addition to racial division, another legacy of British colonial rule is Sri Lanka’s Penal Code, established in 1883, which, in Section 365a, criminalises homosexual acts (“carnal intercourse against the order of nature”).²¹⁰ Sri Lanka’s government maintains that the law has not been used to prosecute anyone for a long time.

²⁰⁷ Kamalika Pieris, “Ethnic Conflict and Tamil Separatism,” *Island* (27 October 1999): n.p.

²⁰⁸ Peter G. Johansen, “Recasting the Foundations: New Approaches to Regional Understandings of South Asian Archeology and the Problem of Culture History,” in *Asian Perspectives: the Journal of Archeology for Asia and the Pacific* 42.2 (Fall 2003): 193-206. See, for example, Friedrich Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language* [1861] (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1887) and *Biographies of Words and the Home of the Aryas* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1888); Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages* [1856], 2nd Edition, Revised and Enlarged (London: Trübner & Co., 1875).

²⁰⁹ Jayawardena, 1987.

²¹⁰ “Sri Lanka,” in *World Legal Survey*, (ILGA [The International Lesbian and Gay Association]: 1 March 2001). Available online at http://www.ilga.org/Information/legal_survey/asia_pacific/Sri_lanka.htm. 8 February 2004. See also, Arvind Narrain, “There Are No Shortcuts to Queer Utopia,” in *lines* 2.4 (February 2004). Available online at http://www.lines-magazine.org/Art_Feb04/Arvind.htm. 3 May 2004.

However, there are numerous accounts of police harassment, blackmail, and even abuse of men labelled as 'homosexual.' Selvadurai felt threatened during his year of research in Sri Lanka, and recounts the experience of an acquaintance who was jailed for over a week resulting in family turmoil and the loss of his job.²¹¹ Sherman de Rose, former priest and founder of Companions on a Journey, perhaps Sri Lanka's only 'gay' rights group, argues that the very existence of Section 365a gives police and homophobic groups or individuals an excuse to cause trouble for suspected 'gays.'²¹² In addition, such laws encourage and confirm the widespread belief that homosexuality is a social perversion and moral depravity, and should therefore be illegal. While de Rose and Companions lobby for the abolishment of the anti-gay statute, the government contends that there are more important items on the national agenda, citing Tamil separatism and political feuds which threaten the country's stability.

Pradeep Jeganathan is interested in the various formations of identity in Sri Lanka. His many articles, edited books, and even fiction interrogate and examine the ways violence and nationalism influence and shape each other. Jeganathan scrutinises what he calls "the nexus of masculinity and ethnicity" by detailing the tumultuous history of recent ethnic conflicts through specific and personal examples.²¹³ Although there is no such thing as a singular or unified masculinity in post-independence Sri Lanka, Jeganathan concludes that, in general, Sri Lankan masculinities develop within the continuous anticipation of and participation in violence. "To wait for a riot is to wait in a space for violence, at its shifting, porous boundaries. A space for violence is a space of danger, one in which particular masculinities can emerge."²¹⁴ The tensions and inter-communal (primarily Sinhala and Tamil) violence means that various ethnic backgrounds influence different expressions or performances of masculinity. For example, the Tamil son-in-law of a Sinhala family, will leave his home in

²¹¹ Shyam Selvadurai, "Coming Out," *Time Asia* 162.6 (18 August 2003): 96. Afdhel Aziz, "Shyam Selvadurai, author of *Funny Boy*, on Homosexuality in Sri Lanka," *Sunday Times* (Colombo, January 1999): n.p.

²¹² Linda LoPresti, "Haven in Sri Lanka," *Asia Pacific* (ABC Radio Australia, 20 July 1999). Transcript available online at <http://www.abc.net.au/ra/asiapac/archive/1999/jul/raap-20jul1999-2.htm>. 11 May 2004.

²¹³ Pradeep Jeganathan, "In the Shadow of Violence: "Tamilness" and the Anthropology of Identity in Southern Sri Lanka," in *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka*, Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 97. See also Pradeep Jeganathan, "A Space for Violence: Politics, Anthropology, and the Location of a Sinhala Practice of Masculinity," in *Community, Gender and Violence: Essays on the Subaltern Condition* (Subaltern Studies XI), Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 37-65.

²¹⁴ Jeganathan, "Shadow of Violence," 97. See also Else Skjønberg, *A Special Caste? Tamil Women of Sri Lanka*, (London: Zed Press, 1982), esp. 118-130, for a discussion of how (the threat of) violence influences and enforces social order according to gender and caste.

order to save the house and his extended family during an expected riot. Meanwhile, the Tamil father/patriarch of a Tamil or mixed family will send his family away, but stay at home to protect his house from intruders. Both acts arise from the same concerns, a sense of obligation to the family and a desire to ensure the safety of the home (both people and structure).

For Jeganathan, whose main focus is Tamil experience, masculinity *is* a performance, shaped principally in relation to the anticipation of violence. Jeganathan points out that violence is sometimes considered legitimate in Sri Lanka, as when police beat a criminal, or the way teachers punish disobedient or disrespectful students, or what elders do when a youngster misbehaves.²¹⁵ However, regarding Sinhala masculinity, Jeganathan sees a disconnection between the practice of socialising children to think of what others will say before they act (*lajja-baya*²¹⁶) and the imperative for fearless(ness) (*baya-nethi[kama]*) in Sinhala men once they reach maturity (most often invoked in response to violence). He problematises the two concepts of *lajja-baya* and *baya-nethi* by illustrating that they are truly contradictory: “The practice of fearlessness ... is a practice of masculinity that produces a space for violence in Sinhala society.”²¹⁷ Although the linguistic opposite of *lajja-baya* (fear of shame) is more often applied to women than men (*lajja-nethi* [shamelessness or immodesty]²¹⁸), Jeganathan indicates there is also a kind of shame ascribed to the bare(d) male body, a modesty inherited from the British.²¹⁹ He also acknowledges the existence of “slowly simmering ... homo-erotic domination” in the disciplining of younger boys by older boys in the same neighbourhood or organisation.²²⁰ Such “homo-erotic domination” is also evident in the abuse of Tamil

²¹⁵ Jeganathan, “Space for Violence,” 64.

²¹⁶ Obeyesekere glosses *lajja-baya* as “shame-fear,” while de Alwis translates it as “respectability.” Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 46; Malathi de Alwis, “The Production and Embodiment of Respectability: Gendered Demeanours in Colonial Ceylon,” in *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited*, Vol. 1, Michael Roberts, ed. (Colombo: Marga Institute [Sri Lanka Centre for Development Studies], 1997) 105-106.

²¹⁷ Jeganathan, “Space for Violence,” 51-52.

²¹⁸ Jeganathan, “Space for Violence,” 58.

²¹⁹ See, for example, Jeganathan’s description of the *chandiya* (Sinhala thug) Gunadasa, in “Space for Violence,” especially 54-56. Although in traditional labouring or ceremonial situations men may be bare-chested, many are embarrassed by nakedness in different social situations, especially as objects of (an)others’ gaze. Anglo-Sri Lankan artist George Beven comments on this in relation to his models who often seem reluctant to remove their shirts: “They’re always so shy.... They are very modest.” Cited in Richard Ammon, “Being Fearful and Boldly Gay in Sri Lanka,” *Global Gayz* (January 1999). Available online at <http://www.globalgayz.com/g-srilanka.html>. 24 May 2004.

²²⁰ Jeganathan “Space for Violence,” 56-58.

detainees accused or suspected of involvement with the separatist movements.²²¹

Wijesinha's Coy Narrator

Comparisons between Rajiva Wijesinha and Witi Ihimaera can be tempting – both are socially and politically active academics – but Wijesinha is clearly of a different ‘class,’ if one may still use that word. His father was a politician and Wijesinha has been the Liberal Party candidate in national presidential elections. However, his political beliefs are difficult to understand for an outsider with only a mediated comprehension of Sri Lanka’s complex political landscape.

Wijesinha published his first novel, *Acts of Faith* (1985), and its sequel, *Days of Despair* (1989), in response to the anti-Tamil riots and ensuing ethnic violence in 1983, which led to civil war and India’s disastrous involvement in the conflict. These fictionalised accounts were overtly political parodies which lampooned the ruling elite, especially the government leadership. Read in light of these earlier books *Servants* can be understood as a more subtle satire on Sri Lanka’s upper classes.

Unlike its predecessors, *Servants: a Cycle* (1995), which was awarded the 1996 Gratiaen Prize, is a collection of vignettes rather than a novel.²²² It is divided into ten sections with their own titles. However, unlike Alfian Sa’at’s *Corridor* (discussed in the next chapter), *Servants* is centred on a common set of characters who interact with each other. The book’s subtitle points to the difference between this and ordinary short story collections. On one level, it refers to the cyclical nature of time and history, especially as related through each story/chapter. The narrative does not follow a linear progression, and each vignette contains its own internal chronology. Moreover, the characters and narratives are connected to each other in an intricate system of concentric and overlapping circles, like a Venn diagram or a child’s colourful spirograph drawing. In addition to novels and a short story collection,

²²¹ See M. Peel, A. Mahtani, G. Hinshelwood, and D. Forrest, “The Sexual Abuse of Men in Detention in Sri Lanka,” *The Lancet* 355.9220 (10 June 2000): 2069.

²²² Rajiva Wijesinha, *Servants: A Cycle* (Colombo: McCallum Books, 1995). Further citations included parenthetically refer to this edition, abbreviated as *SC*.

Wijesinha has published several works of non-fiction, including *Beyond the First Circle: Travels and Reflections in the Second and Third Worlds* (1993).²²³ The collection of interrelated narratives in *Servants* also concerns life “beyond the first circle” of the narrator’s upper class. Though not exactly *about* servants, each tale shows the better-off classes’ relationships with, and dependence upon, servants, as well as the sometimes central role of servants in the lives of their employers.

Wijesinha’s unnamed narrator is a middle-aged Sinhalese man who grew up in a fairly privileged home (Shalimar), with two ayahs (nannies), a cook, a gardener, and at least one ‘boy’ (a young man responsible for taking care of the main part of the house and serving meals) at any given time.²²⁴ His is a somewhat matriarchal family governed by the narrator’s maternal grandmother and living in her home. The grandmother herself had married into a family run by a widowed mother. He has an older brother and sister. His grandfather had been the first native Assistant Government Agent in the colonial government, his father was a lawyer who became a member of parliament, an uncle owned a newspaper and publishing house (the actual Lake House), a great-uncle and another uncle were bishops, his brother became a doctor, and a cousin became prime minister after the assassination of the president. In his early childhood, the narrator and his family lived in Canada for two years. He went to university at Oxford. His family are examples of *kaduwa*, “the dividing sword” which separates English speakers (usually well-off) from non-English speakers, creating two different worlds (SC, 16).

Wijesinha positions his narrator as an observer of, not a commentator on, upper-middle class life, the country’s political situation, and the various relationships he describes or suggests. The first story or chapter, “Extensions,” sets the scene, as it were, establishing relationships and giving little anecdotes about the lives of various servants as well as household events (like the attempted poisoning of Prime Minister [Mrs.] Bandaranaike, or the elderly ayah

²²³ This non-fiction text is apparently based on Wijesinha’s travels throughout Asia, Europe, and the Americas as part of his involvement with the University of Pittsburgh Semester at Sea programme. I say apparently, because, to date, the book has not been located outside Sri Lanka, and the library at Sabaragamuwa University, where a copy of the volume is held, does not participate in interlibrary loan schemes.

²²⁴ It is interesting that the narrator’s home is named Shalimar, for it refers to the famed gardens Jehangir, the seventeenth-century Mughal emperor, had built in Kashmir for his wife. Roughly translated, it means ‘house of love.’ What happens in and around the Shalimar of *Servants* is not necessarily love but rather collisions between classes, ideologies, and bodies. The narrator does not describe or experience romantic love.

who slept under the piano). Though a native of Sri Lanka, the narrator has been anglicised through Oxford (which, like Cambridge, is often portrayed and sensationalised in fiction and film as a bastion of institutional and situational homosexuality) and the British Council (presented here as a haven for homosexual expatriates). As the product of an English education and social advantage he wrestles with the residue of empire. Homosexuality is perceived as the legacy of colonialism and privilege of the upper classes, while servants, minorities, and the lower classes function as commodified capital, objects of political as well as physical desire.

Wijesinha's narrator asserts,

When we were young, we were not accustomed to thinking of servants as part of the real business of life.... [They] were simply appendages to our existence, and we grew up without a shadow of a doubt that our lives and theirs were lived on two entirely different planes, and that the plane they were on was far far below ours. (SC, 16)

He then goes on to dispute or disprove this understanding by the very act of relating family tales in which the servants are unquestionably "part of the real business of life." His various relatives and family members may have looked down on their servants as existing on a different plane, a lower circle as it were, but these episodes show how the planes or circles intersect and overlap each other. At one point toward the end of the book, the narrator declares, "a number of different worlds had spun into each other as they revolved on their different paths" (SC, 106). He is referring to an intersection of events among members of his own circle. However, the irony is that he thinks this has occurred only for a "brief moment" and does not seem to realise that his stories illustrate how different worlds continually spin and occasionally smash into each other.

On one of the flyleaves, Wijesinha states: "Except for some background material about my immediate family, the incidents and characters in this book are fictional. I hope that it will in particular be understood that this applies to the narrator too." This distancing of the author from his narrator and narrative is something we will see again in Johann Lee's foreword and have already encountered, though by different means, in Ihimaera's choice of a Pākehā protagonist in *Nights in the Garden's of Spain*. However, like his nameless (anti-)hero,

Wijesinha was born in Sri Lanka in the mid-fifties, studied at Oxford, taught university in Colombo, and worked for the British Council.

Beginning in the mid 1960s, the narrator became aware of ethnic, class, and political differences among people, particularly between his family and their servants. At that time, there was also a shift in the thinking of the 'boys,' a few of whom had remained at Shalimar even though they no longer worked as household servants. Unlike previous generations, the younger men no longer "saw their lives as bound up with ours [or] their families as somehow connected through themselves to us" (SC, 7). Also in the sixties, the narrator "developed revolutionary fervours" and thought of his great-grandfather as the "sad victim of colonialism" because of his efforts to join an all-white, exclusively male, English club (SC, 42).

While noticing that people are different and society is segmented, the narrator also begins to struggle with the question of self: "I tried to find an identity," he confides (SC, 11). Something, however, is not quite right – he does not divulge what kinds of identities he considered. Identity suggests individuality, and for that there must be some way of setting apart or distinguishing, of *identifying*, between oneself and others, and of *identifying* which others one is most like. Without names we can't function: "Personal names signify individual identity, making one human being distinct from another; in other words, names grant subjecthood."²²⁵ The narrator, however, does not reveal his name, nor names an identity for himself. What purpose could such anonymity serve?

The anonymous narrator remembers adolescent "storms of rage ... and anguish, evenings full of tears" (SC, 11). Unfortunately, he does not reveal to the reader the reasons for this rage and anguish. What identity issues could have caused his tears? We are left with little recourse but to use conjecture and rely on uncovering hidden meanings throughout the text. A little later he notes, "we all ... need not merely security, but associations that confirm us in the identities we assert" (SC, 13). But again, rather than speaking about himself, he relates his

²²⁵ Lavina Dhingra Shankar, "The Limits of (South Asian) Names and Labels: Postcolonial or Asian American?" in *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America*, Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth, eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 51.

ayah's search for family and personal relationships independent of her employers.

Although, as we shall see in the next chapter, anonymity can have the liberating effect of eliding a character's ethnicity, class status, religion, and, sometimes, gender, here it does no such thing.²²⁶ We already know, or can easily deduce, the narrator's (male) gender, (Christian) religion, (upper) class status, and (Sinhala) ethnicity. In Ihimaera's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, the substitution of nicknames for personal names was a two-fold strategy that served to focus on or reveal certain aspects of the characters that the narrator saw as important or defining, as well as to protect or conceal the identities of those being discussed. In *Servants*, however, the narrator is never named. It is actually quite remarkable that in all his interactions with other people the narrator is never addressed by name – comments, questions, revelations, requests, etc. are only directed *at* him. Equally remarkable is that in his struggles with self-identity he chooses to remain anonymous. According to Riki Wilchins an unnamed object (or subject) cannot be discussed, or scrutinised and examined; the lack of a name implies non-existence. Leaving something/one unnamed is, therefore, an act of exclusion and erasure.²²⁷ This is precisely what Wijesinha's narrator is attempting – he tries to exclude himself from the narrative, erase traces of the personal, so that he will not be discussed and examined along with the characters who populate his stories. One could argue that he is but a mask for the coy author, who, despite protestations to the contrary, knows his Sri Lankan audience will identify him as the protagonist – an assumption he cultivated in his earlier novels.

(Homo)Eroticised Servants

Just as the book is not about servants, it also does not revolve around alternative or transgressive masculinities. However, there are a few notable instances in which the vignettes contain 'gay' characters and/or involve male same-sex desire. The suggestion of

²²⁶ For the freedom of anonymity see Chelva Kanaganayakam, "Hunting the Minotaur: Reading Gopal Baratham and Kirpal Singh," in *Interlogue: Studies in Singapore Literature, Volume 1: Fiction*, Kirpal Singh, ed. (Singapore: Ethos Books, 1998), 78.

²²⁷ Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2004), 38-40.

multiple couplings, daisy-chain links between men in the upper classes, and ready availability of sexual partners from among the servants are like a porn fantasy – but without the sex. Throughout the narrative our wily and unreliable hero is reluctant to clearly discuss or unambiguously describe the (homo)sexual activities and relationships of the various characters who populate his stories. In the following chapter on Singapore we will come across this reticence again in the novels by Johann S. Lee and Andrew Teck Koh.

One of the storylines involving a 'gay' man is in the section titled "Effectiveness Measures." The narrator works for the British Council in Colombo. Office speculation has it that his immediate boss, the Deputy Representative, a British woman named Monica, is interested in him. "[It] was clear that what she wanted was not simply a man but marriage too" (SC, 78). The narrator tells us he was unsuitable because he was "much younger than her, and also black" (SC, 78). So the office's next choice is Michael Hewson, the Council's English Education specialist. But it turns out that Michael is 'gay' – he's "essentially monogamous, and very happy" with his flight attendant boyfriend (SC, 105). Monica's new boss, Desmond Marten, who is also single, becomes the next candidate for marriage according to the office gossips. However, Desmond has no interest in women either; he's besotted by a young male library clerk who does not know how to deal with the Representative's unwanted "attentions" (SC, 79). Although homosexuality is not uncommon in the Council offices, according to the text, it appears that it is contained among the ranks of the upper level British officials. The local employees are aware of its existence and seem accepting of the 'gay' English men, but are less forgiving of their peers. They tease and harass the young library clerk.

Desmond advertises a new gardener position for the Council grounds and the narrator recommends Upul, one of the 'boys' from Shalimar. Upul is somewhat slow-witted but has a "particularly well developed" body which, the narrator assures us, "extended to every aspect" of his anatomy (SC, 59). He shows up for his interview with Desmond in a new pair of trousers – sans underwear. The Representative "enthusiastically" gives Upul the job: "Des couldn't keep his eyes off your boy's dick," Michael tells the narrator (SC, 81). Michael assumes the narrator, knowing of Desmond's 'preferences,' deliberately sent the applicant

underpants-less into the meeting, despite the narrator's remonstrations that Upul usually wears sarongs and is unfamiliar with Western clothing.

Desmond requests Upul to work for him privately. He pays well and makes special arrangements for English classes. Eventually, Upul is promoted and allowed to serve tea in the office, and thus Desmond has more opportunities to see him. At first, Desmond's temper mellows and he becomes more easy-going with his staff. Soon, however, a rivalry over Upul develops between Desmond and Monica. Monica, spurred on by a scheming Michael, hires Upul to help her out with dinner parties. She keeps him till late to "help with the washing up" (SC, 83). Tensions rise and an ensuing mismanagement scandal leads to Desmond's early retirement. Monica is promoted to Togo and plans to take Upul with her as her personal servant. In an act of revenge, Desmond informs London headquarters of the 'impropriety' of the relationship between Monica and Upul leading to Monica's request being denied (SC, 85). Desmond, in turn, offers to take Upul to England, to help him run a Bed and Breakfast in the Lake District. Upul declines and Desmond ends up taking a willing security guard instead.

In the story titled "Obligations" the narrator mentions that he "had got very friendly" with Michael Hewson, the "essentially monogamous" ELT officer at the British Council (SC, 104, 105). They take several work related trips around the country and have "a great time staying in various resorts" (SC, 104). Michael, however, is "not above flirting outrageously whenever he got the chance" (SC, 105). The narrator confides that he feels provoked "by [Michael's] attentions to roomboys at the various hotels" where they stay (SC, 105). There are two ways to read the narrator's resentment; either he is disturbed or offended by Michael's 'outrageous' behaviour, or he is jealous that, rather than giving him his undivided attention, Michael is distracted by the boys. Feeling slighted, the narrator turns catty; he reveals that Michael had been "very promiscuous" in his "distant youth" (SC, 105).

Before moving to Colombo to work for the British Council Michael lived in the remote mountain district of Pannala. He takes the narrator there for a visit. On the way he reveals that many of the plantation owners he knew in Pannala "exchanged boys on a regular basis.

A couple of them were married, but their families were in Colombo, and they had found this the ideal substitute" (SC, 105). The wealthy land owners obviously regard sex with men as an acceptable and pleasant diversion, a substitute for their absent wives, and not permanent or fixed identity. It is also significant that Michael does not say the owners have sex with each other but prefer servants instead. Having sex with social equals would alter the balance of power and have stronger implications about the participants' sexuality.

Michael introduces the narrator to a servant "in his very early twenties" to whom Michael had been attracted. The narrator comments, "I could see that he must have been very attractive a few years earlier" (SC, 105). "Isn't he gorgeous?" Michael exclaims as they drive off: "He was the one boy I never ever had, though I lusted after him for months" (SC, 105). Like other servants encountered in these narratives however, the young man is involved in his own exploitation by men more powerful than himself. Michael says the young man "liked it as much as anyone did" and "asked why I'd never approached him" (SC, 105). Of course, this could be no more than Michael boasting or exaggerating his allure and the willingness of much younger and more attractive men to engage in sex with him (a common phenomenon among 'gay' men). Michael reveals that the boy had been the male equivalent of a mistress for Gamini, the narrator's brother-in-law. The narrator is shocked: "I didn't know he was gay," he exclaims (SC, 106). Thinking back over previous events he realises that Gamini was also having an affair with Ananda, a young man employed by the narrator's sister to look after her house in their absence.

Another story with homoerotic overtones is entitled "A Trust." It begins with an apparently non sequitur allusion to the Duke of Clarence, England's Crown Prince in the 1870s, who "had come under suspicion of being a homosexual, or Jack the Ripper, or possibly even both" (SC, 27). The area around Shalimar, the narrator's home, had commemorated the prince's visit to Colombo, but the names of streets and parks had been changed when his younger brother, George V, acceded to the British throne. The narrative then moves on to the de Mel family, wealthy previous owners of the land on which Shalimar was built, and whose grand residence was called Clarence House. David, the family's eldest son, "was not what could be called the marrying type" (SC, 28). He has something in common with the male

members of the Perera family (related to the narrator through marriage), who were also “not really interested in love or marriage” (SC, 19). Rather, the narrator informs us, the Perera men “were committed to books and booze and boys,” but not necessarily in that order (SC, 19). Thus we have an emerging picture of transgressive (‘gay’) masculinities as aristocratic, (too) well educated, alcoholic, eccentric, having paedophilic tendencies, and possibly homicidal. The narrator remarks, rather cryptically, that David de Mel showed a special interest in his young neighbour because “he saw in me I suspect something of himself” (SC, 29). He never explains what this similarity may have been. However, given the subsequent clues to David’s sexuality, one could also assume that the narrator is giving the reader a hint about his own preferences. “I was a young man he could patronize, and he liked patronizing young men. If they were good-looking, so much the better” (SC, 29).

Although there is no discussion of the nature of David’s “interests” in the various Socialists, students, and apprentices “who flocked to him” (SC, 30), we read that the main focus of his attention is “one of the bright young men the British Council Librarian of those days had picked up and sent off on scholarship, at just about the time he had himself gone back to Britain” (SC, 34). The use of the phrase “picked up” is suggestive and is commonly employed to refer to sexual assignments. Therefore this is a hint, an innuendo about the nature of the relationship between the English librarian and the “bright” young man, who just happened to go to England at the same time his benefactor did. The situation is to the one mentioned previously when Desmond Marten, the ‘gay’ British Council Representative, returns to England with one of the organisation’s local male employees. In the case of the librarian and the student, however, the relationship and the scholarship expire, and “After five years the young man had come back [and] David had taken him up” (SC, 34). Passing on, replacing, and exchanging young men is a recurring feature of the homosocial/sexual relationships alluded to throughout the text.

Meanwhile, David’s ayah Agnes, who has remained in service long after her duties as nurse and nanny are required, ensures that any vacancies in household staff are filled by her relatives.

Whether she actually understood all the *implications* when she introduced one smart young nephew after another to be David’s personal servant, one

could not be sure. However, one after another who turned up and were taken on ... were uniformly good-looking.... She must have screened them and, if so, the one unfailing criterion she applied surely indicated an awareness of her master's *predilections*. (SC, 36, emphasis added)

The narrator does not elucidate on the "implications" of Agnes's recruitment of handsome boys, but we are to surmise that in addition to surrounding himself with attractive young men David must get some kind of satisfaction from these associations. That the employer-employee relationships are also sexual is indicated by Agnes's awareness of David's "predilections." One of these servants procured by Agnes, David's most faithful companion William, eventually marries and has children of his own, yet remains employed and in residence at Clarence House. Once again, it is clear that homosexuality is seen neither as permanent nor as defining one's identity. Desire for and pleasure with or between men does not alter or negate social responsibilities, or preclude conventional marriage and family life.

On a visit to David at Clarence House, the narrator notices William's sons in the background. He wonders how they "would fare if they stayed on there as they grew older. At the time they were still fairly small" (SC, 37). He is curious about what role they may (be required to) play or concerned for their safety while living in the same house as David. Again we glimpse the spectre of paedophilia. This is quickly dismissed, however, as the narrator watches "William presiding over the two newest boys, his nephews now it seemed, who served us lunch," and ruminates on the perpetuation of tradition, as it were: "I found myself thinking of that sort of continuity as being somehow appealing" (SC, 37). The tradition, however, has disturbing overtones. David's ayah Agnes, his personal servant William, his sister's caretaker Ananda, the young servant in Pannala, and other members of the working or lower classes participate in their own exploitation and commodification. The nameless narrator cannot see their degradation nor recognise that the comfort he feels comes at their expense.

If we choose to read *Servants* as a satirical social critique then this is an indictment of Sri Lanka's elite, whose arrogance towards those lower in the social hierarchy, according to Wijensinha, is often expressed as (homo)sexual misconduct and abuse. As a companion piece to *Acts of Faith* and *Days of Despair*, *Servants* does not necessarily condemn men who love men, but rather uses homosexuality as a metaphor for corruption. By engaging in sex with

men, particularly those with less power and status, David de Mel, the Pereras, Gamini, and the Pannala landlords are no better than the colonial powers which metaphorically raped the land, or their latter-day counterparts (like Michael Hewson and Desmond Marten of the British Council) who continue to prey on the island's young men.

Funny Boy Selvadurai

Funny Boy: A Novel in Six Stories (1994), by Shyam Selvadurai, deals with masculinity in formation.²²⁸ In that sense, it is similar to Duff's *Both Sides of the Moon*. Here, however, the narrator is even younger than Duff's teenaged protagonist. The narrative spans seven years in the tumultuous period of Sri Lanka's early post-independence history that resulted in the current state of affairs in which the island government is still in conflict with the separatist movement popularly known as the Tamil Tigers (the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or LTTE). The narrator, Arjun Chelvaratnam (Arjie), is only seven at the beginning of the novel and fourteen by the end. His narrative presents a childish yet insightful point of view into the social and political climate of the day.

Arjie, the 'funny boy' in Selvadurai's eponymous novel, is from an upper middle class family in Colombo, the capital. He has an older brother, Varuna (nicknamed Diggy), and a younger sister, Sonali. His father (whose first name, Robert, we read of only once, in a childhood pledge) works in some unnamed office until chapter three, when he goes into the hotel business with a partner. His mother, Nalini, is a beautiful woman who dotes on Arjie. Though they are from the Tamil minority, they are financially privileged. In a time prior to the events described, and outside of Arjie's memory, Sri Lanka's racial unrest had erupted into ethnic riots, during which his paternal great-grandfather was murdered by a Sinhalese mob. Thus, ethnic tension underlies much of what happens in the narrative and informs the relationships Arjie witnesses and develops.

Employing a technique somewhat similar to Wijesinha's, Selvadurai divides *Funny Boy* into five rather substantial self-contained chapters of reminiscences and an epilogue written as a series of journal entries. Although the book is subtitled *A Novel in Six Stories*, and each chapter is structured around a significant event in Arjie's life that can be read as a separate story, there is a more unified sense to the narrative because it follows a straightforward, linear (Western) progression. Moreover, while Wijesinha's narrator is outward-focused, Selvadurai's narrator relates each new insight to himself. While the unnamed narrator in

²²⁸ Shyam Selvadurai, *Funny Boy: A Novel in Six Stories* (London: Vintage, 1995 [1994]). Further citations included parenthetically refer to this edition, abbreviated as *FB*.

Servants signposts each moment of 'awareness,' Arjie stumbles into knowledge and is more subtle yet expansive in charting his development.

According to Terry Goldie, "the question of what constitutes gay identity is played out in a specifically postcolonial way" in *Funny Boy*.²²⁹ The novel provides the perfect intersection between the postcolonial and the queer. Beginning with Arjie's performance as bride in a children's game (which Goldie declares is a phase "generic to the universal homosexual"²³⁰) and ending in displacement through exile, Selvadurai's narrative demonstrates how the upheavals of ethnic hatreds and violence intermingle with and influence Arjie's awareness of his own sexuality and desire. (Post)Colonialism is a reality for Arjie: he speaks English, attends a British-style school, relatives travel to and from North America, and his mother's lover is a Burgher journalist who lives in Australia. However, his identity as a postcolonial subject does not provide an explanation or justification for his alternative, transgressive masculinity. Arjie struggles to negotiate and balance his desires and nascent sexuality with competing and often conflicting social and familial expectations.

In the first chapter, "Pigs Can't Fly," Arjie becomes aware of gender roles and expectations. At seven, he prefers to play with the girls, especially a dress-up game of his invention called "bride-bride" in which he always gets to be the bride. None of the girls is bothered by Arjie's performance, and no one outside the game seems to know of this, until a cousin arrives from America and wants to be the centre of attention. When the adults realise that Arjie likes dressing up as a bride there is a scramble to re-orient him, as it were, to the boys' world of cricket. Arjie is so terrible at this game that, much to his delight, he is ordered off the field by the other boys. Meanwhile, cousin Tanuja, "quickly renamed 'Her Fatness'" (*FB*, 5), has taken over the role of bride. In the ensuing fight, Tanuja's dress is torn and their grandmother's rest is disturbed, resulting in Arjie's banishment from play altogether. He realises that his behaviour is considered odd, unnatural, and problematic.

The second chapter, "Radha Aunty" involves another relative from America. This time, Arjie forms a very close relationship with his father's younger sister. As his aunt falls in love with

²²⁹ Goldie, 22.

²³⁰ Goldie, 22.

Anil, a fellow-actor in a production of *The King and I*, Arjie becomes aware of ethnicity and racial tension. Anil is Sinhalese and both of their families oppose any such union. Radha and Anil's friendship becomes strained as national unrest escalates. When Radha is injured in a Sinhalese riot, their fate is sealed – she agrees to marry a Tamil whom she had met in America, and whom her family has approved.

“See No Evil, Hear No Evil” is the apt title of chapter three in which many of the adults in Arjie's life refuse to acknowledge the deteriorating conditions in the country. His mother has an affair with an old boyfriend, Daryl. They had not married because he was a Burgher. Daryl is now a journalist based in Sydney who returns to Sri Lanka to investigate rumours of racial violence and police brutality in the Tamil region of Jaffna. He is eventually killed by government forces. Arjie, whose love of reading Daryl encourages, realises that the romantic fictions he enjoys are just that – fiction. They bear no resemblance to the reality he is living.

In “Small Choices,” the fourth chapter, Arjie forms a bond with his father's newest employee. Jegan is a Tamil from Jaffna whose former association with the Tigers, now branded ‘terrorists’ by the government, creates problems for Mr. Chelvaratnam. Jegan is forced to leave following a near-riot. Mrs. Chelvaratnam, severely shaken by the death of her lover, and now even more frightened by the looming threat of violence, wants the family to emigrate. However, her husband refuses to face the truth, even after government thugs rig an election.

With growing concern over Arjie's development, Mr. Chelvaratnam enrolls him in The Queen Victoria Academy at the beginning of chapter five, “The Best School of All.” The title of the chapter is taken from a poem by Sir Henry Newbolt extolling the virtues of his alma mater. It is ironic, of course, because the Victoria Academy is a repressive and oppressive environment run by a sadistic principal and a racist vice principal. However, Arjie meets Shehan, his first boy love. Their friendship progresses from shared punishment and commiseration to full-fledged affair complete with awkward first kisses and tender moments as well as disgust and guilt.

The epilogue has a sense of immediacy and urgency because it is related in the present tense. These are no longer recollections. We experience Arjie's last month in Sri Lanka as each event occurs. Riots and mob violence are a daily reality now. It is the middle of 1983. The Chelvaratnam home is destroyed by fire, his grandparents are murdered while trying to escape, and the family is forced to flee the country.

Border Crossings

In a literal way, the Chelvaratnam family traverses a national boundary by leaving Sri Lanka. However, a major theme in these novels is the idea of transgressing social boundaries as well. In order for there to be transgression there must be some type of barrier or limit beyond which it is understood and accepted that one must not venture. According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, transgression is "an act, process, or instance of ... infringement or violation of a law, command or duty."²³¹ For people who cannot quite conform to the standards of a given society, whose personality, intellectual capability, faith, sexuality, ethnicity, or other demarcation, sets them apart from and in opposition to the majority, these boundaries seem stifling. Social practices and expectations become oppressive, repressive, and depressive (causing depression) tools to keep the masses in line. This can lead one to feel trapped, and one either struggles to break out from these restraints or accepts them as one's fate and acquiesces.

In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Stallybrass and White contend that,

The primary site of contradiction, the site of conflicting desires and mutually incompatible representation, is undoubtedly the 'low'. Again and again we find a striking ambivalence to the representation of the lower strata (of the body, of literature, of society, of place) in which they are both reviled and desired. Repugnance and fascination are the twin poles of the process in which a political imperative to reject and eliminate the debasing 'low' conflicts powerfully and unpredictably with a desire for this Other.²³²

²³¹ Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th Edition (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1996).

²³² Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 4-5.

This is precisely the ground Wijesinha's *Servants* covers, for it (re)presents the family's workers (the 'low') as a site of conflicting desires. While not necessarily reviled by the upper classes, they are dismissed, patronised, infantilised (the male servants are called 'boy'), and exchanged with little understanding of their humanness, except in how it reflects or affects their own lives. Nevertheless, many of these servants are also desired, not only for the services they can provide (such as cooking, cleaning, chauffeuring, or taking care of children and the elderly), but also for their bodies. Upul is just one such example of a commodified, sexualised worker shunted between the private sphere (Shalimar) and the public (the British Council), fought over by Monica and Desmond, promoted from gardener to tea-boy because he looks good in a tight-fitting uniform. The young male servants in the hill district who are passed around between plantation owners like objects are also an example of the eroticised 'low.' The attitudes of both Michael (the English employee from the British Council) and the local land owners towards these 'boys' is debasing.

Stallybrass and White go on to say that the 'higher' classes are not only "frequently dependent upon [the] low-Other (in the classic way that Hegel describes in the master-slave section of the *Phenomenology*)," but their very existence is dependent on and "includes that low symbolically, as a primary eroticized constituent of its own fantasy life."²³³ Stallybrass and White, perhaps purposely, employ the terms 'top' and 'bottom' to refer to this hierarchy of unequal interactions, clearly alluding to sexual positions (usually associated with the active and passive roles in male-to-male intercourse). Reminiscent of the joke about walking into a 'gay' bar where everyone claims to be a 'top,' they state the self-evident observation that one role cannot exist without the other; in fact, the one identity is defined by its relation with, and opposition to, the other:

The result is a mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjectivity: a psychological dependence upon precisely those Others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded at the social level.²³⁴

Although socially outside the circles in which they serve, Wijesinha's 'lower strata' are

²³³ Stallybrass and White, 5.

²³⁴ Stallybrass and White, 5.

invaluable to their masters. They may be marginalised and excluded, yet the text demonstrates how central to every day living they actually are. Two such figures are Daisy and Ravi, both Tamil. Daisy is the grandmother's attendant who attempts to poison the new Prime Minister, the narrator's cousin. She may have been compelled by her son to do so, but that is not relevant. Her action, if successful, could have thrown the country into political turmoil, unleashing new waves of ethnic violence and reprisals. Although Ravi is not, strictly speaking, a servant (he also works as an English teacher at a Hindu College), he is the brother of a servant, and fills in for her when she immigrates to Australia. Ravi saves Sri Lanka "from what would certainly have been an absolute disaster" when he foils Daisy's plan by tackling her and knocking the poisoned drink from the Prime Minister's hand (SC, 117). Both Daisy and Ravi commit a transgression, but the intentions and results are vastly different. Although socially restricted by their respective positions, Daisy could have, and Ravi did influence an outcome of national significance.

Rather than class differences, the social demarcations which keep people apart in *Funny Boy* are primarily ethnicity and gender. Each of the chapters in the novel contains or is based on transgressive relationships which foreshadow or anticipate the final and most important relationship in the novel, that of Arjie and Shehan. In addition, each episode provides examples of, or contrasts between, accepted/acceptable models of masculinity and alternative forms. Arjie and Shehan commit an act of double transgression with their affair. Not only are they both boys, but they are also from opposing ethnic groups. Arjie is Tamil and Shehan is Sinhalese. None of the other unconventional couples have a happy ending, and this seems to indicate that Arjie and Shehan's relationship is also doomed from the start. Radha Aunty (Tamil) and Anil (Sinhalese) develop a passionate relationship which is destroyed by ethnic violence between their communities. Arjie's mother and her Burgher lover were unable to marry in the past. When Daryl is killed, their recommenced affair ends abruptly and the police threaten to blackmail Mrs. Chelvaratnam and expose her infidelity. Both Radha Aunty and Nalini Chelvaratnam should have known better than to consort with men of other ethnic groups, the texts suggests, because of the example of family friend Doris (a Burgher) who married Paskaran (a Tamil). Both of their families objected to the marriage, and Doris was rejected by hers. When Paskaran died Doris was left completely alone with no support from

either side. Finally, Arjie's father, Robert Chelvaratnam, once had an affair with a working-class English girl while studying in Britain, but ended the relationship after going home on holidays. He "came to his senses" when he realised that she "would never fit in with his family" (*FB*, 164). Sri Lankan society was and, in the novel's present, still is not ready to accept such unions.

Besides these bi- or cross-cultural relationships, there are some other pairs that parallel or anticipate the eventual coming together of Arjie and Shehan. There is a brief reference to an intense friendship between Robert Chelvaratnam and Buddy Parameswaran. As schoolmates they had made a pact, a declaration of undying devotion sealed with the mingling of their blood, "until death does us part" (*FB*, 156). In adulthood Mr. Chelvaratnam is reluctant to discuss the friendship and shrugs it off with embarrassment when quizzed by his wife. However, so powerful was this attachment that on Buddy's death Robert feels compelled to provide for his son Jegan. Furthermore, a deep bond develops between Mr. Chelvaratnam and Jegan, possibly because Jegan reminds him of Buddy. Mr. Chelvaratnam displays small intimacies, such as patting Jegan on the knee or squeezing his shoulder, in addition to waiting for him after work so they can share a drink and private conversation. Nonetheless, there are no other indications that Mr. Chelvaratnam's affection for Jegan is anything more than paternal, and we cannot be certain that Mr. Chelvaratnam's relationship with Buddy had been physical. On the other hand, there is a fairly clear suggestion that Jegan himself had been in an intimate relationship with another boy in a nationalist movement to which he belonged.

Mr. Chelvaratnam's growing attachment to Jegan seems not only to reconfirm and revive the earlier indiscretion, but also, paradoxically, to compel him towards preventing Arjie from doing the same. He even calls upon Jegan to help Arjie "outgrow this phase" (*FB*, 166). Ironically, the interest Jegan shows in Arjie may have nothing to do with helping him overcome his "tendencies." He defends Arjie, telling Mr. Chelvaratnam that there is nothing wrong with the boy. Arjie certainly has a crush on Jegan and is flattered by the attention he receives.

There is a further twist in the complex relationships involving Robert, Buddy, Jegan, and Arjie. Throughout the novel Robert Chelvaratnam shows concern for Arjie's lack of masculine traits and is worried about what he calls "certain tendencies" (FB, 166). After we learn of Robert's involvement with Buddy, however, it appears that he is speaking from personal experience; that he recognises these "tendencies" not only because they do not fit into his model of masculinity, but also because he himself may have exhibited and acted upon them as a youth.

When pressed to explain what he means by "tendencies," Mr. Chelvaratnam exclaims, "You know ... he used to play with dolls, always reading" (FB, 166). Arjie's voracious appetite for books is a complex site of signifiers with multiple levels of interactions and implications. His father worries that Arjie reads too much, that somehow this bookishness and implied lack of physical exertion is effeminising. Daryl, however, has a different take on this and even encourages Arjie's bibliophilia by giving him more books. Daryl's love of books and writing has obviously not made him 'effeminate' – quite the opposite, it seems: he is Mrs. Chelvaratnam's lover. In quainter times this would have made Mr. Chelvaratnam a cuckold, hence an emasculated, ineffective man. In addition, as a journalist Daryl exhibits courage and commitment to justice in his determination to investigate government involvement in the violent suppression of Tamils, even though the project is dangerous and eventually leads to his death. Unlike Mr. Chelvaratnam and other models of accepted masculinity in the novel, Daryl is a hero.

One of Arjie's favourite novels (which also figures in his dreams) is *Little Women*, "a girl's book" according to Mr. Chelvaratnam (FB,109). But Daryl confides to Arjie that Louisa May Alcott's book had also been one of his favourites. He further surprises Arjie by giving him the sequels as a gift. In addition to the obvious assumptions readers make when confronted by a boy who plays with dolls and reads *Little Women*, by making Arjie a fan of the Alcott series, perhaps Selvadurai is also playing with the somewhat obscure historical fact that American Colonel Henry S. Olcott, founder of the Buddhist Theosophical Society, travelled

to Sri Lanka in 1880 where he gathered many followers, especially women, in a kind of revival.²³⁵

Like many of the characters in *Funny Boy* who are restrained by social constructions and expectations regarding gender or ethnicity, several of the characters in *Cinnamon Gardens* are also confined, whether or not they recognise it themselves. Bala thinks of his father as “a prisoner who had spent so much of his life in a penitentiary that he [is] unable to accommodate himself to a life outside of it” (CG, 30). It is not until much later, though, that he understands that the Mudaliyar was in part responsible for creating his own prison. Balendran was also an inmate in a self-made prison, though he did not realise at the time that he had any choice in the matter. On his deathbed, Arul, Bala’s older brother, helps Bala see his position in the family and in society from a new perspective: “You have been blind to the reality of life, Bala. You have spent your whole life living by codes everyone lays down but nobody follows” (CG, 273). During his first year of marriage, Bala had been unable to sleep at nights suffering from the sensation of suffocating. The words he uses to describe what is usually considered the honeymoon period, are despair, anguish, and alienation (CG, 38-39). Clearly, Bala has been trapped in a marriage he neither wanted nor felt he could refuse. His wife, Sonia, cannot comprehend Balendran’s blind obedience to his father, unaware of the episode in England and the reasons for the Mudaliyar’s very conditional love. But she herself is also trapped. She

belonged to that group of women from Europe who had married non-European men as an escape from the strictures of their world, a refusal to conform. What they did not know, could not have known was that these men, so outcast in Europe and America, were, in their own land, the very thing women like her were trying to escape. (CG, 54)

In general, the transgressions described in the novel are not necessarily violations of law (though homosexual acts were certainly illegal in early twentieth century colonial Ceylon); but they are indeed breaches of acceptable societal behaviours and familial duty. Both of the main characters, Balendran and Annalukshmi, commit social offences and minor ‘sins’ against family wishes, and the narrative is frequently peppered with either accusations of

²³⁵ Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva, “Buddhist Fundamentalism and Identity in Sri Lanka,” in *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka*, Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 21. For more details see Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

wrongdoing or feelings of shame for supposed misbehaviour. Annalukshmi's mother Louisa blames her husband for their eldest daughter's "reckless nature" because he raised Annalukshmi "as if she were a boy" (CG, 4). This echoes Mr. Chelvaratnam's charge in *Funny Boy* when he tells his wife "it'll be your fault ... if [Arjie] turns out funny" (FB, 14).

Balendran commits the ultimate transgression, in his eyes as well as society's, by having a relationship with another man. We get an indication that he considers the liaison improper or inappropriate on some level through the words used to describe his emotional state at the thought of meeting Richard again after more than two decades apart. We read that he feels "inebriated" and "intoxicated" (CG, 34). Drunkenness is not a respected or respectable state of being in most cultures, and certainly not in the straight-laced prim and proper Ceylonese upper class society of the early twentieth century. Thus, it is significant that terms associated with unseemly loss of control and public embarrassment should be used in this situation. Later, as we read about Bala's sexual association with Rajan ("the one he always went with") we again encounter Bala's sense of shame and impropriety: "[Once] it was over, he knew he would be visited by a terrible anguish.... Then Balendran would vow never to visit the station again" (CG, 82-83).

However, Bala is not the only male character who commits some kind of offence. The Mudaliyar is a hypocrite who passed himself off as a great Hindu sage on a tour of the United States, teaching meditation to "those gullible Americans" (CG, 55). In addition, he's having an affair with his American live-in secretary and has also had liaisons with several of his female workers. One of those was Pakkiam's mother. Following her death, the Mudaliyar had the young girl brought to his estate with the intension of making her his mistress when she came of age. Raised by the Mudaliyar's loyal retainer Pillai, Pakkiam fell in love with Arul, the Mudaliyar's eldest son. When Bala discovers the secret of Pakkiam's mother he finally understands that the Mudaliyar was opposed to the marriage between Arul and Pakkiam because of petty jealousy. Here we have a reversal of the Oedipal complex in which the father wishes to supplant the son, rather than the reverse.

The idea of transgression, however, is often balanced or, more accurately, explained and

even justified by the concept of nature, or the interrogation and recognition of what is natural. After reading Edward Carpenter's *Intermediate Sex* (during his relationship with Richard in England), Balendran had realised that scientists who had studied 'inversion' "did not view it as pathological" (CG, 58). At the time, not only was he more innocent about the realities of his culture and society, he was also romantic and idealistic enough to believe that his relationship could exist unopposed, unchallenged, perhaps even sanctioned. Through family connections back in Ceylon Balendran and Richard are given the opportunity to visit Carpenter and his lover/partner George Merrill.

While visiting Millthorpe, Bala is "amazed and then intrigued" by the bond between Carpenter and Merrill; it is an affirmation that such relationships are not only natural but that a future with Richard is possible "despite such strong societal censure" (CG, 59). Nevertheless, even though he acknowledges to himself in the present that "the type of love" he had shared with Richard is "part of his nature," Bala has come to believe that his sexuality is unpleasant and substandard, a disability: "His disposition, like a harsh word spoken, a cruel act done, was regrettably irreversible. Just something he had learnt to live with, a daily impediment, like a pair of spectacles or a badly set fracture" (CG, 38).

As we will see in the next chapter, Johann Lee's use of E.M. Forster's *Maurice* (1971) acts as a code, an unspoken yet acknowledged signal to the transgressive nature of his character's sexuality. At the same time, this reference back to a British text indicates not only a lack of local or native models for Singapore but also a continued reliance on, and reaction to, colonial discourses. In addition, the use of a Western canonical text underlines or seems to prove the accusation that homosexuality is a foreign import and imperial legacy. In *Cinnamon Gardens*, Selvadurai makes the connection both more subtle and more substantial. Forster acknowledged Carpenter and Merrill (but particularly the latter) as the conceptual 'fathers' of *Maurice*. At the end of the book he noted that the novel "was a direct result of a visit to Edward Carpenter.... [H]e and his comrade George Merrill combined to make a profound impression on me and to touch a creative spring. George Merrill also touched my backside.... I had conceived."²³⁶ Similarly, Bala undergoes a kind of epiphany during his visit

²³⁶ E.M. Forster, *Maurice* [1971] (London: Penguin, 1983), 217.

to Millthorpe.

In a sense, Selvadurai is skipping the middle-man and going directly to the source. By eliminating Forster and *Maurice* as the mediating and elucidating factors, Selvadurai is placing himself and *Cinnamon Gardens* in their vacated position. To what extent he succeeds in creating a Sri Lankan alternative is debatable for several reasons. First, he is speaking from a geographically as well as psychologically Western position. Canada affords him the freedom to express ideas shunned and persecuted in Sri Lanka, and provides the agent, publicist, and publisher it is doubtful his home country would. Second, Bala's epiphany is realised in Britain through British agents. And third, Bala's newfound belief in, and affirmation of, same-sex love is shattered by the family and social expectations and responsibilities awaiting him back in Ceylon/Sri Lanka.

Mimic Boy

This brings us to the text's portrayal of accepted versus alternative masculinities. At the start of the narrative the young children mirror society's gendered roles in their play. In the beginning, Arjie does not seem to be able to distinguish between 'acceptable' masculine and feminine behaviours. This ambiguity and fluidity, however, is challenged by cousin Tanuja, who points out that boys cannot be brides and grooms must go to work. (It is interesting that Tanuja has arrived from America – perhaps an authorial comment on Western-imposed morality.) When Arjie is forced to act out the male role and “go to the office” he reinvents what the children perceive to be a boring and conservative environment, and makes the “office” a fun place where all the children want to play. Arjie's cross-dressing is not only reminiscent of Judith Butler's assertion about gender performativity, but as a kind of imitation it also evokes Bhabha's notion of mimicry. While in this sense Arjie can be conceived of as a mimic-man (boy), he is imitating local women (or at least their idealised image as portrayed in popular movies, novels, and love comics) rather than British men. Bhabha's conception also includes the suggestion or possibility of menace – colonial mimicry poses a threat to the one being emulated by destabilising the image and showing up its

inherent fictitiousness. Arjie's mimicry, however, is perceived as a threat by the men around him rather than the women being impersonated. His performance as 'woman' destabilises the idea of a unified, singular masculine identity. The result is a fragmented 'gender-hybrid' identity.

From the very beginning of the novel we get the feeling that Arjie is not quite 'normal' – at least not in a heteronormative sense. He describes a Chelvaratnam ritual known as 'spend-the-days' when, once a month on a Sunday, all the extended family gathers at the grandparents' house. The adults leave the children there to play and go away for a child-free day. The cousins divide into two groups, marked by two territories known as "the boys" and "the girls" (*FB*, 3). However, one female cousin, Meena, is part of "the boys," and Arjie belongs to "the girls." "It was to this territory ... that I seemed to have gravitated naturally.... The pleasure the boys had standing for hours on a cricket field under the sweltering sun, watching the batsmen run from crease to crease, was incomprehensible to me," Arjie tells us (*FB*, 3). He is a very imaginative child who enjoys creating fantasies or re-enacting favourite fairy tales, in which he always gets the role of "the much-beleaguered heroine" (*FB*, 4). The role of romantic bride is his favourite because of his transformation into a "more brilliant, more beautiful self" (*FB*, 4). The role of groom is reluctantly tolerated in the game as a necessary evil, an "unfortunate feature to the marriage ceremony," because it is regarded as "stiff and boring" (*FB* 6). When cousin Tanuja arrives, though, the idyllic play world of the children is disrupted. She refuses to play the groom role and challenges the group's belief that "Arjie is the bestest bride of all" (*FB*, 11). "But he's not even a girl," she exclaims. "A bride is a girl, not a boy" (*FB*, 12). The argument is incontrovertible, but the children seem innocent enough to ignore this. Left with no other recourse, Tanuja resorts to name-calling: "You're a pansy ... A faggot ... A sissy!" she shouts, while the other children stare uncomprehending. No one knows what these words mean, except that they're obviously derogatory. They call her a "fatty-boom-boom" and this is an insult they can all understand.

Arjie's unconventional behaviour is exposed on his grandmother's birthday, when all the aunts and uncles are gathered together in the house. The aunts and uncles have a laugh at his expense. One of the uncles taunts Arjie's father, "looks like you have a funny one here" (*FB*,

14). Arjie's parents end up having an argument in which Mr. Chelvaratnam blames his wife for allowing Arjie to play with her jewellery and watch her dress. Arjie is perplexed by his father's use of the word 'funny' and the tone of disgust which accompanies it. The parents decide that Arjie must join the boys.

Robert Chelvaratnam is Arjie's first image of acceptable masculinity. He is a distant father and strict disciplinarian who blames his wife for indulging Arjie's quaintness (by allowing him to watch while she dresses and puts on her make up). "It'll be your fault," if Arjie turns out "funny," he accuses her (*FB*, 14). Robert decides to send Arjie to a boys' school, the Queen Victoria Academy, in order to "make a man" of him (*FB*, 209). Of course, there are small ironies here, of which Selvadurai must have been conscious. It is perhaps intentionally ironic that the name of this boys' school, where Arjie is supposed to learn how to be a man, includes the word 'queen.' Furthermore, we find out that the head prefect has sex with boys. It is also significant that the institution is named after Victoria (herself a matriarchal figurehead of colonialism and 'mannered society') and still aspires to and perpetuates Victorian colonial values.

Like Arjie's father, his older brother Diggy is also a model of accepted masculinity. He plays cricket with the other boys, exercises with weights, and has no difficulties in the strict environment at the Queen Victoria. Even though only a boy, he greets Jegan confidently and shakes hands with him as an equal, as a man. Diggy confides that their father is sending Arjie to the Queen Victoria Academy because he is worried: "He doesn't want you turning out funny," he explains (*FB*, 210). His advice to Arjie is to "never complain ... take it like a man" (*FB*, 211). The irony is that "take it like a man" is a phrase often repeated in Western 'gay' subcultures with echoes from 'gay' erotica. Selvadurai's use of the expression may also be a deliberate allusion, an intentional reference to the notoriety of boys' schools. In addition, it foreshadows Arjie's and Shehan's sexual awakening as well as the abusive 'discipline' they endure at the sadistic principal's hands.

Among the many other examples of archetypal or stereotypical masculinity in *Funny Boy*, the principal of the Queen Victoria Academy, Mr Abeyinghe ("Black Tie," behind his back), is

perhaps the most extreme. He epitomises the colonial ideal. Besides dressing as the British colonists in a “carefully pressed white suit” and “sola topee” (similar to a safari hat), he stresses the ‘old’ values taught by his English predecessors (*FB*, 214). He is a strict authoritarian who verbally berates and belittles students and severely punishes anyone for the slightest infraction. When he notices that Shehan has long hair, he slaps him forcefully, pulls his ears and hair, and shears off the offending locks. At another time, he disciplines the boys by making them kneel in the hot sun for hours on end with not even a drink of water. These experiences cause Arjie to question the status quo: “How was it that some people got to decide what was correct or not, just or unjust? ... [E]verything had to do with who held power and who didn’t. If you were powerful like Black Tie or my father you got to decide what was right or wrong” (*FB*, 274).

In *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* Alastair Pennycook discusses what he calls colonial dichotomies, the cultural constructs which (much like Edward Said’s notion of orientalism) allowed the British to conceive of the colonised peoples as diametrically opposed Others. One of these was the contrast between masculine and feminine. This is a concept Said, Ashis Nandy, Sara Suleri, Leela Gandhi, and others also discuss. The colonial impetus and its justification were often couched in gendered, sexualised terms. Britain’s imperial representatives and administrators were often described as strong and forceful (masculine), while the colonised place was viewed as inviting, vulnerable, penetrable (thus, feminine). Pennycook demonstrates how this type of thinking was a cyclical operation: positive and negative views of the genders were attributed to the coloniser and colonised, but these stereotyped traits in turn were further developed and assigned to the genders. Thus, the colonial project also influenced European culture, which then was projected and imposed upon the colonised peoples. One could argue that the kind of British, colonial masculinity that was exported to, and constructed in, the colonies was a reaction to the perceived ‘effeminacy’ of non-European males. The tough but loyal, physically aggressive and competitive man was hailed as the epitome of ‘manliness,’ whose fitness and ability could be tested and proven on the sporting field. This ethic was adopted not only by the public school system in England (Pennycook calls public schools “misogynous, homophobic, racist ... and

elitist institutions"²³⁷), as well as other organisations and boys clubs, but also implemented in the colonies.

Idealised British masculinity was upheld as the standard to which not only English but also colonised males should aspire. This is clearly evident in Selvadurai's novels, especially in *Funny Boy* chapter 5, "The Best School of All." The title of the chapter is taken from a poem by Sir Henry Newbolt (whom Joseph Bristow describes as a poet of empire) extolling the virtues of his alma mater. Newbolt's poem "Clifton Chapel" promotes the idea that public-school boys are part of a superior race.²³⁸ The irony here, of course, is that even though the British public school model has been emulated in the (former) colonies, its pupils will never be considered a 'superior race' by colonial standards. The boys may indeed be 'elevated' above their compatriots, but they will never attain the status of the English, they cannot be English. Patrick Brantlinger points out that in much of English colonial fiction, the 'natives' are often portrayed as having "a wonderful facility for imitation." However, "No matter how astonishing their apings of white ways ... they can never become the genuine article. Ironically, the imperialist work of converting the savages undercuts itself at this point: the idea of imitation makes a mockery of the idea of conversion."²³⁹

The title of chapter 5 is itself ironic because The Queen Victoria Academy, the school Arjie attends, is an oppressive, repressive environment run by a sadistic principal and a racist vice principal. Nandy's quip that the Westernised Indian is more English than an Englishman seems to be what Selvadurai had in mind when he wrote the character of the principal. Mr. Abeysinghe is a strict authoritarian man who favours colonial dress (*FB*, 214) and extols the "old" values (*FB*, 246). Furthermore, Mr. Abeysinghe and his Academy stress instruction in the English 'classics' rather than a vernacular education. The school is designed to produce good English subjects, even though Sri Lanka has already been independent for several decades.

²³⁷ Alastair Pennycook, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 64.

²³⁸ Sir Henry Newbolt, *Poems: New and Old* (London: John Murray, 1912); cited in Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (London: Harper Collins Academic, 1991), 28.

²³⁹ Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, New York & London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 60.

In addition to the masculine/feminine binary, Pennycook identifies another colonial dichotomy as that of adult (England/Europe) and child (the colonised peoples). In the West colonialism was often considered as a necessary step in progress and the 'civilising' mission – progress as the evolution from prehistory to history, childhood innocence to adult maturity, savagery to civilisation, paganism via religion to rationalism/scientism. In Victorian literature, England was often portrayed as a concerned, nurturing, and some times disciplinarian parent, whose children (the colonies) were at various levels of development and maturity. Like children, many of them were already at the verge of independence, but this was not necessarily a threat to parental authority and respect. This model of knowledgeable parent/adult and simple or impressionable (and preferably trainable) child was replicated in many spheres, including education, and is in evidence at The Queen Victoria Academy. The principal and his deputy know what is best and exert strict control over the hordes of boys in their care.

According to Nandy “a colonial system perpetuates itself by inducing the colonized, through socio-economic and psychological rewards and punishment, to accept new social norms and cognitive categories.”²⁴⁰ However, “More dangerous and permanent are the inner rewards and punishments, the secondary psychological gains and losses from sufferings and submission under colonialism.”²⁴¹ Although both Mr Abeysinghe and the vice principal are Sinhalese, they have internalised the English ideals and run the school like a micro-empire. They are examples of the colonised mind. They identify with the former coloniser. In relation to India, Nandy asserts that even though the colonised “may not have fully shared the British idea of the ... hyper-masculine, manifestly courageous, superbly loyal Indian castes and subcultures mirroring the British middle-class sexual stereotypes,” many of them did see “their salvation in becoming more like the British.”²⁴² While Nandy refers specifically to India, a similar process occurred in Sri Lanka, which maintains comparable cultural beliefs and caste principles.

²⁴⁰ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 3.

²⁴¹ Nandy, 3.

²⁴² Nandy, 7.

Nandy outlines the ways in which eighteenth and nineteenth century pro-British 'reformers' reinterpreted and reinvented classic texts, myths, and traditional beliefs to fit Western models and ideals, promote English-style masculinity, and establish the notion that the modern British Empire epitomised the principles and aspirations of a lost Golden Age. Pradeep Jeganathan asserts that this was also the case in Sri Lanka which the British regarded as the location of a degenerated civilisation that once equalled Egypt, Greece, and Rome. This was their justification for imperialism as a project of restoration, archaeological exploration, and the acquisition of historical knowledge.²⁴³

Pennycook asserts that the colonial combinations of adult/child and masculine/feminine binaries are also revealed in many of the sexual relationships between colonisers (primarily men) and colonised (often boys). But it is not only colonisers and colonised who conform to this pattern. This hierarchical power play is repeated in several forms (not always sexual) throughout the Sri Lanka novels, and usually involves class or social status. Among these are the sexual exploitation of servant boys by wealthy native land owners and the ambiguous associations of David de Mel with his 'apprentices' in *Servants*; Mr. Chelvaratnam's ambiguous friendship with Jegan, his best friend's son, in *Funny Boy*; and as we shall see later, the relationship between the Mudaliyar and Balendran, his adult son, in *Cinnamon Gardens*.

The English language itself is implicated in the project of colonialism, Pennycook contends. For example, imperial constructions of the colonised Other as feminine and childish are informed and reproduced by theories about the language; such as the astonishing declaration that English is "positively and expressly masculine, it is the language of a grown-up man and has very little childish and feminine about it."²⁴⁴ It is immediately apparent that Jespersen's claim is closely related to the colonial dichotomies Pennycook highlights. The implication is that if English is masculine and grown-up, there must be other languages which are feminine and childish. A culture that values masculinity and adult maturity but devalues femininity

²⁴³ Pradeep Jeganathan, "Authorizing History, Ordering Land: The Conquest of Anuradhapura," in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, eds. (Colombo: Social Scientists Association, 1995), 121.

²⁴⁴ O. Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982 [1938]), 2; cited in Pennycook, 145.

and childhood will also look down on those whom it considers feminine (or effeminate) and childlike (or childish). In the Sri Lanka novels having an English education or speaking English is a symbol of higher status.

In *Servants* we came across the term *kaduwa*, the dividing sword which separates English-speakers from non-English speakers. *Kaduwa* creates two realms, two classes of people in Sri Lanka; Wijesinha's narrator and his family are firmly rooted in the privileged realm, while most of the servants are in the disadvantaged one. The narrator was educated at Oxford and works for the British Council. Pennycook notes that one of the main goals of the British Council, established during the height of imperialism, was to spread English around the globe.²⁴⁵ According to Qadri Ismail in current times language rather than lineage is considered the primary indicator of ethnic difference and identity in Sri Lanka.²⁴⁶ So where does this leave Wijesinha's narrator? What does his language indicate about his post-independence identity? On one level he is merely hiding behind a veneer of 'respectability,' using language to deflect attention and obscure his motivations as well as his ethnic and sexual identity. Like Mr Abeysinghe and his deputy in *Funny Boy*, he's an example of the colonised mind. On another level though, as a tool for Wijesinha's social commentary and political critique, the unnamed narrator subverts the system from within, by pointing out its instability and inconsistencies, its constructed façade.

Commenting on a common theme in many imperialist adventure romances, Brantlinger asserts that "the loss of the ability to speak one's native tongue represents a symbolic outer limit of regression"²⁴⁷ – but somehow this only applied to Europeans who 'went native' (whether by choice or by force). What about the non-European person's loss of native language? The opposite seems to be assumed; rather than a sign of degeneration to some imagined "outer limit," the exclusive use of English was seen as somehow improving the 'native.' But if we stretch this formulation somewhat, can we re-conceive Brantlinger's limits as boundaries and (re)position regression as a kind of *transgression*? In this sense then, the

²⁴⁵ Pennycook, 12.

²⁴⁶ Qadri Ismail, "Unmooring Identity: The Antinomies of Elite Muslim Self-Representation in Modern Sri Lanka," in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, eds. (Colombo: Social Scientists Association, 1995), 62.

²⁴⁷ Brantlinger, 66.

one who speaks another language is also being transgressive. Thus, Wijesinha's narrator and Selvadurai's protagonists commit cultural transgression on several different levels. By speaking English the narrator of *Servants* (as well as Arjie in *Funny Boy* and Balendran in *Cinnamon Gardens*) perpetrates linguistic nonconformity. Arjie transgresses family and social values when he not only befriends a boy from a different ethnic background, but also gets involved with him sexually. Below we will discuss Bala, who also breaches cultural principles, as well as his father's decrees, by re-establishing a relationship with his older brother Arul, having sex with Rajan, the young soldier, and maintaining his liaison with the Englishman, Richard.

An Uncle in the Gardens

Selvadurai's second novel, *Cinnamon Gardens* (1998), could be subtitled "The Uncle's Story," but unlike Ihimaera's novel of that title, in this one the uncle is still alive.²⁴⁸ In a significant departure from the other novels discussed, this one takes place wholly in the colonial past, specifically, in Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) during 1927 and 1928. This was even before self-rule, though murmurs of political dissent and ethnic unrest were already being heard. In another departure from most of the texts examined in this thesis, the story is narrated from a third-person omniscient point of view, and one of the central figures is female. The story revolves around two main characters, Annalukshmi Kandiah and her uncle, Balendran Navaratnam (actually her father's cousin). They are high-caste Tamil, but the Kandiah family are Christian while the Navaratnam family are Hindu. Annalukshmi, whose ideas are more progressive than her family or society are prepared to deal with, is a teacher in her early twenties at a Mission school. Balendran (Bala) manages his father's rubber plantation and the family temple. While a student in London, Balendran had been in a relationship with an English man. Even though there are two main characters with parallel stories, Balendran's narrative is the more relevant to this discussion. His struggles with sexuality and social obligations, his ascendance in the family hierarchy, his relationship with his father, and the affair with Richard chart the development and recognition of an alternative masculinity

²⁴⁸ Shyam Selvadurai, *Cinnamon Gardens* (London: Anchor, 2000 [1998]). Further citations included parenthetically refer to this edition, abbreviated as *CG*.

which, ultimately, is preferable to the colonial models described previously.

It must also be noted that in general, men in *Cinnamon Gardens* are described with much more detail than women. In a book equally divided between a 'gay' male and a straight female protagonist this has the effect of making the reader participate in the thoughts of both, to share their desires, hopes, and frustrations. This identification with both genders is a result of the author's own sexuality, as well as a strategy employed by the author to blur the distinctions between 'hetero-' and 'homoerotic' desire and help the reader *feel 'gay.'* The meticulous, almost loving, attention given to men's appearance evokes the lingering 'gay' gaze of one appraising other men as potential lovers, rivals, or persons unworthy of further scrutiny. These passages translate the physicality of 'gay' bars and beats, the longing of erotica, into lexical images and create a subliminal suggestion that men are to be looked at, admired, even desired. The reader becomes aware of the bodily presence and reality of each male character, however insignificant. Female characters, no matter how central or important to the narrative, regardless of how well described and characterised, seem to lack the weightiness or significance assigned to men. (Unfortunately, however, this reinforces a patriarchal hierarchy, even if only on an aesthetic level.). Even Annalukshmi, who is a central character and the least stereotypically 'ladylike' in Ceylonese terms, practically glides off the page in her saris, while an unnamed young man playing cricket on the beach gets a full paragraph of sensual elaboration. As he squats in the sand guarding the wicket we are invited to gaze at "His handsome face and nice teeth when he smiled, the straps of his [bathing] suit slightly awry over his smooth chest, the shape of his crotch clearly outlined" in his "close-fitting shorts" (CG, 93). This is but one example of the aesthetic dominance of masculine constructions.

In Sri Lanka, homosexuality is often considered a youthful phase, frequently with economic undertones. The local young men who have sex (often in exchange for money or gifts) with primarily Western 'gay' tourists are often referred to as "the boys on the beach"²⁴⁹ – and this seems to be the extent to which most people acknowledge the existence of same-sex desire or sexual activity on the island. Selvadurai mentions a similar arrangement in *Cinnamon*

²⁴⁹ Goldie, 22-23.

Gardens, but the older and financially better-off patron is also a local. Bala's marriage to Sonia, his first cousin (daughter of his father's brother and an English wife), seems the model of propriety and happiness. Their son Lukshman is in school in England. But Bala harbours a guilty secret – he often meets Ranjan, a young army private, for sex on the beach. In some ways, Bala is like David, the protagonist in Ihimaera's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*. Both are 'happily' married, with children, and fairly prominent positions. Both have strained, precarious relationships with their fathers. But, whereas David makes the choice to leave his family for a relationship with Chris, Balendran chooses to remain with his family.

It is interesting that both books have the word "garden" in their titles. There is a sense of lushness in both titles, of fragrant flowers and spices, luxurious sensuousness. Gardens are personal places in which nature is allowed to encroach upon human structures or constructions. But gardens can also be ordered places where nature is not given free reign. Occasionally, some bush or tree grows unruly and must be trimmed, or even removed. Left unattended, gardens would revert to a wilder, yet more natural, state. Similarly, the characters who inhabit these two metaphorical gardens are restrained by family expectations and societal norms. Their struggles to either conform or break free are like those of tropical plants in a formal garden.

While comparing fictional characters to domesticated garden flora may seem an irrelevant digression, I also want to draw a connection between the image of verdant growth and the behaviourist's ubiquitous yet contrived conundrum of nature versus nurture. The question with alternative sexualities in this regard, still remains contested and unanswered, despite numerous studies, anecdotal information, and personal testimony. In *Funny Boy*, Arjie struggles with what is natural, and what imposed. In *Cinnamon Gardens* the question also arises in other areas of the various characters' lives. Annalukshmi, for example, does not act in ways that women are expected to within her own culture. In addition, the English principal at the mission school where she teaches, does not think that Annalukshmi (or indeed, any native teacher) is capable of holding an administrative position. "That would be beyond you," she says without malice (CG, 22). Bala struggles between what he feels are his natural inclinations and his familial duty. In the end he chooses a compromise, in which duty takes priority but does not exclude his sexuality. Returning to the metaphor of vegetation, we

could ask, Is a garden 'nature' (natural), or is it the product of careful and deliberate cultivation (nurture)? The obvious answer would be, It is both. And so it must be with characters both fictional and actual. We all are the products of external influences as well as internal programming. Identities are both constructed and essential.

Balendran is the second son of a wealthy Mudaliyar (a traditional leadership role adapted by the British as a colonial government representative). His older brother Arulanandan rejected his birthright in order to marry a servant girl and was subsequently banished from the island. Bala was sent to England for a 'proper' education at Oxford. There he met and fell in love with Richard Howland. They shared a flat together until Bala's father, informed of the relationship, forced him to marry his cousin Sonia and return to Ceylon. These two events, Arul's disobedience and defiance and Bala's obedience and acquiescence, lead to Bala's elevation as the favoured son and his father's successor. Fully aware of his father's conditional love, acceptance, and approval, Bala treads a precarious line between complete subservience and a clandestine occasional nightlife. This all changes when Richard arrives in Ceylon.

An overarching theme in *Cinnamon Gardens* is the repeated motif of difference, or differentiation. This can also be seen as segmentation and separation. The novel deals with racial, ethnic, class, religious and gender distinctions which often lead to opposition, disagreement, and ultimately, loss. Early in the narrative we become aware of the various hierarchies and structures by which the society of Ceylon governs itself. These are not only systems imposed by British colonial powers and other Western/European influences, though their effects are undeniably and significantly present.

For example, the segmentation and differentiation between young and old teachers within the Colpetty Mission School where Bala's niece Annalukshmi teaches is imposed by the teachers themselves. On the other hand, the disparity between native staff and English principal is based on both colonial biases as well as internalised notions of inherent superiority/inferiority. Such separation is prevalent in Ceylon during this period of unrest in its colonial history. The school serves as a microcosm of Ceylonese society dealing with

larger issues of racial, ethnic, and religious fragmentation which will ultimately lead to civil war.

The novel is named after a wealthy suburb of Colombo which used to be a cinnamon estate “cultivated by the colonial masters” where the native workers were practically slaves (CG, 11). Many of the streets here commemorate former British governors and are lined with grand mansions whose owners and residents are “faithful servants of the British Empire or ... at least loyal to the principles of the colonial economy that had placed them where they were” (CG, 12). The Mudaliyar, who lives in Cinnamon Gardens, epitomises this attitude. He is not in favour of self-government for Ceylon because he wants to keep his position and is worried that the Sinhala majority will come to dominate the Tamil minority of which he is a member. Furthermore, he also does not believe in universal franchise for the Ceylonese masses. Together with Balendran’s best friend F.C. Wijewardena, he represents the ruling classes, which are either happy with the status quo, or else not very interested in relinquishing or sharing power, should a change occur. The Mudaliyar belongs to the Ceylon Tamil Association, the most conservative of the political groups, while F.C. is a member of the Ceylon National Congress which is pressing for independence, or at least a modicum of autonomy, but not universal suffrage.

Balendran disagrees with both of these conservative views. He may be motivated in part by the recognition that if his homosexuality is discovered he will be consigned to the heaps of the irrelevant, or worse, the reviled. Though his own status as a man who has sex with other men potentially marks him for political obscurity and social oppression, he also has the ability to empathise with the voiceless and powerless (women and other marginalised groups). He can see that his niece’s independence and career ambitions are neither socially sanctioned nor likely to be actualised without sacrifice. He agrees with his wife that women deserve to be heard and guiltily acknowledges that she herself is trapped in a pattern of relationships which deny her independence, freedom and personal power. He witnesses the effects of his brother’s dispossession and exile upon his nephew. Unlike his father, Balendran has faced adversity and been forced to make decisions contrary to his nature or desires.

As Ceylon prepares for the Donoughmore Commission, charged with the task of assessing the colony's readiness for self-rule and universal suffrage, Bala's old lover, Richard Howland, arrives to report on the proceedings. He is accompanied by James Alliston (Alli), his partner of seven years. Bala and Richard had been truly in love over twenty years ago but now, Balendran acknowledges, "his love for Richard was long dead" (CG, 38). Besides the fact that they had not had any contact during the intervening time, too many things had happened ensuring that they no longer had similar lives, or anything much in common. Both Richard and Bala are nervous about their first meeting after the abrupt end of their relationship, imagining various scenarios which don't take into account the passage of time or the new partners each now has. Neither knows the full extent of the circumstances surrounding their break-up. Bala discovers that his best friend, F. C. Wijewardena, had informed Bala's father about the relationship, while Richard discovers that Bala fell ill as a result and cut off all communication because of his father's emotional blackmail.

Soon after his father had arrived in London, Bala had come down with pneumonia. When Sonia first met her cousin she thought the haggard look in his eyes was due to his illness, and that he seemed as a man dying rather than recovering. She did not know the reason for his illness or for the haggard look. She thought that his "unquestioning obedience to familial and social dictates, his formality even in their lovemaking, his insistence that they maintain separate bedrooms" was due to cultural and social dictates (CG, 80). But when Richard appears on the scene he re-ignites the memories and old feelings in Bala. However, Bala finds he cannot turn his back on his family, even though Richard is willing to leave Alli to be with him.

Like Arjie in *Funny Boy*, Bala's models of 'acceptable' masculinity in *Cinnamon Gardens* are his father and older brother. As a boy he was always unfavourably compared to his brother, Arulanandan. More importantly, however, Bala's father, the Mudaliyar, is never referred to by first name and rarely even by surname. This emphasises his emotional distance from his wife and children as well as his supreme authority, an almost godhead position, within the family. The Mudaliyar's relationship with Balendran is very nearly one of master and servant because of the events in England two decades prior. When Bala goes to visit his father on

family business he often waits in the queue with the other petitioners. But just as the Mudaliyar's social or governing position is dependent upon outside forces, especially the good favour of the British overlords, so his position as absolute head of the family is also dependent upon, and subverted by, the very people (relations and retainers) over whom he presumes to rule.

The Mudaliyar has grown up the spoiled first son in a wealthy and influential family: "From the time he was a child, he had been taught to feel his superiority, his right never to be thwarted.... [He] was like a blunt knife, unsharpened on the hard stone of adversity" (CG, 55). His overindulged upbringing leads the Mudaliyar to act like a petulant child even in adulthood. Once he makes a decision he regards it a sign of weakness to change his mind or compromise. Thus, when he impetuously banishes his eldest son to India, he forces the entire household to take an oath never to contact Arulanandan, or even so much as speak his name. He is so accustomed to getting his own way that he cannot conceive that his wife would be unable or unwilling to honour this command. He also cannot imagine that his trusted servant Pillai would go against his demands to keep in touch with his foster daughter Pakkiam, whom Arul married.

In one of the greatest ironies in the book, the Mudaliyar believes that "the two people he trusted most, the two he felt he could count on for absolute obedience and loyalty had betrayed him" (CG, 350). He still does not understand that his wife Nalamma and his servant Pillai choose to honour a greater love. He cannot conceive that love between parent and child is far more important than blind obedience and unquestioning loyalty. This is the difference between the Mudaliyar's understanding and expression of masculinity through which all his relationships are filtered, and Balendran's brand of masculinity which is more liberal in displays of affection and genuine concern for others.

Bala came to believe that his relationship with Richard was like a dream, an escape from the realities and responsibilities of life. "How foolish to have imagined that the world would change over for them" (CG, 59). After Arul's fall from grace Bala assumed his position as favoured son. What he did not realise at the time was that his father felt he had no alternative. It would have been seen as a weakness on the Mudaliyar's part to change his

stance on Arul and accept him back from exile. Therefore, he had little choice but to forgive Bala's transgression and groom him to be his successor. If Bala were to be cut off as well, the Mudaliyar would have no one to carry on the family name or inherit his possessions and duties. Bala had convinced himself that his father had acted out of love and concern. "He had his father to thank for saving him from such a fate" (CG, 60). There is a sense of irony here, but also an unconscious bitterness in Bala, a hurt and resentment he represses rather successfully until Richard comes back into his life and he realises what a manipulative and hypocritical man his father truly is.

The Mudaliyar subscribes to the clichéd notions that 'a man is the head of the household' and 'king of his castle.' He regards any deviation from this rigid and demanding masculinism on his part, or perceived disloyalty from others, as a direct challenge not only to his authority as husband and father but also to his very essence as a man. However, early in the novel we get an inkling that the Mudaliyar's gruff and tough exterior is just that, a façade; a constructed persona no less vulnerable than the people on whom he unleashes his formidable will and occasional fury. On one occasion, the Mudaliyar allows himself to feel pride in his son, but it is a strange kind of delight which lingers on Bala's appearance and resemblance to his grandfather than on his impressive accomplishments as plantation manager and temple custodian. As Bala is ushered into his father's poorly lit office "the Mudaliyar let his normally stern expression soften...because his face was in shadow" (CG, 28). This is a small fracture in his carefully composed image which he is careful to hide from Bala. This is an example of constructed masculinity that seeks to blend in or conform to social (and personal) expectations rather than transgress, even if it is duplicitous to do so.

However, this episode is a little peculiar not because of the fleeting slip in the Mudaliyar's austere mask, but because of the manner of pleasure or satisfaction he displays. It is more akin to a lover's appraisal than a father's joy, especially as it lingers on Bala's physical attributes and makes no reference to his intelligence, abilities, endeavours, or any other internal qualities. Earlier, the Mudaliyar had been thinking of a favourite verse from the Tirukkural: "The service a son can render his father is to make men ask 'How came this blessing?'" (CG, 28). We are told that the Mudaliyar's pride in Bala "was well warranted" as

he gazes on his son's "small but well-proportioned frame and fine features, his long eyelashes ... his mouth with its thin upper lip and full lower one ... the dark glow of his skin" (CG, 28). What makes the Mudaliyar proud, his son's attractiveness? There is no mention in the detailed physical description of any type of 'service rendered'. Nor does the Mudaliyar reflect on his son's accomplishments or contributions to the family's power, wealth, and prestige that would make him the envy of other people or could be regarded as a 'blessing.' So what are we to make of this strange passage?

Judith Butler explains that Freudian analysis of "gender consolidation" and identity formation postulates a childhood (homo)sexual desire of a boy for his father which is sublimated, denied, and displaced (replaced and transferred) onto a female object in 'normal' development; but in the development of an 'abnormal' (i.e. 'gay') boy that desire for the father is transformed into a desire for other men.²⁵⁰ While this may be true, it is not obvious or elucidated in any of the texts (and would require a completely different type of thesis to analyse). In fact, almost the opposite seems to be true in the episode mentioned above, in which the desire is from the father for the son.

In one respect it would be fairly easy to read this as a slip-up in the narratorial voice, an intrusion of the author into the father's point of view, producing the strange, homoerotically sensuous, description above. However, I consider the passage another instance of transgression in which a son's repressed erotic (Oedipal) feelings are transposed onto the father. Yes, the author's voice does blend with the narrator's, but the passage also performs that other function of transgression: it mirrors and inverts the accepted and acceptable (taking it a step beyond Oedipus and Electra complexes).

Throughout most of the novel, Bala is a model husband and dutiful son, very aware of his responsibilities and obligations. As we read on, however, we become more conscious of the strange hold his father has over him. The Mudaliyar represents the harsh, uncompromising reality of compliance to accepted roles in mainstream society, within which a same-sex relationship can only be a 'dream.' Towards the end, Bala himself recognises that it was as if

²⁵⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 59.

he has been under a spell. When he decides to finally stand up for himself and speak out against his father, the spell is broken and Bala is free. That he chooses to remain with his family and not pursue Richard to England is a testament not only to the times but also to his strength of character in recognising that other lives will be affected. Though it is not mentioned, we can assume that Bala finally tells his wife the truth about his sexuality and finds a healthy alternative to the surreptitious and furtive nighttime meetings with other men.

The End: Cautious Optimism?

Even though Wijesinha's narrator is deliberately tight-lipped about his own sexuality and personal romantic relationships, and alternative or transgressive masculinity is not exactly foregrounded, there are several occasions which indicate that the narrator may be 'gay.' One such event is when he witnesses the young gardener, Upul, receiving oral ministrations from Wimala, the grandmother's attendant: "He was quite naked.... His body *as I had noted before* was particularly well developed. Now I noticed that this quality extended to every aspect" (SC, 59, added emphasis). The narrator purports to be quite shocked, but cannot keep his eyes from the sight. Later, he declines to speculate about the consequences should simple-minded yet sexual Upul, be required to sleep in the same room as the "effeminate" Siri (SC, 59). Siri was the family's new 'boy' in the eighties. The narrator remarks on his "sweet face," but comments that he had "markedly camp" mannerisms and a "fussy devotion to detail" (SC, 56).

As indicated earlier, Wijesinha's anonymous narrator is as unreliable as he is coy. It is significant that he has "noted before" – gazed at, evaluated, and likely desired – Upul's "well developed" body. His alleged refusal to consider what could happen between Upul and Siri rings false, particularly as he devotes an entire paragraph to it. There is a prurient enjoyment in conjuring up the fantasy for his readers, then refusing to develop or describe it. Therefore, it is quite amazing that the narrator, by now in his thirties and highly educated, has not thought of, been aware of, or considered the possibility of people from a different (lower)

social status having the same kinds of relationships as he and his set do. He declares, "it was then, for the first time in fact, that I became aware of the realities of life in the nether regions. That the servants too had their own private lives, full of subtle associations, came home to me" (SC, 60). Besides the fully intentional pun, the narrator is once again attempting to hoodwink his audience. The reader is well advised to accept neither protestations of innocence, nor declarations of enlightenment. Despite assuring us at every step along the way that he is now aware of, or that he understands, the servants and their lives, the narrator only succeeds in showing how perfunctory and superficial this insight is. His attitude towards servants may be more 'liberal' than that of previous generations, but he is still part of a hierarchy that allows him to be amazed by the "realities of life in the nether regions."

In the final story/chapter of *Servants*, a former servant's cousin appears on the scene. Ravi is "a tall strongly built youth" who develops "a strong devotion" to the narrator (SC, 111). The narrator helps get him a job as English teacher at the Hindu College near Shalimar. In the end Ravi thwarts an attempt on the Prime Minister's life, thus saving Sri Lanka from further upheaval (SC, 117). After that he is invited to move into Shalimar – and the story, as well as the book, ends!

This is a very odd place to end. Throughout the book, the narrator, who remains steadfastly nameless, is looking back at his life – or rather, he relates various events in the lives of those around him. He does not spend much time talking about himself, describing what he wants, analysing what he thinks, or indicating where he hopes he is going. He rarely comments in depth on his personal relationships and avoids discussing the rather unusual fact (for Sri Lanka) that in middle age he is still unmarried and living at home. He declares that his brother-in-law Gamini would have been suspect had he not lived with women and mentions that neighbour David de Mel is considered eccentric for not having married, yet does not turn that same analysis on himself. We are dealing with a capricious narrator (we never hear others' reactions to or about him either). The abrupt ending of the book is like a hasty retreat. Just as things look like they might get interesting, Wijesinha's protagonist decides he no longer wants to speak. When the narrative gets too close to the present, when we want to find out if something more develops between Ravi and the protagonist, the narrator stops

talking. However, it is also possible that the narrator has nothing more to say about Ravi. The likelihood of an actual relationship with him is unthinkable.

Previously I indicated that *Servants* can be read in light of Wijesinha's earlier political satire. Rather than contemplating the nameless and faceless protagonist as a very thin disguise for a reluctant and recalcitrant author, or assuming that the fiction bears too obvious a resemblance to reality, we can recognise the book as social commentary. In this way, the text functions as a national allegory in which homosexuality not only operates as a metaphor for the figurative bugging of a feminised Sri Lanka by a masculine Britain, but also illustrates the unequal relationships between ruling classes and ruled, majority and minorities, government and populace after independence. Therefore, we can accept the rather sudden ending as inevitable. Sri Lanka's story is still unfolding, the ending has not yet been decided. Just as the narrator, his family, his social class, and their servants can move and develop in any number of directions so, too, the country's future has potentially limitless possibilities.

Funny Boy concludes with geographical displacement. The narrative also deals with emotional displacement. The physical dislocation mirrors the psychological and in the end Selvadurai implies that moving away from Sri Lanka is the answer for the non-conformist. If *Servants* is an allegory about the legacy of colonialism, *Funny Boy* can be read as an allegory about love. Love is the answer to the strife plaguing Sri Lanka, and the absence or prohibition of love is the reason for Sri Lanka's continued problems.

While the conclusion of Selvadurai's first novel may be regarded as pessimistic, *Cinnamon Gardens* ends with an implicit (if not explicit) sense of imminent – or at least the promise of future – redemption. It anticipates, or looks forward to, a utopian society in which both ethnic and sexual differences are unimportant. Though not as evident as in Ihimaera's work, this hopefulness is in striking contrast to the earlier book. What is even more striking is that Selvadurai creates a positive role model from the colonial era. His own experiences may have left him angry and bitter, but a fictionalised past (before his own memory) provides an inspiration and source for hope. At the close of *Cinnamon Gardens*, Bala is preparing for his father's birthday party. Looking at his family gathered nearby he is

filled with a sudden tenderness for them that had not existed before, an affection that sat strangely light on him. In the past, they were the things he had drawn around himself, entangled his soul in, weighed his desires down with. Now they stood apart from him and they had, as a result of this detachment, become strangely sweeter.... Balendran straightened his tie and went to take his place amongst his family. (CG 386)

In terms of Western homosexual identity and queer theory, the 'straightening' of the tie can be seen as a metaphor for Bala's conforming to a 'straight' identity. However, I read the ending differently. Like Tane Mahuta in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and *The Uncle's Story*, Bala chooses to construct his identity as a family man who also happens to desire other men.

Some Final Thoughts

In discussing Forster's intentional oversight of Syed Masood, the Indian lover who may have provided the inspiration for *Maurice*, Quentin Bailey comments on the "necessity of this potential misrecognition, in which colonial tensions are displaced onto well-educated, Europeanized versions of alternative identities."²⁵¹ This could also be applied to several of the texts discussed in this thesis: from Wijesinha's 'Britishised' narrator, to Balendran's (*Cinnamon Gardens*) alternative lifestyle in England and rekindled affair with the English Richard (as well as David, the Pākehā protagonist in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and Duff's bi-cultural protagonist, Jimmy, in *Both Sides of the Moon*; and in the next chapter, Jack, the Australian lover, and the function of *Maurice* in *Peculiar Chris*, or the Catholic Church in *Glass Cathedral*). By making the British Council in Colombo a veritable hotbed of homosexual activity, Wijesinha indicates that homosexuality itself is a residue of colonialism. It is a familiar theme in postcolonial national discourses, just as it had been an aspect of earlier colonial thought (see Said's *Orientalism*). For example, Zimbabwe's President Mugabe has claimed that homosexuality is a Western disorder. Singaporean and Sri Lankan officials have also indicated that homosexuality is not an aspect of 'traditional' culture.

²⁵¹ Quentin Bailey, "Heroes and Homosexuals: Education and Empire in E.M. Forster," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 48.3 (Fall 2002): 341.

A writer for the Tamil online magazine *Kuviyam* warns against “a dangerous disease, namely an improper, abnormal attraction of the same sexes” which is the result of “unlimited freedoms” in the “fast developing western countries.” The same article also accuses an unnamed actress “who had the audacity to make a film endorsing homosexuality” of having “imbibed western culture.”²⁵² Another article in the same issue blames “so-called Human Rights organizations” in North America for having “brought about disaster and ... jeopardizing peace and harmony the world over.”²⁵³ The author suggests that the acceptance of homosexuality in the West has led to global extremism and terrorism (though it is not clear whether ‘gay’ rights activists or Western governments are being labelled as terrorists, or whether terrorism is being explained as a reaction to Western permissiveness).

In deeply heterosexist masculinist situations, the Other is seen as ‘effeminate,’ prone to homosexual desire, somehow less-than-man. This is the also the institutionalised paranoid and malicious homophobia found in traditionally hypermasculine and homosocial institutions such as boys’ private boarding schools, the military, and men’s prisons. Power struggles are often played out in physical terms with strongly homoerotic overtones, where sexual penetration is regarded as the ultimate form of subjugation and humiliation. In a study on the abuse of political prisoners in Sri Lanka, researchers from the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture found that twenty-one percent of their respondents had suffered various forms of sexual abuse, including rape and forced intercourse with other inmates, at the hands of their captors.²⁵⁴ The descriptions of abuse sound chillingly similar to the acts committed by American soldiers against Iraqi prisoners of war at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison in 2003. Interestingly enough, mainstream media outlets (particularly in the United States) were initially reluctant to comment on the sexual aspect of the torture and its homophobic nature. The authors of the Sri Lankan study point out that “the perpetrators do not perceive themselves or their acts as homosexual” because “the motivation for sexual assault of men is the demonstration of complete control over the

²⁵² Pavalamani Pragasam, “Cancer of a Different Kind” in *Kuviyam* 9 (15 September 2002). Available online at <http://www.kuviyam.com/b001r09/articles.htm>. 11 May 2004.

²⁵³ Ananda Wijesinghe, “How Does Same-Sex Marriage Affect Society?” in *Kuviyam* 9 (15 September 2002).

²⁵⁴ Peel, et al., 2069.

victim.”²⁵⁵ However, in Sri Lanka police officers have also been accused of exploiting the anti-homosexuality law to blackmail ‘gay’ men into having sex.²⁵⁶

How does all this relate to the fictional depictions of alternative or transgressive masculinities in Sri Lanka? Arjie is sent to an all-boys’ school to ‘become a man,’ while Bala is forced to marry his cousin and give up his ‘youthful indiscretions.’ In *Servants*, local office workers react differently towards British homosexuals as opposed to other Sri Lankans perceived to be ‘gay’ or merely the objects of homoerotic attention, and wealthy landowners (some of whom are married) use and share their servant boys for sexual gratification, as an acceptable substitute in the absence of their wives. Homosexuality as a legitimate and specific identity is inconceivable, while romantic love and sex between men are regarded as either a power struggle, an alternative when there are no women available, or, finally, a phase one can and should grow out of. Given the fairly relaxed attitude of Buddhism and Hinduism, it is more likely that heterosexism, rather than homosexuality, is the Western import and a legacy of British colonial influence.

²⁵⁵ Peel, et al., 2069.

²⁵⁶ C. Barillas, “Sri Lankan Activists Move for Sodomy Law Repeal,” *the data lounge* (16 October 1998). Available online at <http://www.dataounge.com/dataounge/news/record.html?record=3544>. 11 May 2004

**IV. ISLAND STORIES, ALTERNATIVE VOICES:
SINGAPORE**

KOH, LEE, AND SA'AT



The boundaries of transgression are not defined. Singapore's leadership bemoans the lack of creativity among its people, and exhorts them to dare to be different. But when some do, the establishment comes down upon them, because it fears spontaneity.

Salil Tripathi, "Mandarin Duck," *New Statesman*

Bordering on the raw and banal.... [the] two figures in the painting are linked together by the artist in an incongruous fashion. Neither pervasively combative nor sexually suggestive, it still manages to project psychological tensions and unresolved anxieties.

Kwok Kian Chow, *Channels & Confluences*

It is difficult to tell what is happening, or what is being suggested, in Vincent Leow's painting of two yellow figures, *Two Men* (1989). In the foreground we have the partial bust of what appears to be an anxious, tense, and unhappy man. He peers at us with curiosity; his head and right shoulder angle into the frame as if through a window, his expression both defensive and vulnerable. He appears to be nude, but the rest of his body is cut off by the canvas borders. Are we watching him or is he watching us? His orange-red hair seems to be on fire. The shapes and movement of colour and brushstrokes in his corner of the painting are reminiscent of Medieval European paintings depicting hell. Behind him is another nude male figure whose genitals are strategically obscured by being beyond the edge of the painting. We know it is a man because the title tells us so, despite the suggestion of slightly swelling breast and gently curved hip. This second figure has a very long neck, stretching comic-book style towards the figure in the foreground. He seems to be laughing maniacally, menacingly; his darkened, lined face skull-like. His neck is supported, or being fended off, by a Daliesque forked stick, which is either behind the main figure or jutting from his back.

A friend has suggested that, if one looks carefully, there is actually a third figure, a ghostly presence outlined in aquamarine with splashes of red (see the line of his neck, shoulder, and arm) directly behind the foregrounded man. The man with red hair and the green spectre seem to be the same person, perhaps with some sort of personality split, or one who is experiencing an internal struggle. The main figure is being marginalised (literally pushed to

the margins) by his other half, but at the same time he is trying desperately to maintain some kind of resistance. He knows that if he loses the battle he will no longer be able to support the man with the elongated neck, who seems unaware of the situation – he seems isolated or protected by what looks like an overturned wine glass-shape, which encloses his body. The two yellow men appear to be a couple. The foregrounded figure wants to protect the other but knows this relationship will not last forever. He is like a Christ figure – the supporting twig on his back similar to a cross, the burden or duty he must bear. His shadow half, as well as his friend's skeletal face, could signal impending death.²⁵⁷

Although Kwok asserts that the two figures are “neither pervasively combative nor sexually suggestive,”²⁵⁸ there is a sense of both aggression and sexual charge. There is something undoubtedly homoerotic in any painting that depicts two naked men. Kwok goes on to mention “tensions and unresolved anxieties.” In terms of my project it is not difficult to read these tensions and anxieties as the inner conflicts surrounding identity, masculinity, and sexuality. This reading is further supported by the artist's participation in, or association with, the notorious controversy about artistic freedom and expression in Singapore involving The Artists Village, The Substation (a theatre complex), and 5th Passage, and particularly their New Year's festival and New Year's Eve performances. Leow is a member of The Artists Village, a collective managed by 5th Passage, which focuses on issues of gender and identity. On New Year's Eve 1991, Leow drank his own urine as part of a performance piece in the “Body Fields” show. While Leow avoided arrest, two years later, artist Joseph Ng was arrested following the New Year's Eve show, after apparently snipping off some of his pubic hair and placing it on cubes of tofu, which he then beat with a cane at the end of his twenty-

²⁵⁷ I am indebted to Jason Chieh-Ching Chen for this observation (October 2005).

²⁵⁸ Kwok Kian Chow, *Channels & Confluences: A History of Singapore Art* (Singapore: National Heritage Board/Singapore Art Museum, 1996), reprinted in full in “The Literature, Culture, and Society of Singapore,” *Postimperial & Postcolonial Literature in English* (May 2000). Available online at <http://www.thecore.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/singapore/arts/painters/channel/24.html>. 27 September 2005.

minute performance.²⁵⁹ These acts were intended to highlight the body as a contested site where the tensions and intersections between public and private occur;²⁶⁰ Ng's was also a protest against the entrapment, arrest, and punishment of men charged with homosexual activity.

Setting the Stage

Because of its history, its size, its very essence as an immigrant-based city-state, Singapore is different from either New Zealand or Sri Lanka. It is the perfect example of a post-independence, postcolonial nation trying to establish its own identity as unique and separate from its colonial past, yet also as the beneficiary of 'Asian' social values and a theoretically shared cultural history. Annexed as a shipping outpost for the British East India Company in 1819 and incorporated into the British Empire by the mid-nineteenth century, Singapore eventually gained its independence from Britain in 1963, and seceded from newly-federated Malaysia in 1965. During colonial times, Singapore was a pluralistic society in the sense that none of its disparate populations was compelled to associate beyond purely economic or commercial transactions. Social interaction was limited, as most people lived within separate ethnic communities. However,

Superimposed on this plural setting for effective rule was the racial ideology of the colonial regime which classified and divided the diverse peoples according to races, each with its supposedly inherited traits and implied qualities, and which had the effect of exacerbating and consolidating ethnic differences.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ For more details, see William Peterson's, "Sexual Minorities on the Singaporean Stage," *Australasian Drama Studies* 25 (October 1994): 61-72, and "The Queer Stage in Singapore," in *People Like Us: Sexual Minorities in Singapore*, Joseph Lo and Huang Guoqin, eds. (Singapore: Select Publishing, 2003), 89-92. See also, Lee Weng Choy, "Chronology of a Controversy," in *Biotechnics* (Singapore: March 1996). Available online at <http://www.biotechnics.org/Chronology%20of%20a%20controversy.htm>. 27 March 2004.

²⁶⁰ For a discussion of the ways in which postcolonial national (auto)biographies foreground the body (and disciplinary techniques applied to it act as a metaphor for the disciplining of the self) see Shirley Newman, "Autobiography, Bodies, Manhood," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 415-424.

²⁶¹ Lai Ah Eng, "Introduction: Beyond Rituals and Riots," in *Beyond Rituals and Riots*, Lai Ah Eng, ed. (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, Marshall Cavendish International, 2004), 4.

Singapore's indigenous Malay population forms the second largest ethnic group of the nation. The island's majority (around seventy-seven percent) is ethnically Chinese, while Indians comprise the third largest ethnic group. However, each of these ethnic/racial categories is subdivided into smaller groups based on different linguistic and regional origins. Often referred to as Others, the fourth group includes 'Eurasians,' Arabs, European and American expatriates, and other nationalities. Ethnicity, therefore, is a significant factor in all aspects of the city-nation's life.²⁶²

The predominantly Chinese highly educated ruling elite often exhibits race and class anxiety concerning its position and legitimacy. This gives rise to an "internalized orientalism," which

makes available to *postcolonial* authority the knowledge-power that *colonial* authority wielded over the local population, and permits... an overwhelmingly Western-educated political elite to dictate the qualities that would constitute Chineseness.... [It also] supervises the erasure of the rich cultural resources of dialects spoken over countless generations, and arbitrarily names Mandarin the single repository of core Chinese virtues so as to facilitate cultural dissemination.²⁶³

Such internalised orientalism is discussed and theorised by other writers as well. The eroticisation of ethnic minorities in China as female/feminine, primitive or old-fashioned, and exotic (as opposed to the modern, male/masculine, sophisticated, moderate, and ordinary Han majority) is akin to Said's description of Orientalist feminisation of the East by

²⁶² The first three categories are overgeneralisations that cover a multitude of ethnic and linguistic groups from their respective regions. For example, people of Chinese background speak a number of dialects and languages, including Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hainan, Hakka, and Foochow; the designation 'Indian' covers Tamil, Malayalam, Telegu, Punjabi, Hindi, Bengali, and Gujerati, from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, in addition to India, among others; and Malay includes those of Javanese, Boyanese, and Bugis heritage. See Kong Chiew Seen, "Ethnic Stratification," in *Social Class in Singapore*, Stella R. Quah, Chiew Seen Kong, Ko Yiu Chung, and Sharon Mengchee Lee, eds. (Singapore: Centre for Advanced Studies, National University of Singapore and Times Academic Press, 1991), 138-182; Anne Pakir, "English-Knowing Bilingualism in Singapore," in *Imagining Singapore*, Ban Kah Choon, Anne Pakir, and Tong Chee Kiong, eds. (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1992), 234-262; "Singapore: A Country Study," [1977] Area Handbook/Country Studies Series (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1989). Reprinted in full and available online at <http://countrystudies.us/singapore/1.htm>. 19 May 2004.

²⁶³ Geraldine Heng and Janadas Devan, "State Fatherhood: The Politics of Nationalism, Sexuality, and Race in Singapore," in *The Gender/Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy*, Roger N. Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo, eds. (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 115.

the West.²⁶⁴ This is also evident in Singapore, where popular media images of ethnic minorities portray them as passive, 'effeminate,' and/or homosexual. For example, Kenneth Paul Tan points out Malay men of any social class are often depicted as buffoons, irrational and violent, or weak and ineffectual. Men of Indian background are also sometimes portrayed as effeminate. The epitome of what it means to be a 'normal' Singaporean, are Chinese-educated but Singlish-speaking Chinese men.²⁶⁵ Heng and Devan charge that internalised orientalism "writes its own narratives of history and nationalism, in service to the state," while ignoring the richness and complexities of multiple histories.²⁶⁶

Chinese, or Confucian, ideals dominate the image projected by the island. According to Heng and Devan, however, government propaganda about 'Asian values' and Confucianism masks concerns about maintaining the status quo for the Chinese majority. Chinese are more likely to be better educated (they can afford to go to university and/or travel abroad), thus, most of what is published is written by Chinese authors. In terms of higher education, students of Chinese background are an overwhelming majority, as a cursory glance through the list of honours graduates at the National University of Singapore from 1995 to 2002 shows.²⁶⁷ This translates not only into higher paying jobs for Chinese but also a decidedly 'Chinese' voice in the media, including publishing. On the list of Singaporean authors compiled by George Landow (lecturer at the National University of Singapore) for the

²⁶⁴ For the eroticisation of the female ethnic minority subject, see Louisa Schein, "Gender and Internal Orientalism in China," in *Chinese Femininities / Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 385-411. For the construction of masculine identities, see Ralph Litzinger, "Tradition and the Gender of Civility," in Brownell and Wasserstrom, eds., 412-434. See also, Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, "Introduction: Theorizing Femininities and Masculinities," 20 and "Gender, Sexuality, and Ethnicity," in Brownell and Wasserstrom, eds., 381-383.

²⁶⁵ Kenneth Paul Tan, "Ethnic Representation on Singapore Film and Television," in *Beyond Rituals and Riots*, 289-315. Tan has analysed six TV series and twelve films from 1997 to 2002. See Tan, 314-315, Table 1.

²⁶⁶ Heng and Devan, 115.

²⁶⁷ "Student Honours" (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore: 2003) Available online at http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/sea/student_3-1.htm. 15 March 2004. For the most recent year shown (2001-2002) there are 17 students, 11 of whom are of Chinese extraction (4 are Malay, 1 is Indian, and the last is Western). In the previous year only 1 out of 9 was not Chinese, and the year before that only 1 out of 12.

“Postcolonial Web” thirty-eight out of the forty-three are of Chinese extraction.²⁶⁸ Of the three authors discussed in this chapter, two are of Chinese heritage. Just as the predominant views expressed in Australia or the United States are by middle-class white Anglo-Europeans, so in Singapore one could easily mistake Chinese opinions as representing the entire society.

Officially, Singapore’s languages are English, Mandarin, Tamil, and Malay, with English being the authorised language of government and preferred for commerce. Malay is considered the ‘national’ language but it is rarely used by non-Malay people.²⁶⁹ Singapore’s government has established a strict code of law aimed at protecting its free market economy by ensuring social harmony. This entails authoritarian controls on political, artistic, religious, and other forms of expression which are considered either as threatening to that harmony or in direct challenge of the government. Much of the legal code is inherited from British colonial law imported and imposed during the Victorian era.²⁷⁰

In many postcolonial independence movements, nationalism and patriotism are often conceived of as a fraternity, a union of men, and thus include (and some would argue, are based on) misogynist and homophobic elements. In their introduction, Andrew Parker, et al, maintain that because of its masculinist self-conception as a “passionate brotherhood,” a nation such as Singapore is “compelled to distinguish its ‘proper’ homosociality from more explicitly sexualized male-male relations,” which in turn demands the “identification, isolation, and containment of male homosexuality.”²⁷¹ Within such a framework, then, male-to-male (anal) eroticism is conceived as a threat to nationhood, not only because of the

²⁶⁸ George Landow, “Singaporean Literature,” in *Postimperial & Postcolonial Literature in English* (2002). Available online at <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/singapore/literature/authors.html>. 15 March 2004.

²⁶⁹ “Singapore,” in *Nationmaster* (3 January 2004). Available online at <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Singapore>. 8 February 2004.

²⁷⁰ Thomas Ng, “Law and Homosexuals,” in Lo and Guoqin, eds., 17-20. See also, Au Waipang, “The Map’s Tale,” in *Yawning Bread* (Singapore: January 2004). Available online at http://www.yawningbread.org/arc_2004/yax-350.htm. 16 February 2004; and, Sarah B. Hogan, “To Net or Not to Net: Singapore’s Regulation of the Internet,” *Federal Communication Law Journal* 51.2 (March 1999): 429.

²⁷¹ Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaeger, eds., *Nationalisms & Sexualities* (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), 9.

perception of weakness associated with such activity, but also because of the impossibility of procreation. Reproduction, especially of the 'right' kind of people (i.e. intelligent, well-educated, middle-class, and therefore, in all likelihood, of Chinese heritage), has been a government policy since Singapore's inception. Thus, Singapore's family planning initiatives aimed at the nation's elite exploit the "deeply ingrained" notion within Chinese family tradition that "failing to continue the family line" is considered the "greatest shame one could bestow upon ones' [sic] ancestors and parents."²⁷² It becomes clear that as a new nation struggling to assert itself on the global stage and maintain its uniqueness in the region, Singapore established its restrictive legal code to regulate a particular view of morality as well as social conduct. One way in which it authorises its specific national character is to categorise and restrict "the sexual practices or gender behaviors it deems abhorrent."²⁷³ Four decades on since independence, Singapore remains male-centred and staunchly masculine in both its outlook and its staging, its government (dominated by the ruling PAP since its inception) patriarchal and condescending towards its citizens in its attitude as benevolent father-figure.

In their valuable work on the construction and conception of gender in Chinese culture and history, Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom point out that in Medieval China,

Unmarried, homosexual, or otherwise socially marginal men ... were in many cases dealt with more harshly by the law and regarded as more of a threat to legitimate heterosexual male power than were any categories of women.²⁷⁴

This has not changed much in Singapore today. Sexually marginal(ised) men are still regarded as a threat to 'legitimate' masculinity and the state's male-defined, andro-centric power. Many of the writers on Singapore point out that the Chinese-dominated government rhetoric has focused primarily on Confucian ideals (rather than Buddhist, Taoist, or a combination) as the legitimate legacy and expression of Chinese culture. It is this Confucian philosophy which places greater emphasis on gender hierarchies and appropriate sexualities. Traditionally, conceptions of male sexuality varied among the upper classes depending on

²⁷² William Peterson, "Queer Stage," 79.

²⁷³ Parker, et al, 10.

²⁷⁴ Brownell and Wasserstrom, "Introduction," 10.

whether they observed Buddhist and Taoist practices, or followed Confucian precepts.²⁷⁵ Thus, by excluding or ignoring non-Confucian Chinese customs and beliefs, the government is able to regulate and dictate behaviour according to its strict moral guidelines, which are arguably both a reaction to colonial imposition and a perpetuation of the same.

In 1998, the Millennium Project was formulated as an effort to document the history, experiences, cultural contributions, legal issues, and future aspirations of sexual minorities in Singapore. This led to a series of forums held in 1999. That these were allowed to take place at all is due in great part to the government's "Singapore 21" initiative calculated to usher in the new century with a sense of nationhood and social responsibility. The Millennium Project forums resulted in a collection of writings, compiled in the volume *People Like Us* (subtitled *Sexual Minorities in Singapore*).²⁷⁶ The title comes from the name of an informal 'gay' discussion and social group whose 1996 application for registration as an official organisation (required under Singapore's Societies Act) was not only rejected by the government, but whose members and organisers were also threatened with severe penalties (including, but not limited to, a \$3,000 fine or a three year prison sentence).²⁷⁷

In this chapter I consider the evolving depiction of emerging alternative and transgressive masculinities in contemporary Singapore. I focus on two novels from the early 1990s and a collection of short stories published on the eve of the new millennium: *Peculiar Chris* (1993)

²⁷⁵ Keith McMahan, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), 150-175.

²⁷⁶ It may be significant that this book was not published until 2003, when the political climate in Singapore started relaxing somewhat in regards to homosexuality. In July 2003 Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong made the shocking (for Singapore) statement that the government had reversed its policy against hiring homosexuals. See "Singapore Eases Gay Ban," in *BBC News World Edition* (4 July 2003). Available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3044688.stm>. 19 February 2004. Also, "Singapore: It's In to Be Out," in *TIME Asia*, (10 August 2003) Available online at <http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/article/0,13673,501030818-474512,00.html>. 19 February 2004.

²⁷⁷ "Discussions," (22-25, 32 note 2), and Joseph Lo, "Copernicus Revolution in PLU," (132-137), in Lo and Guoqin. For additional information, see Joseph Lo, "One Session of the Singapore 21 Forum," originally posted on SiGNeL (an online forum for GLBT Singaporeans), and reprinted in Au (Singapore: October 1998). Available online at http://www.geocities.com/yawning_bread/guw-028.htm (moved to www.yawningbread.org). 16 February 2004. See also, "Singapore," in *World Legal Survey*, (ILGA [The International Lesbian and Gay Association], 23 February 2000). Available online at http://www.ilga.org/Information/legal_survey/asia_pacific/Singapore.htm. 8 February 2004.

by Johann S. Lee, *Glass Cathedral* (1995) by Andrew Teck Koh, and *Corridor: 12 Short Stories* (1999) written by Alfian bin Sa'at. Of the three, Sa'at is the only one of Malay background (of Javanese, Minang, and Hakka heritage), and as such he is the only one of this group who can claim any measure of 'indigenouness.' The question of who is and who is not indigenous has been a constant difficulty in this research project. However, a balance had to be found between what I consider indigenous (i.e. descending from the original inhabitants) and native (i.e. born locally into established, but not indigenous, ethnic groups), and a compromise reached regarding my original intention to engage with strictly indigenous writing, while also remaining faithful to the idea of examining post-independence narratives which are not the vocalisations of colonisers' descendants and implicit heirs (such as the Pākehā in New Zealand or expatriates in Singapore). It was, and still is, an uneasy compromise, a careful treading between and around fine semantic and theoretical lines.

Two other texts could be considered as belonging to this grouping: *Abraham's Promise* (1995) by Philip Jeyaretnam, and Daren V. L. Shiau's *Heartland* (1999). Both of these novels deal with questions of postcolonial identity and masculinity. While both are important works in their own right, and certainly better written than Lee's or Koh's efforts, I have chosen not to discuss them here because they are less revolutionary in terms of portraying alternative or transgressive masculinities. In *Abraham's Promise* the eponymous narrator's son is 'gay,' but this is not fully articulated or further explored beyond the father's disappointment that he will not have grandchildren. *Heartland* contains no 'gay' characters.

The first novel discussed is Johann S. Lee's *Peculiar Chris*.²⁷⁸ "Peculiar Chris" is Christopher Han, the first person narrator of this short bildungsroman. Lee has gone to great lengths in his foreword to distance himself from his 'gay' protagonist. He professes a reluctance to write about his own life because readers would find it boring, yet he asserts that he is compelled to write this fiction "because there is so much to say, and so much that people should know" (*PC*, v). Although the book is self-consciously a novel, it is difficult not to think of the author as the protagonist, especially when the narrator mentions that he is also

²⁷⁸ Johann S. Lee, *Peculiar Chris* (Singapore: Cannon International, 1993). Further citations included parenthetically refer to this edition, abbreviated as *PC*.

writing a novel (*PC*, 96).

The second novel discussed in this chapter is *Glass Cathedral*, by Andrew Teck Koh.²⁷⁹ In some senses, this is a profoundly 'Christian' novel, or at least expresses decidedly Christian concerns and dilemmas. The title refers not only to the Catholic Church, which plays an important role in the book, but also to Christian faith and the fragility of beliefs in conflict with, and apparent contradiction to, the realities of modern life in Singapore. The narrator and protagonist is a young man named Colin Tan Seng Kuang. Like *Peculiar Chris*, the book is a kind of bildungsroman, tracing the development of its main character from denial of his own (homo)sexuality to acceptance of a life beyond one's hurts and disappointments. As in Lee's novel, there is the first love, the boy who introduces and initiates the protagonist into the 'gay lifestyle' but then decides to live conventionally and ends up with a woman. There is also the 'gay' best friend, a female supporting role, a homophobic institution, and a reticence to describe sexual situations.

Alfian bin Sa'at was an undergraduate at the National University of Singapore when he wrote *Corridor: 12 Short Stories*.²⁸⁰ This collection is an impressive feat considering not only the age of the author but also the subject matter of several of the stories, as well as the use of a more relaxed, vernacular syntax and idiom. Recently, a Singaporean postgraduate student and aspiring writer²⁸¹ in one of my classes at the University of Sydney claimed that the Singapore government discourages writing in what is commonly referred to as 'Singlish' (that distinctive blend of English, Hokkien, Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, and other languages used in Singapore).²⁸² When the island was still a part of the Malay Federation, a hybrid new language was envisioned, dubbed 'Engmalchin' (English, Malay, Chinese), to service the

²⁷⁹ Andrew Teck Koh, *Glass Cathedral* (Singapore: EPB Publishers, 1995). Further citations included parenthetically refer to this edition, abbreviated as GC.

²⁸⁰ Alfian bin Sa'at, *Corridor: 12 Short Stories* (Singapore: Raffles, 1999). Further citations included parenthetically refer to this edition, abbreviated as C12.

²⁸¹ This person, who has since graduated, wishes to remain anonymous.

²⁸² For a brief discussion of this dialect of English as well as some examples, see Anthea Fraser Gupta, "Singapore Colloquial English," in *Language Varieties* (University of New England, Australia: 22 February 2004). Available online at <http://www.une.edu.au/langnet/singlish.htm>. 4 March 2004. For more information, see Anthea Fraser Gupta, *The Step-Tongue: Children's English in Singapore* (Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, 1994). An excellent online dictionary of words and phrases, *The Cxford Singlish Dictionary*, can be found at <http://www.talkingcock.com/html>. In addition, Daren V. L. Shiau's novel *Heartland* (1999) includes a glossary at the end which shows the multilingual origins of various terms used throughout that text.

new multicultural political entity. It was structured around Malay (but did not include Tamil, and thus did not take into consideration the 'Indian' minority).²⁸³ However, the reality of post-independence Singapore is that the local dialect (which emphasises English rather than Malay and is officially known as Singapore Colloquial English) is prevalent. It "thrives on the streets, among friends, and in popular culture," despite government restrictions against "this informal, impure, and thoroughly heteroglossic language."²⁸⁴ The student in my class said Singapore's government felt Singlish reflected the nation negatively. Some books had even been banned from publication, let alone distribution, because of their use of Singlish.²⁸⁵

It is quite significant that Johann Lee, Andrew Koh, and Alfian Sa'at were very young (in their early twenties) when they published their work. It is also very important to note that Lee and Koh published in the early 1990s before some of the social changes which have brought a small measure of openness and willingness to address the issue of same-sex relationships. Not only is homosexuality still illegal in Singapore, but the laws are very strict on issues governing morality. All forms of media are strictly monitored and even censored. Certain magazines published globally are banned in Singapore, movies and books are suppressed or edited, and access to 'objectionable' web content is prohibited. What these authors and their books represent is part of a movement, a pressing and pushing of the boundaries, a less visible and less confrontational revolution in the ways marginalised groups are making their voices heard and effecting social change.²⁸⁶ Perhaps these books slipped through the censors' nets at an opportune time, and their very appearance in Singapore helped bring about the social changes in evidence today.

²⁸³ Anne Brewster, *Towards a Semiotic of Post-Colonial Discourse: University Writing in Singapore and Malaysia, 1949-1965* (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, for the Centre for Advanced Studies, National University of Singapore, 1989), 3.

²⁸⁴ Ien Ang and Jon Stratton, "The Singapore Way of Multiculturalism: Western Concepts/Asian Cultures," *Sojourn* 10.1 (1995): 86.

²⁸⁵ See, for instance, Chelva Kanaganayakam, "Hunting the Minotaur: Reading Gopal Baratham and Kirpal Singh," in *Interlogue: Studies in Singapore Literature, Volume 1: Fiction*, Kirpal Singh, ed. (Singapore: Ethos Books, 1998), 73-82.

²⁸⁶ For discussion of more visible and confrontational efforts, as well as their consequences, particularly in the theatre, see Peterson's, "Sexual Minorities," and "Queer Stage." See also, David Drake, "Fusion: David Drake Interviews Playwright Chay Yew" (97-104); and Russell Heng, "Sex, Equality, Activism and Censorship: Artist Jimmy Ong Chats Online with Playwright Russell Heng" (105-111) in Lo and Guoqin.

A 'Peculiar' Story

Between Johann Lee's Foreword and the first chapter of *Peculiar Chris* (1993) there is an epigraph from the George Michael song "Praying for Time" (a rather bleak statement that God, perhaps worse than being dead, does not care) followed by a page from Chris's diary.²⁸⁷ The entry tells us that someone named Samuel has died. Since the narrative is set in the late 1980s or early 1990s, it is a reasonable assumption that Samuel may have been Chris's lover and that he has died of AIDS.

A rather distracting (and somewhat annoying) feature of the text is the inclusion of third-person flashback sequences at the end of the first six chapters. These are meant to fill in the background history of our main character and to present an explanation for his actions (and possibly a reason for his homosexuality). One thing they do accomplish is to provide a negative picture of Chris's (now dead) father and his brand of (stereotypical, authoritarian, and detached) masculinity.

The novel itself is a flashback, an explanation of events leading up to the diary entry. The story begins with Chris as a student in junior college (roughly equivalent to the final years in high school preparing for university entrance). He is intelligent, attractive, fairly athletic (a competitive swimmer), yet also somewhat shy and restrained. He has a relationship with a popular, witty, beautiful, and rather independent classmate named Sylvia, but from an early age has experienced mildly disturbing sensations and feelings in relation to other boys, leading to the belief that there is something wrong with him. However, he is too afraid and defensive to analyse such thoughts.

²⁸⁷ Michael is the famous British-Cypriot singer who at the time was not publicly out as 'gay.' The lyrics, as cited by Lee, read: "So you scream from behind your door / Say what's mine is mine and not yours / I may have too much / But I'll take my chances / Because God's stopped keeping score / And you cling to the things they sold you / Did you cover your eyes when they told you / That He can't come back / Because He has no children to come back for" (*PC*, vii).

Just as in *Cinnamon Gardens*, there is a connection here to E. M. Forster's *Maurice* (1971). Chris is almost eighteen when he meets twenty-year-old Kenneth, a student from Indonesia to whom he feels strangely attracted. Ken gives a copy of *Maurice* to Chris for his birthday; described on its back cover as, "A masterly and touching novel of homosexual love" (*PC*, 15). In the chapter on Sri Lanka we discussed the way in which Selvadurai's oblique allusion to Foster functions in an understated yet significant manner to present *Cinnamon Gardens* as a local alternative to the earlier British text. For Lee, however, Forster's novel operates in a slightly different way to achieve a similar result: it acts as a marker, a signifier of potential (yet foreign) alternatives to the heteronormative strictures of Singaporean society. Within this context, literature opens the possibilities of new and different ways of seeing and being. Yet there could be more at work here than merely the appearance of a 'gay' password. *Maurice* is a very English novel and has functioned as part of the Anglo-Western 'gay' canon, which also includes such novels as James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) and *Another Country* (1962). Its introduction at this point in Lee's text with no further mention of its plot or any other narrative information and explanation seems to act as a kind of legitimization of Lee's novel. While *Maurice* can be seen as a literary precursor to *Peculiar Chris*, Lee seems to be offering his book as a Singaporean alternative, an attempt to create a local narrative which not only parallels Foster's but articulates native experience. However, this reference back to a British text highlights the continued dependence on and interaction with colonial discourses, as well as the lack of local or native examples. In addition, the use of a Western canonical text underscores or contributes to the accusation that homosexuality is a foreign evil and a relic of imperial contamination.

As Chris's friendship with Ken blossoms, his relationship with Sylvia deteriorates and eventually ends. "Any other boy in my shoes then could have been disturbed by a number of things," Chris muses, "[b]ut I never felt that I was compromising my sense of pride by falling for a guy rather than a girl" (*PC*, 9). Although not labelling his sense of sexuality, or identifying it according to Western expectations, Chris does refer to his desire as an "orientation [that] had loomed in the darker side of my psyche for so many years" (*PC*, 9). Throughout the novel Chris is ambivalent about his sexuality. On the one hand, he portrays this 'orientation' as natural, neither a perversion nor an act of conscious choosing (*PC*, 20). He

declares he is not “mad” or “ill” but “normal” (PC, 54). On the other hand, however, he carries a sense of wrongdoing and residual shame, referring to “the dark side of [his] psyche” and the “shadow” it cast over his relationships (PC, 9).

Although he does not express ambivalence about his masculinity, in a rather strange aside, Chris reveals that he “never felt a sense of superiority over the female sex” (PC, 9). It is unclear whether this is meant to naturalise or explain his eventual interest in, and involvement with, boys in the same way that many theories and traditions of same-sex sexualities have posited a third sex (such as the Polynesian *fa'afafine*, or the Native American two-spirit person [*berdache*]). Nonetheless, this lack of superiority towards, and perhaps a subconscious identification with, girls allows Chris to admit that he was “never shocked” by his feelings for Ken (PC, 9).

While we read that Chris’s sexuality “possessed a sense of naturalness” (PC, 20), there is a reluctance on the part of both the author and the narrator to discuss sex itself, and the novel includes many veiled references. For example, in describing his affair with Ken, Chris declares, “Just as there was intimacy with Sylvia, so was the case with Ken, but this was more mutual, and both of us gave and received at the same time” (PC, 20). In this instance, the narrator wants to convince the reader not only of the naturalness of this relationship, but also that he was not in any way coerced or dominated (emasculated). It is also clear that he is referring to the active and passive, top and bottom, and other roles or positions taken in same-sex pairings. However, this is a strangely neutral (or neutered) account of the passion between the two young men.

In another reference to sex, Chris again makes the point that the physical acts between him and Ken were natural. However, he thinks that what is ‘natural’ for one person may not be natural for another – a man who desires men considers his (homo)sexuality just as natural as a man who desires women views his (hetero)sexuality, but the two cannot necessarily switch roles, or conceive of the other: “After all the time we had spent together and all the things that we had done, I couldn’t imagine [Ken] getting married. Things had been so natural between us. What would it be like for him, with a girl?” (PC, 38). This formulation is in

contrast to what we have already seen in novels from New Zealand and Sri Lanka. Tane (*Nights and Story*) regards his marriage as a way to (re)create a tribal identity, not a negation of his (homo)sexuality; while Bala (*Cinnamon Gardens*) chooses to remain married and incorporate his duties and obligations to the family (primarily his wife and son, but also his parents) as part of his own alternative masculinity.

The reluctance to name sex seems somewhat prudish, almost Victorian, particularly in the way that it posits the sexual act and the emotions derived as binaries, almost mutually exclusive. After Chris and Ken have broken up, he continues to use euphemistic language:

There were times when I was so sick with longing that I seriously considered throwing caution to the wind, and indulging in whatever fleeting pleasures that might be derived from non-committal flings with him. But I held emotional fulfillment in high regard, and hence found myself struggling to refrain from succumbing to these carnal cravings. (*PC*, 46)

And again later, when Ken asks him to spend the night, Chris declines, thinking, "I decided to set my sight beyond mere sensual gratification" (*PC*, 65). The wording is almost comical by contemporary Western standards. It reminds me of the earnest tracts on Christian morality of an earlier generation. But there is also a kind of touching innocence, a naiveté beyond mere prudishness. Of course, one should keep in mind that this was written and published in Singapore in the early 1990s, and therefore the veiled references and apparent reticence are at the very least legal manoeuvring and most likely a result of censorship (self-imposed or external).

The first fairly straightforward depiction of sex does not occur until halfway through the novel (*PC*, 109-110). Though by no means pornographic, or even 'tastefully' explicit, there is a sense of freedom, a joy lacking from the earlier euphemistic encounters. It is perhaps significant that this takes place away from Singapore and its repressive heterosexism. It is an awakening into new possibilities:

He took my hand and led me to the bed, where he lay me down gently and kissed me warmly on my lips and neck. All this while, he was whispering words of reassurance into my ears.... I began to respond with an acquiescence of which I was only subliminally aware. The rest of the hour passed with a dreamlike quality, in an intoxicating confusion of flesh, warmth and sheer physical pleasure that climaxed with shuddering contentment. (*PC*, 109-110)

'Gays' in the Military

Like many 'gay' boys, Chris is unaware of his sexual orientation prior to meeting Ken. He is, however, acutely aware that there is something different about himself, something which makes him not quite like all the other boys around, something 'not normal.' In the following passage Chris deals with an internal coming out, but there is still a sense of ambivalence:

Try as I may, I simply cannot recall the first time I actually allowed myself, either mentally or aloud, to put a name against my sexual orientation. When you think about it, you'll find it so easy to understand, because the indecisiveness, and hesitation, and reluctance, linger on for years, varying in intensity from time to time, until one finally comes up with the courage or the nerve to embrace the idea fully. For me, the initial acknowledgement must have happened a few months after I met Ken. Little did I know then, that *this commitment was a premature one*, one which was shrouded in idealism and false confidence. And in the years that followed, *I was forced to face the consequences of this declaration, to reconsider the notion repeatedly*, and to answer questions that I had not even imagined when I was eighteen. (*PC*, 21, emphasis added)

How are we to interpret Chris's assertion that the commitment was premature? He is obviously not talking about his involvement with Ken, because that relationship did not last; it is not part of the novel's present. The commitment to which he refers is "this declaration," the self-admission of being 'gay' (though interestingly enough, that word is still not used at this point). Does this mean that Chris (or even the author) believes that one can choose one's sexuality? Or that one should not be hasty in declaring one's (homo)sexual orientation? Of course, the author/narrator is setting us up for what follows in the story. On first reading, however, it seems he is saying that not only is it dangerous to reveal one's (homo)sexuality in Singapore, but that one's sexual identity is something which can be contested and debated (or is debatable) within one's self as well as in society.

Chris finally does "put a name against his sexual orientation" during his military pre-enlistment medical interview. Among the standard questions about allergies, prior illnesses, and family medical history is one on sexuality. "Are you a homosexual?" the officer asks. "Yes!" Chris eventually responds, and the answer takes both him and the officer by surprise (*PC*, 49). It is a routine question to which the authorities apparently expect a negative answer.

Chris's affirmation ends the medical interview and he is sent to an army psychologist for another interview designed to assess his mental status. Here, Lee employs the clever literary strategy of framing the law within the framework of an interrogation in order to undermine the official position on homosexuality by highlighting its discriminatory and dehumanising effects. The reader is not-so-subtly yet effectively influenced to share the author's indignation. The questions are intrusive and overly interested in the minutiae of sexual experience, and seem to bear little relevance to one's abilities and capabilities to serve in the military.

"So," he began. "What makes you think that you are a homosexual?"
"No. Not 'think'," I corrected. "I am a homosexual."
"Alright then," he said. "What makes you a homosexual?" ...
"I am sexually attracted to members of my own sex."
"I'm not asking you for a textbook definition," he said coldly.
"I'm not trying to give you one," I responded.
"Have you ever had sex with a man?" he asked.
"Yes." (PC, 51)

The idea that one has to have sex in order to know one's orientation is often applied to people who identify as same-sex-loving. Heterosexual people are never quizzed about their sexual activity in order to determine whether they are actually heterosexual. The assumption is that one is 'straight until proven otherwise' – I deliberately paraphrase the adage associated with American justice. Being 'straight' is often assumed to be natural, correct, right, and therefore 'innocent,' while being 'gay' is unnatural, incorrect, and wrong, thus 'guilty.'

"How many?" ...
"One."
"Is that all?" he scoffed.
"Isn't that enough?" ...
"Not necessarily." (PC, 51)

Again, we have the notion that the act(s) of sex determines one's sexuality. If Chris has had only one partner, then perhaps this is just a phase he is going through. But this also touches on another myth about same-sex male sexuality, that of promiscuity.

"Have you ever had oral sex?" ...
"Yes," I mumbled.
"How many times?"
I felt sick.
"I can't remember," I replied.

"Try to."
"I can't," I said firmly.
"Did you enjoy it?"
I glared at him.
"I take it that you did," he said calmly.
I wanted to hit him. I really wanted to hit him.
"What about anal sex?" he continued. "Have you ever had anal sex?"
I was outraged....
"Yes!" I hissed.
"What was it like?"
"That's an invasion of my privacy!"
"You gave up your privacy an hour ago." ... "What was it like?" he reiterated.
"Were you the active or passive partner?" (PC, 51-52)

This line of questioning seems designed not only to assess the truthfulness of a recruit's admission but to humiliate the 'gay' recruit. There is also an assumption that once someone declares himself to be 'gay' he relinquishes the rights enjoyed by other members of society. This assumption is manifest in later instances throughout the novel. For instance, in the Singapore military men who have sex with men receive the numerical classification 302.²⁸⁸ As Nick, Chris's friend, explains, "One's for male, two's for female and three-o-two, which sounds like three-over-two, or one-and-a-half, means 'in-between'. Get it?" (PC, 63). It is interesting that while Chris may think of, or position, himself as 'in-between' (not necessarily identifying as feminine, but having a certain sense of empathy for women, particularly in their interactions with men), it becomes a sort of insult when applied by the state apparatus. Although there is no evidence that the '302' designation arose from such simple arithmetic as Nick suggests, it would make an interesting study to examine 'official' versus 'personal' representations of homosexuality and what this says about masculine constructions. However, this lies beyond the scope of the present project.

The insidious nature of the interview and its ultimate purpose become clear when the medical officer reveals the military's policy on homosexuals, worth quoting here at length:

²⁸⁸ This category is not just creative license or authorial exaggeration. Though official sources could not be found to confirm the 302 classification, it is by no means a secret among males in Singapore. For example, see "Dancing on Transit Road" an anonymous posting on SiGNeL, reprinted in Au, (June 1997). Available online at http://www.geocities.com/yawning_bread/guw-028.htm. 16 February 2004. Au adds a helpful note in which 302 is glossed as "Classified as homosexual by the military," and indicates another category applied to 'gay' servicemen, PES C: "A classification in the military's physical/medical grading system. "C" means not fit for combat roles." See also, ILGA, 2000.

I don't think you are aware of the seriousness and consequences of your declaration.... [If] you are classified as a homosexual, the government will henceforth be informed of your orientation. I doubt if you will ever find employment in the civil service and I am sure that you will not qualify for any scholarship, grant, or bursary. You will also be required to turn up for appointments at the counselling centre and be called in for regular blood tests.... Although the information you provide will be protected under the security classification of 'medical-in-confidence', you should know that access to your medical docket will be within the means of common medical orderlies, who are usually young men such as yourself. Thus, you will find it quite impossible to maintain any secrecy with regards to this matter. (PC, 52-53)

Chris begins to experience prejudice in the military almost from the beginning of his term. First, he is assigned a clerical job, a position reserved for those who are seen as somehow unfit for military training and actual combat, people with physical deficiencies or other medical conditions, such as poor eyesight. After going through all the rules and regulations, the Chief Clerk informs Chris that he may not "keep long hair or wear make-up to camp" (PC, 68). Chris also discovers that he is not allowed to spend the night in camp. "[Is it] because three-o-two's go around committing violent sexual crimes once the sun sets?" he angrily demands (PC, 71).

The officer continues psychoanalysing Chris, trying to find causes for his homosexuality in family circumstances and childhood events. Chris finally responds with what could be proposed as the universal exclamation of men who love men: "It doesn't matter anymore whether I made myself what I am, or I am what I was always meant to be. The fact is ... I can't and don't want to turn back" (PC, 58). The interminable psycho-sociological debate between essentialist nature and constructionist nurture is irrelevant when dealing with something as individual and personally intrinsic as sexuality or sexual preference. The discussion itself constructs a binary opposition out of equally important biological and social factors that influence the formation of identities and subjectivities.

Peculiar Chris can be situated as an aporia, not only located in, but also locating, this trouble-spot of 'nature versus nurture' behavioural discourse, drawing attention to an undecidable source of tension. Johann Lee seems ambivalent about the possible causes of homosexuality, for immediately after Chris's encounter with the military psychologist we get the last 'daddy'

vignette. We discover that his estranged father died of cancer, but Chris refused to be with him in his final moments. Chris struggles with grief and guilt: "It's not fair.... I don't even remember feeling him.... I never got the chance to touch him.... How can I miss him? ... When I never got to know him" (*PC*, 58-59). It has long been claimed that one of the 'causes' of homosexuality is the absent father. In this scenario the 'gay' man is either looking for a substitute father figure or unable to act in an acceptably 'masculine' (i.e. heterosexually male) way because he lacked the appropriate male role model.

As indicated in the previous chapter, Judith Butler analyses masculine identity formation in terms of "gender consolidation," which hypothesises that in the development of an 'inverted' (i.e. 'homosexual') boy, childhood desire for the father can be transferred onto other male objects.²⁸⁹ On some level, the dysfunctional relationship between Chris and his father could be analysed in such Freudian terms. A similar study could be undertaken with other characters mentioned in this thesis (such as Arjie and Mr. Chelvaratnam in *Funny Boy*, or Balendran and the Mudaliyar in *Cinnamon Gardens*; David and Mr. Munro in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, or Sam and Arapeta Mahana in *The Uncle's Story*; or even the metaphorical father, the priest Norbert Lim, transformed into object of desire as well as desiring subject in *Glass Cathedral*). However, this lies beyond the scope of my project.

²⁸⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 59.

Ken's Inferno

For Ken, Singapore itself is open to possibilities; it is a more porous and diverse society than he has experienced in Indonesia. As a foreigner and someone with no local family or community ties he feels free to explore his sexuality as well as elements and segments of society not available to him back home. He enjoys the relationship with Chris (physical and otherwise). He is obviously aware that it is not 'normal' or acceptable in terms of all the boy-girl relationships around, and also knows it has a separate designation (never vocalised, but not-very-subtly acknowledged in the gift of *Maurice*). However, when Ken first becomes aware of the friendship between Chris and Nick he angrily demands, "What on earth is going on between you and that homo?" (PC, 26). Though the reader may at first be as shocked as Chris, Ken's reaction is not so surprising considering the countless numbers of men who have sex with men, who not only remain discreet in public, but also maintain personal denial about their sexual identities and relationships. It is also important to keep in mind that the relatively modern conception and categorisation of (homo)sexuality is a Western rather than a universal paradigm. In addition, the way in which many cultures formulate, express, and recognise gender and sexuality is not dependent upon a person's biological sex but upon the roles (both social and sexual) one performs.²⁹⁰ Ken does not associate his sexual activity with Nick's flamboyant behaviour, nor does he recognise his present desire for Chris as a permanent marker of his future sexual or gender identity within his society.

Nonetheless, the situation that follows Ken's outburst is initially confusing – until one understands the point Ken is trying to make. Ken takes Chris to a gay dance club where Chris's eyes are opened to a whole new world of 'types' (queens, twinkies, etc.), uninhibited expressions of desire and attraction, cruising, and desperation. Ken abandons Chris to the unwanted and vaguely repulsive attentions of an older man. Chris flees in search of Ken and ends up in the bathroom fending off an obese drunken man before finally being rescued by Ken. They go to a riverside park where Chris becomes aware of the "nocturnal activities" of certain men:

²⁹⁰ See, for example, the various essays in Brownell and Wasserstrom.

[Nothing] could grant them the freedom of guiltlessness.... [The] atmosphere that prevailed was thick with furtiveness, which remained something that could not be dispelled. Amidst this, the search for carnal gratification swirled and mixed with hope and despair, remorse and recklessness, until one could no longer be detached from the rest. (*PC*, 32)

This revelation of the hidden realities of 'gay' life in Singapore (the splashy lights and the concealed alleyways, the unconstrained exhibitionism and the surreptitious gropings) is critical: the 'naturalness' of homosexuality in this text is, in part, a function of its being outside society and the law. The transgressive nature of these men's behaviour places them beyond the margins. Although they may be non-people, it is this invisibility which grants them freedom.

However, Chris occasionally sees an elderly man wandering alone, through a Dantesque depiction of the park as a 'gay' beat, and is overwhelmed with pity and sadness. Ken's question, "Do you feel wonderful tonight?" is full of sarcasm and irony (*PC*, 33). This is Ken's point: the desperate man in the club, the drunk man in the toilet, these lost and wandering souls in the park, they are all homosexuals, "homos" according to Ken, destined to a life of furtive and frenzied embraces, futile attempts at making an emotional, or at least physical, connection, compelled to satisfy sexual urges which force them beyond the edge of society. Ken is warning Chris of the dangers of identifying as 'gay.'

In spite of this, there is a contradiction between Ken's position regarding homosexuality and his knowledge of 'gay' hangouts. While he refuses to think of himself as a homosexual, perhaps convincing himself that it is just a youthful phase, he is far more comfortable than Chris in a 'gay' club and seems to know his way around Singapore's 'gay' subculture, such as it is. The fact that he not only knows where the disco and park beat are but has apparently been there before seems at odds with his reticence to be called 'gay.' This too, is an aporia, and highlights the ambivalence of the text and the characters within, as well as the ambiguities of identity formation and recognition. It is necessary to remember, however, that the Western conception and perception of this identity, the transgressive masculinity labelled 'gay,' is not universal.

Chris thinks he understands Ken's shame but does not comprehend the full import of Ken's stance. Chris had allowed himself to fantasise about their future together, going so far as to imagine a typical suburban family life with children. But Ken shattered this dream by announcing abruptly and nonchalantly that he has decided to return to Jakarta and get married. When Chris asks what the girl will think if she "found out," Ken replies, "Found out what?" (*PC*, 39). On one level, we could say Ken is in deep denial. That he has had a sexual relationship with another man would certainly be something his future bride may not be happy about. If he is honest with her (as Tane Mahuta is with Leah in Ihimaera's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and *The Uncle's Story*) and she accepts him, that would be different. Despite his denials about being 'gay,' Ken is still plagued by the fear that his sexual activities may determine his sexual identity. "[What] if I turned [out] that way?" he worries (*PC*, 39). Ken's experiences in Singapore's underground 'gay scene' have left him thinking that the 'gay lifestyle' is about hedonism, promiscuity, superficiality, and, ultimately, desperation and humiliation. He desires a family, to be a father, yet there is no space in Singapore's (and Indonesia's) sociopolitical climate for that kind of alternative or transgressive masculinity. He is neither in the position, nor can he imagine, heading or belonging to a 'new gay tribe' that will make space for itself (or indeed, himself) in society.

It is interesting to also have a look at the border issue in this scene. What are the borders (physical, social, and personal) being crossed? Who polices the borders? According to Ihimaera, an island's coast forms "the border between sea and land," easily visible, undeniable.²⁹¹ Nonetheless, it is not only the creation and maintenance of boundaries, limits, margins, or borders that defines a particular place, but also the establishing of difference between 'inside' and 'outside,' 'here' and 'there,' 'private' and 'public,' 'local' and 'foreign,' 'us' and 'them,' the imagined and enforced contrast between polar opposites. Singapore's coastline establishes a boundary which contains and excludes, and while the city-state is (in)famous for what it prohibits, for Ken it is having crossed that border that affords him more freedom than had he stayed on the other side, within the borders of his own country.

²⁹¹ Witi Ihimaera, *Sky Dancer* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003), 9.

Gloria Anzaldúa has said that “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe”:

A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.... those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal.”²⁹²

Crossing back into Indonesia brings a new set of rules and responsibilities, particularly because that is where Ken sees himself as belonging. But Ken has also crossed the social margins of desire and sexuality, which are less discernible but perhaps of greater importance. Crossing a national border does not usually have the same consequences as crossing those of conventional masculinity. Transgressing across the sexual periphery is something Ken must deny in order to be accepted within the ‘safe’ side of those limits. But as Edward Said has pointed out, “Borders and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity.”²⁹³ In Ken’s case, he polices the border in addition to (or even, one could argue, on behalf of) his society. By not only returning to familiar territory, but also accepting its strictures as his own, he places himself in a prison. Although it can be argued that it is a prison of his own choosing, we must also be aware that oftentimes one’s choices are also limited.

The ‘Flamboyant’ Fag

Another instance of character ambivalence and textual aporia takes place between Chris and his normally ‘flamboyant’ friend, Nick. After being gay-bashed in a bar, Nick admits it requires strength and courage to disclose that one is ‘gay.’ In essence, he asks Chris to be understanding of Ken’s decision to return to Indonesia. Nick sensibly discusses the ‘gay’

²⁹² Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinters, 1987), 3.

²⁹³ Edward Said, “Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile,” *Harper’s* (September 1984): 54. Cited in Mae G. Henderson, ed., *Borders, Boundaries, and Frames: Essays in Cultural Criticism and Cultural Studies* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), 4.

rights movement in the West and even seems to espouse the appropriate rhetoric, yet he displays some contradictory beliefs and a borderline loathing for his sexuality:

We can fight for our rights, argue about what's natural and what's not, but don't you sometimes wish that you didn't have to go through all that headache and heartache? And [Ken's] right, you know, about the bleakness and insecurity and all that. (*PC*, 42-43)

Later, Nick says that he's very cautious about who he sleeps with because, "I don't believe in dragging people to the gutter with me.... [When] I'm alone, I tell myself, hey, your life isn't exactly the most beautiful thing in the world. Why try to make other people part of it?" (*PC*, 43).

Nick is perhaps the least 'masculine' of all the male characters in the book. We are clearly meant to see him as an extreme parody of the fag, the quintessential 'gay' as imagined (and feared) by the heterosexist, male chauvinist or 'masculinist' segment of society. Note that his name is also feminised:

Nicholas, or Nicole, ... chose to sashay instead of walk, purr instead of talk, and blow kisses instead of shake hands. Flamboyance was his trademark, a quality that was both a blessing and a curse, a cause for popularity as well as for ignominy.... People like him exist around us, extreme and ludicrous in speech and behaviour, like caricatures come to life. (*PC*, 22)

What could Lee's strategy be for presenting Nick in this way? Nick is a kind of foil for Chris; his flamboyance a reminder of the way Chris (and by extension, most other 'normal' 'gay' people) does not act. Nick is the obvious homosexual, with the stereotypical characteristics expected of him. In a way, his confrontational appearance and behaviour are reassuring because they are visible in their difference. He does not necessarily present an alternative masculinity, only an alternative lifestyle – one that can be identified, labelled, and shunted to the margins. He is 'gay' and everyone knows it. Chris's sexuality, however, is threatening. His masculinity is transgressive, not only because of his (homo)sexuality, but because he is not obviously 'gay' – he does not act in the outlandish or exaggerated manner expected.

Nick's 'flamboyant' behaviour is a defence mechanism designed to make people laugh as in the presence of some exotic creature, and thus not think about the complete truth of his sexuality. On the rare occasions when Nick does not act as stereotypically 'gay,'

the people around him would withdraw coolly. Perhaps this was because it only occurred to them during these moments, that what they had witnessed all this while was not merely a show or a joke, but an outward manifestation of something that was truly innate and deep-seated. Then they would think of *all the implications of his inclination*, judgement would be passed, and they would recoil. (*PC*, 25, emphasis added)

But what are these “implications”? What is the worst thing that being ‘gay’ can mean for a ‘straight’ person? That a ‘gay’ person will not produce offspring? The fear that a ‘gay’ man will molest boys?²⁹⁴ Perhaps it is the heterosexist repugnance of imagining sex between two men (especially and specifically anal penetration), a hysterical projection of the Freudian anal fixation leading to an almost clinical obsession with who is the inserter and who the insertee, and thus, who performs the feminine role (thereby debasing his maleness). Such obsessions rebound upon the heterosexist male in particular, for they show up the constructedness of socially sanctioned masculinity, its ultimate performativity. If a man can shift effortlessly between the acceptable outward and public behaviours of maleness and the eccentric performance of a ‘flaming queen,’ then the same must be true of his thoughts and desires. Worse yet, if that ‘flaming queen’ can so easily enact conventional ‘straight’ masculinity, there’s no telling who is actually ‘gay’ and who is not. The threat, then, is one from within the ranks rather than from without.

On the other hand, the implications of being ‘gay’ are serious and potentially detrimental to the man who is in violation of Singapore law if he engages in sex with other men and could face a fine and imprisonment. In addition, there is no employment protection for a ‘gay’ person and he could thus be fired if his employer believed that his sexuality posed some kind of disadvantage or threatened the working environment.²⁹⁵ It is only in recent years that these restrictions have eased somewhat, though the laws that prohibit homosexuality have not been changed. Just as in Sri Lanka, the Singapore establishment, including the state-

²⁹⁴ The myth of ‘gay’ men being either child molesters or victims of child abuse is somewhat perpetuated in the narrative through several incidents. Nick reveals that as an eight-year-old he was raped by a neighbour: “That’s why I find those reports in the papers about homosexual child molestations so sick” (*PC*, 43). We also read that Samuel was sexually abused by his own father (*PC*, 155).

²⁹⁵ See ILGA, 2000. In wording strikingly similar to that of Sri Lanka’s Section 365a, Singapore’s Section 377 of the Penal Code (a legacy of British colonial rule) criminalises homosexual acts. In perhaps a not-so-amazing coincidence, India’s law criminalising consensual sex between males is also designated Section 377.

controlled media, claims that these laws have not been used to charge anyone for decades. However, as Ronald Lim argues in "The Gay Movement in Singapore," the very existence of such laws validates and bolsters the contention that homosexuality is unnatural and immoral, and should therefore be illegal.²⁹⁶ In addition, Section 377 gives the government, homophobic individuals, or even someone bearing a grudge, an excuse to harass or create difficulties for anyone suspected of being 'gay.'

²⁹⁶ Ronald Lim, "The Gay Movement in Singapore," reprinted in Au (January 2004). Available online at http://www.yawningbread.org/guest_2004/guw-089.htm. 16 February 2004.

Tall, Dark, Handsome ... and Dangerous

When we first meet the vehicle mechanic Sergeant Samuel with whom Chris will be stationed at the Motor Transport Line, we are immediately reminded of the opening diary entry. He is a “dark, unshaven and hefty man clad in grimy overalls” and a permanent scowl (*PC*, 69). Could this be Chris’s future lover? It appears we have strayed into Mills and Boone territory, or the pornographic world of military and/or domination fantasy: Samuel as the brutish ogre who will be transformed by love, or Chris as the willing effeminate slave in thrall to the ultra-masculine beast. That this is indeed the direction in which the narrative is progressing seems confirmed in the next appearance of Sergeant Samuel.

While examining his new workspace and the office of his absent superior, Chris is surprised by an unexpected visitor: “I recognized the greasy, swarthy and ruggedly handsome face at once,” Chris recollects (*PC*, 74). That the sergeant is good-looking is news to the reader, for the previous description of the brooding officer portrays a man who may possess a type of raw animalistic magnetism yet remains decidedly unattractive. So this marks a change in Chris’s perception. A few days later, Lieutenant Lye, the Motor Transport Officer, asks Chris to bring the mechanic to his office.

I saw a shadow lurking in a dark corner. Then the tall, broad frame of Sergeant Samuel stepped into view, with his perpetual dark and stormy expression. There was a huge tear in the leg of his overalls and a lighted cigarette dangling from his fingers.... He cursed roughly under his breath, and caught me completely unawares as he pulled the zip of his overalls from the collar all the way down to his crotch.... [He] stepped out of the dirty garment and stood before me, clad in nothing but a pair of black briefs. My eyes defied my will and were drawn almost magnetically towards the dark, bulky, muscular body.... [He] proceeded to put on his camouflage attire with a deliberate, teasing slowness. I looked on with a helplessness tinged with an undefinable flavour of illicit voyeuristic coercion, as his fingers played tantalizingly with every button they came across. All the while, I could sense him gazing at me. (*PC*, 83-84)

This episode, of course, takes place in a location of homosocial bonding, Singapore’s mandatory National Service. Even though it reads like the prelude to an erotic encounter, the steamy sex scene does not eventuate, at least not immediately nor in the way one would expect. The incident seems like a kind of textual foreplay, but is ultimately a narratorial red

herring, a calculated attempt by the author to mislead the reader. In one sense, Sergeant Samuel appears to be the poster-boy for straight masculinity: he is muscular, rugged, a hard worker (as evinced by the soiled uniform). Yet, in another sense, he poses a threat to conventional masculinity by playing on the borders of transgression. He intentionally bares his body to another man with apparent relish, welcoming and returning the gaze ordinarily reserved for the female erotic object. We are on the margins that separate the homosocial from the homoerotic, a boundary which Eve Sedgwick asserts does not really exist.²⁹⁷

According to Sedgwick, "For a man to be a man's man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being 'interested in men'."²⁹⁸ Jonathan Rutherford remarks, "Men have created cultures around drinking, sport and work that seek to shut out the troubling contradictions of male heterosexuality."²⁹⁹ Sedgwick concurs; her important study of homosocial desire in literature highlights the often overlooked or elided parallels and associations between "the most sanctioned forms of male-homosocial bonding," (such as in sports teams and athletic competitions, the military, private schools, fraternities, prisons, and other predominantly male occupations and organisations) and "the most reprobated expressions of male homosexual sociality."³⁰⁰ Rutherford also observes that among 'straight' men, "workplace banter ... horseplay, mocking references to effeminacy" and imitating stereotypical 'gay' mannerisms are a kind of ritual to clarify the differences between hetero- and homosexuals, which, nevertheless, reveals "a mixture of fascination and loathing."³⁰¹ This formulation is remarkably similar to theories of colonial power structures and relationships.³⁰²

²⁹⁷ See also Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

²⁹⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 89.

²⁹⁹ Jonathan Rutherford, "Who's That Man," in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity* [1988], with a new Introduction, Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford, eds. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 54.

³⁰⁰ Sedgwick, 89.

³⁰¹ Rutherford, 59, 60.

³⁰² See, for example, Bhabha's formulation of mimicry in "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (Spring 1984): 125-133 and *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). Likewise, for Fanon such fascination and loathing is a factor in colonial/racial, as well as (homo)sexual, fears. See *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952], Charles Lam Markman, trans. (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

Chris's next encounter with Sergeant Samuel takes one more step in that misleading direction. Samuel enters the office and stands behind Chris's chair, then leans forward, placing his hands on either side of the desk.

There was a prurience in his proximity, but the elements of provocativeness and eroticism could not be ignored. My temperature was rising, and I was becoming sick with excitement. Then I felt his hand on my shoulder, which caused a sudden intake of air into my lungs. Very slowly, it slid down my back, a skilful movement deliberately executed for the sake of arousing nothing else but lust. (*PC*, 89)

The action is interrupted by the entrance of Lieutenant Lye. Significant glances are exchanged, but there is no verbal exchange. This is a little strange in light of an earlier overheard argument between the two officers. It seems to be a puzzle piece and one could assume that perhaps there is more to the hostility between Lye and Samuel. Perhaps they had been lovers and it ended badly. Or perhaps they were rivals for the affections of a third party. This question is never answered in the text.

Chris's final meeting with Sergeant Samuel results in an apparent sexual encounter, but one made ambiguous by the choice of language used:

In a moment of weakness, my better judgement took leave and made way for the first stirrings within me. The atmosphere was thick and heavy with lascivious intentions, and the tension was mounting at an alarming rate. Throwing caution to the wind, I shed my inhibitions and succumbed to the most carnal of my urges. It was lustful, violent and carried out with total abandon, completely devoid of any tenderness or emotion, and completely out of control. It was as reckless as it was senseless. (*PC*, 98)

So far the euphemistic and clichéd terminology is consistent with previous descriptions of sex. It is as if we are reading the secret diary of a Victorian ingénue. What is depicted seems to be a fierce and intense, though consensual, act. However, in the following paragraph something has gone horribly wrong and what was mutual enjoyment becomes abusive, an evident rape (even though the narrator seems to deny it at the end).

I caught the look in his eyes – cold as steel, and abruptly, all my libidinal cravings dissolved into nothingness. The full realization of the situation, the shock, and the shame, made me recoil. But the resistance seemed to excite him.... My cries of protest only managed to elicit a guttural laugh and a lunatic glint in his eyes. The struggle that ensued bore no sexual overtones; it

was purely a physical assault, a furious bout, a blatant display of aggression.
(*PC*, 98)

This is another one of those instances in which the author/narrator seems to be quickly retreating from something he has said. One gets the impression of an object dipping downward and lifting up again, like stones skipping on the surface of a lake, or a gull dipping into the ocean for a fish. The narrative continues this undulating motion, approaching taboo subjects then hiding behind interruptions, elliptical remarks, and other devices. By disavowing the rape is the author/narrator falling into some myth of masculinity which cannot allow or conceive of such a thing perpetrated against a man?³⁰³

In *Peculiar Chris* the rape could function as a metonym for the treatment of sexual minorities in Singapore. In a grander sense, this violent and degrading occurrence could be taken as metonymic for Singapore's colonial experience (or the brutality of Japanese occupation during the Second World War); although I do not think the author had this in mind. Sara Suleri claims that colonial anxieties "are only obscured by a critically unquestioning recuperation of the metaphor of rape [and] sexual aggression," because employing "literal inscriptions of gender-bound metaphors" to describe imperial politics is problematised by the obvious homoeroticism of many colonial narratives.³⁰⁴ Suleri remarks that "rape as a dominant trope ... has been in currency too long for it to remain at all critically liberating, particularly as it serves as a subterfuge to avoid the striking symbolic homoeroticism" of imperialist narratives."³⁰⁵ I would contend, however, that the metaphor of rape does not preclude or avoid the idea of homoeroticism. Suleri seems to assume that rape cannot be committed against a man. However, for the male psyche, to be raped is an enormously disempowering and symbolically emasculating act. Thus, the concept of rape could be understood as a valid metaphor not only in the case of aggressive colonisation, but also the persistent criminalisation and unpredictable victimisation of men who have sex with men in Singapore. I do not use the term 'homosexual' or 'gay' rape, as the media often do, because, as Sedgwick points out, men who rape other men usually do not self-identify as homosexual,

³⁰³ See also the reluctance to discuss Nick's childhood abuse on pages 96-97.

³⁰⁴ Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 16, 17.

³⁰⁵ Suleri, 17.

nor are they ordinarily involved in homosexual practices. Just as in the rape of women, violence, domination, and humiliation are of more significance in the act than desire, pleasure, or sex itself.³⁰⁶ Nonetheless, the frequently homophobic undercurrent in such acts conceals the subject's fears about his own sexuality and the perceived threat from the victim.

One of the most perplexing responses to this violence is Nick's advice to "Get the bloody hell off your high moral horse, Chris. And get real" (*PC*, 99). Despite the fact that Nick also suffered sexual abuse as a child, this is a needlessly harsh and completely heartless thing to say to someone who feels guilty for being victimised, who is ashamed for allowing lust to cloud his judgment, who feels self-pity at his loss of innocence. In addition, it is unclear what Chris's "high moral horse" may have been, for certainly a victim is allowed or worth some higher moral value than the perpetrator. In a sense, this is similar to the attitudes often of privileged groups towards oppressed and marginalised peoples, such as colonised populations or those still disadvantaged by the imperial legacy – 'Get over it. Move on.' – while there is no attempt made to acknowledge the weight of history, or address the contributing factors for disaffection.

As a result of the assault/rape, Chris is given some time off, and he takes a vacation in Sydney. He is amazed, a little overwhelmed, and practically seduced by the sexual freedom and excess he witnesses in Kings Cross. He wanders along the strip and winds up in a theatre showing 'gay' movies. There he meets Jack, a young man with whom he has a passionate holiday affair.³⁰⁷ Jack has recently lost his lover to AIDS and his father to leukemia. Chris, who has lost his father, first to alcohol and then to cancer, and feels abandoned by Ken, his first love, feels a bond with Jack. They spend several days together and promise to keep in touch. Jack seems particularly needy. At a future date he even proposes moving to Singapore in order to be with Chris, an offer Chris declines. Later, when

³⁰⁶ See Sedgwick, 225, note 6. While not the case in this particular instance, it is also important to remember that a rapist does not always or necessarily use his penis, and that rape of men frequently includes a homophobic element. This is true in most of the alleged and reported cases of sexual abuse by police officers or prison guards.

³⁰⁷ There is an apparent slip-up in Lee's research at this point. At first I was confused and read over the passage twice. He writes that Jack grew up in Melbourne but moved to Sydney because New South Wales laws concerning homosexuality are more liberal than Queensland's "punitive anti-gay laws" (*PC*, 116). I realised that Lee thought Melbourne is in Queensland. He should have had Jack originating from Brisbane – or perhaps the laws he refers to are part of Victoria's legal code.

Chris is in a relationship of his own, he and his partner go on vacation to Sydney. Chris is eager to share all the wonderful sights and experiences he remembers from his first trip. For some reason, however, Chris also wants to find Jack. In one of several melodramatic plot points, he learns that Jack returned to Melbourne (or should that be Brisbane?) because he could not deal with the disappointment of being rejected. Looking for Jack seems to be an insensitive thing for Chris to do with a new boyfriend tagging along. It is difficult to understand exactly what his motivation may be. There is no indication that he is interested in another sexual experience. Perhaps he wants to show off his partner, who hangs about through all this rather uncomfortably. Or perhaps he is seeking a validation of his choice and some kind of forgiveness for not having taken Jack up on his offer.

Again, we have the border theme in these episodes, the idea that crossing national boundaries also allows one to traverse other limits. In Sydney Chris experiences a freedom even greater than he witnessed with Ken in Singapore's 'gay' underground. Lee shows us that freedom is a matter of degrees and perspective. Ken found a degree of openness and license in Singapore which his family and social circumstances in Indonesia did not allow. The irony is that Singapore is by no means a free and open society for the transgressive and alternative. Like Ken, Chris must cross the border into a new and unknown place, uninhibited by restrictive laws and oppressive memories. Yet even in Australia, the author lets us know, there are people like Jack who feel they must move interstate to find increased freedom or escape beyond the border.

When Chris decides to leave the MTL (Motor Transport Line) for a job in a different sector, Lieutenant Lye seems oddly and inordinately upset, which leads us to the first twist in the story. The Lieutenant's name is also Samuel – and he is attracted to Chris. Samuel Lye has obviously kept his homosexuality a secret from the military; otherwise he would not have been an officer. What does seem a little strange, though, is that he is not necessarily closeted. While at Yale, prior to his enlistment, Samuel was active in the campus Gay and Lesbian Association and had even been involved in protest rallies and public forums on AIDS. Chris and Samuel begin seeing each other socially, but are not yet romantically involved when Samuel offers to lend *Maurice* to Chris. Just as with Ken's birthday gift, here again we have this coded reference, perhaps at one time a mode of identification between 'gay' men in

Singapore. In Western terms this seems by turns sweetly archaic and cloyingly passé. At a later stage in their relationship, while on vacation in Sydney, Chris and Samuel watch the Merchant Ivory production of *Maurice* that “never made it past the Singapore censors” (PC, 170).

Chris applies for a position as an announcer at the armed forces radio station. The initial interview goes well and he is virtually promised the job, but he is rejected on the basis of his 302 status. “It’s preposterous! ... I’ve never heard of anything more biased, short-sighted and unprofessional. What’s your sexual preference got to do with it?” exclaims Brenda, the show’s producer (PC, 125). She eventually gets Chris hired. Meanwhile, Samuel introduces Chris to Paul and Dominic, a male couple in their late twenties, fairly well-off and living together. It turns out that Paul is Brenda’s brother and Dominic used to be attracted to Chris. It’s a small world! It all seems a little too coincidental; but perhaps not, when one considers the rather small and secretive ‘gay’ community in Singapore.

Chris’s mother dies suddenly of cancer and his sister, Tammie, comes to visit. By now Samuel has moved in with him. Tammie is angry and disgusted. “You sound as if you’re proud of it!” she says when Chris confirms he is ‘gay’ (PC, 162). “I’m not proud of it. But I’m not ashamed of it either,” he responds. “Is this your way of getting back at everyone?” she asks, acknowledging that they grew up in a dysfunctional family, yet echoing the notion that homosexuality is only a phase (or a weapon). When Chris accuses her of being narrow-minded Tammie retorts, “I have plenty of gay friends” (PC, 162). It is a somewhat humorous reminder of other similar statements one hears regarding persons of a different ethnic background or religion which often accompany denials of prejudice.

At this point Ken, Chris’s first lover, reappears. Again, Lee makes a mistake with the story line and the suspicion of inferior editing is confirmed. Earlier we read that Ken was returning to Indonesia for an arranged marriage. Now, however, we are told that he worked for his father’s business for a year then went to New York where he met a nice Indonesian girl and they decided to get married. What happened to the prospective wife he was to meet in Jakarta? She is not mentioned again and nothing is explained.

I admit that I do not know what to make of Lee's slips and contradictions in the novel. I recognise that punctuation, spelling, and other grammatical errors, as well as omissions and inaccuracies, are not necessarily (or only) the author's fault, but can be the function of editing, proofreading, and printing in relatively small and/or regional publishing houses where English is not necessarily the first language.³⁰⁸ Although this may apply in Lee's case, his first major error is implying that Melbourne is in Queensland, while the next obvious blunder is forgetting the original reason for Ken's return to Indonesia. This leads me to wonder whether there are other inaccuracies, in describing aspects of society in Singapore and life in the National Service. Fortunately, there is corroborating documentation for Lee's depictions of military realities. I do not think that Lee has set out to mislead, for those are not the types of mistakes he makes. Rather, they seem emblematic of a first effort by a very young writer (only twenty when he began the novel). Even Lee acknowledges in his Foreword that his writing "may soon become a victim of criticism and scepticism," and admits that legal and social constraints render *Peculiar Chris* "very passé" in terms of a Western readership (*PC*, v).

Happily (N)Ever After?

Throughout the novel there are small instances of premonition in the form of dreams concerning Samuel's death. Chris is not depicted as being psychic or having any special paranormal powers or abilities and there are no other supernatural elements in the story, nor is there a magical realist narrative strand, so that these dreams become an unbelievable and irritating distraction. There is no obvious reason for the premonitions; they do not guide or propel the story along. Combined with the opening diary entry, which in itself gives away the ending of the story, they accomplish nothing more than to remind the reader that something bad will happen, that not all will live happily ever after.

³⁰⁸ This is also true in Sri Lanka. Wijesinha's earlier novels are riddled with orthographical errors that are obviously the work of typists and printers rather than the author.

Predictably enough, the premonitions become reality when Chris and Samuel are at their happiest. Their relationship has lasted for a year. "It's been that long already?" Chris asks. "We've only just begun,"³⁰⁹ Samuel replies (*PC*, 174). Everything's coming up roses, pass the champagne ... and strap yourself in, because we are just a cliché away from disaster. Samuel goes on a trip to Johor Bahru, just across the Strait in Malaysia, with Paul and Dominic. Chris does not go along because he has a bad case of the flu. There is an accident on the highway and Samuel is severely injured. He receives a blood transfusion in Johor and eventually recovers enough to return home. But the blood he received had been tainted with HIV – still a death sentence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Samuel wants to break up with Chris because, he says, "You can't have a relationship with an infected person" (*PC*, 191). Chris refuses to leave him, but the relationship suffers and there are many times when Chris wonders if it is better to just end it. There is too much emphasis on the sexual aspect; whether Chris can or should have sex (with Samuel or with others). Chris and Samuel seem incapable of imagining a life together without sex; or more accurately, they are unable to envision, let alone engage in, safe-sex practices. Chris's friend Nick also seems to imply that sex is necessary in a relationship and questions Chris's motives for staying with Samuel. He suggests that Chris is subconsciously driven by some kind of misguided guilt over not being with his father during his dying moments. He also recommends that Chris find sex elsewhere – with Jack from Australia, for example.

Here there is another stereotype as Jack is labelled a "rice queen," gay parlance for a Caucasian man who prefers (usually East) Asian men (*PC*, 202). Though widely accepted and employed, this type of classifying or cataloguing of sexual preferences and practices is offensive because it is generated from, and based on, a white (particularly or predominantly American) point of view which regards as a deviation and fetish any divergence or departure from its normative self. In other words, this perspective considers a relationship between two white men of similar age and socioeconomic background as normal, or unremarkable, while fetishising any difference. Thus, a white man who is attracted to (or prefers) Asian men is a 'rice queen,' while an Asian man who is interested in other Asian men is referred to as 'sticky

³⁰⁹ One cannot help but hear the opening strains of the Carpenters' song further popularised by Barbra Streisand, herself a 'gay' icon and somewhat of a code or identifier within (primarily Western[ised]) 'gay' subcultures.

rice.' The latter term is especially derogatory as it implies a kind of incestual intermingling among ethnic (read non-white) minority members. An Asian man who seeks out white partners is called a 'potato queen.' Tellingly, there is no equivalent expression for white men who prefer other white men.³¹⁰

Unfortunately, these terms have gained wider usage as the Euro-American style and standard of 'gayness' is adopted around the globe. In Singapore, with its majority ethnic Chinese population and its national imaginary proudly based on Chinese cultural roots and values, instead of "turning to the examples of antiquity" for validation and self-esteem, young 'gay' men "look to New York and San Francisco for examples to emulate."³¹¹ As Rictor Norton asserts, "indigenous cultural patterns, [including] institutionalized homosexual patterns, are rapidly disappearing as the entire world models itself on the colonial paradigms of the West."³¹²

Both Chris and Samuel eventually come to terms with the inevitability of death. Samuel dies peacefully, even if painfully, and Chris realises that salvation lies in unconditional and forgiving love:

When my father died, he wore a look of remorse, only moments after I had rejected him and denied him the chance of redemption. It was ironic that in inadvertently doing so, I myself had been plagued by guilt and the need to seek redemption – a redemption that I eventually found in Samuel... [Even] as I learned to let go, and survived Samuel's death, I was able to lay my father to rest as well. (*PC*, 224)

If there is a 'moral' to this story (and there clearly is, based on the author's opening

³¹⁰ For a good discussion of the colonisation of male-to-male desire, see Laurence Wai-Ten Leong, "Of Rice and Potatoes: The Dynamics of Interracial Gay Relationships," in Lo and Guoqin, 112-122. For a slightly different perspective, see Sandip Roy, "The Call of Rice: (South) Asian American Queer Communities," in *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America*, Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth, eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 168-185. See also, Jim Nawrocki, "'Rice Queens' and the Men Who Love Them," *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 9.2 (March 2002): 29-30.

³¹¹ Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California, 1990), 171. Although Hinsch's assertions are focused on China, the same can be said for the Chinese majority in Singapore.

³¹² Rictor Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (London: Cassell, 1997), 288.

statements in his Foreword) it is articulated in the following statement by Samuel:

We cannot and must not ... allow ourselves to be consigned to a subsidiary role; we cannot and must not, ever, be ashamed of who we are and what we believe in; we cannot and must not allow our dignity to be compromised. Without our dignity, in the truest sense of the word, in the sense that it entitles us to a moral right and inclines us towards a moral virtue to be intolerant of unjust devaluation and disparagement, we are no more human. (*PC*, 164)

A secondary point is indeed moral in the sense of religious teaching, something lacking in the bulk of the text, which appears near the end in the form of a letter from Australia. Jack urges Chris to release his mental and emotional hold on Samuel, his pain and guilt, and to learn to accept that everyone dies regardless of how they live: "To believe this is to believe in God and accept his ultimate plan of life, without resorting to 'WHY ME!'. It is a whole and total commitment to something beyond this world ... a life of abundance and joy" (*PC*, 222).

At the end of the novel there is an Epilogue. Chris is on a flight to London where he plans on going to university. While thinking about his future prospects he drops the book he is carrying. His seat-mate picks it up – it is a copy of *Maurice* – and introduces himself. The novel ends with the line, "Hi. I'm Chris" (*PC*, 226). This third coded reference to Forster's text opens up new possibilities. We know that life goes on. It may be a trite observation – "But isn't that what clichés are all about? If they weren't so full of truth, they wouldn't be the hackneyed expressions that they've become" (*PC*, 226).

The novel's final line provides closure (it neatly ties up the narrative by linking back to the title), as well as the promise of new beginnings. The significance of the title is that Chris may indeed be 'peculiar' because of his (homo)sexuality, yet in many ways he is just like any other normal young adult male in Singapore, who has similar struggles with, and concerns about, grades, friends, the National Service, and even romance. The main difference is that his object choice is different. *Peculiar Chris* highlights the very ordinariness of its title character as a plea for recognition and understanding. But while hopeful in the sense that Chris has found himself and is embarking on new (ad)ventures, there is a downside at the end. We are back to the border issue – Chris is leaving Singapore and "there's nothing left here to come back for" (*PC*, 225). These words, of course, echo the words from the George

Michael song in the epigraph, suggesting that Chris has given up on Singapore. It's a rather grand or hubristic statement, comparing oneself to an absentee God, but the somewhat awkward message is clear: in the end, the freedom to cross gender/sexual limits requires Chris to cross national boundaries. His brand of transgressive masculinity is unwelcome and cannot be expressed in Singapore. Although there is no current information about the author, the closing note indicates that he also left Singapore in the early 1990s to study law in London. Whether he ever returned, and what he has done since then, are not known.

American aphorist Mason Cooley has written, "Reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are."³¹³ Like *Maurice*, indeed all literature, which functions as an open window or door to new ideas and experiences, *Peculiar Chris* also serves this purpose in a variety of ways. First, Lee makes available in Singapore a narrative that challenges social perceptions as well as government restrictions. Second, he provides a glimpse into the lives and struggles of transgressive men living in Singapore, however hackneyed or unsophisticated it may appear to Western readers. Third, and this is related to the first, by writing this book and making it available within Singapore, Lee contributed to the growing movement for acceptance and freedom, leading to a slight but significant lifting of certain restrictions in the 1990s. It may not have been the decisive factor, and he was by no means at the forefront, but his contribution is important nonetheless.

Colin's Cathedral

Glass Cathedral (1995) begins during Colin's first year at university where he meets James Ong, a fellow student in an English tutorial. They are both presumably twenty or twenty-one years old, just recently finished with their two-year mandatory National Service. At their first encounter Colin notices James is wearing tight jeans and observes the apparent lack of underwear. "Hmmm. No lines.... Is he like me? Is he one?" (GC, 2). Although we are not told what "one" is, Colin's 'condition' is fairly obvious. It is humorous that tight pants and no

³¹³ Mason Cooley, *City Aphorisms*, Sixth Selection, (New York: 1989). Reprinted in *The Columbia World of Quotations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Available online at <http://www.bartleby.com>. 23 September 2005.

underwear signals homosexuality. (Lack of underwear was also a feature in one of Wijesinha's narratives.) However, it is quite significant that the word 'gay' or 'homosexual' is not used. Colin has not come to terms with his sexuality, though by now he has recognised that he is different from other young men. He may not have put a name to his sexual orientation but knows enough to consider that there may be others "like him."

Colin and James spend their first meeting talking about old schools and which church they attend and have a short argument about Catholic doctrine. As Colin gets up to leave we are given another hint about his mysterious condition. "I was glad for the security of the file I was carrying" (GC, 4). Like Johann Lee's writing style, we see a reticence to be straightforward or explicit, for this is a thinly-veiled reference to the erection Colin is hiding behind his folder.³¹⁴ It is a fairly droll, standard literary deflection, which in this case can either be taken for coyness, or explained as a genuine attempt to get past the censors.

Colin's family is fairly average. They live in a small three-room flat, in a building similar to the numerous residential complexes found throughout Singapore. He is thin and uninterested in sports. James, on the other hand, comes from a wealthy family with a large house and a Filipina maid. His father is the director of a large multi-national company, his mother is an active socialite, and his sisters are married to rich men. James drives a sporty car, wears stylish clothes, and has a gym-toned body. All of his friends are wealthy kids who take vacations abroad and can afford expensive hobbies and the latest model cars. Colin does not fit into this social circle.

Colin attends Christ the King Church hoping to run into James. The young priest, Father Velu, preaches against the sins of divorce, alcoholism, and homosexuality, among others. While reflecting on the appropriateness of the message, Colin also has time to notice that the priest is attractive. He recalls his confirmation and his sense of piety and religious fervour –

³¹⁴ The pun is intentional.

he had thought he received the 'calling' and had wanted to become a priest.³¹⁵ Colin also remembers the beautiful boy sitting in another pew who smiled at him, and ignited a different kind of fervour. Catechism taught that 'urges' had to be controlled, and that any type of sexual relationship outside of marriage and/or for purposes other than procreation was 'from the devil.'

Producing children was a privilege, a sharing of the divine power and therefore, had to be used only when two people, a man and a woman, were married in church (no less). Sex (not [Sister Margaret's] word) outside of marriage was a sin, and when we sinned (she turned on a slide of a wilted rose, its original colour being white, set against a black background). We got the message. (GC, 21)

Colin also recalls a discussion on masturbation during Moral Education class at his Catholic Junior College. The teacher declared that God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, and Jesus blessed the sacrament of marriage, therefore masturbation violates God's intent. By extension, homosexuality is also a sin. "It goes against God's will because it is [also] fruitless" (GC, 23). The teacher rushed to assure his all-male class that "being attracted to someone of your own sex is not homosexuality. As long as there is no carnal knowledge, it is friendship. Platonic friendship" (GC, 23). When one of the students asked what carnal knowledge meant, another boy exclaimed, "Aiyah, fuck backside lah!" It is a humorous interjection in typical Singapore dialect that helps break the narrative tension.

In instances such as the one above, the use of non-standard 'englishes' (to borrow Bill Ashcroft's term) signifies and establishes class differences, not only on an economic level but also as an indicator of ethnicity. As Ashcroft, et al., discuss, the "social and economic hierarchies produced by colonialism have been retained in post-colonial society through the medium of language."³¹⁶ On one occasion Colin is pleased "that Singapore men [can] still be charming, polite, and speak good English" (GC, 27). It is interesting to note that Colin focuses on men in this observation. Perhaps he thinks women in Singapore have already mastered

³¹⁵ Note the homophonic similarity between the protagonist's name and the word 'calling.' I contend it is no accident that both words begin with the same morpheme as the author's name. Koh exhibits a knowledge of, and interest in, the Catholic Church to an extent which suggests personal experience.

³¹⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Garreth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* [1989], 2nd Edition (London: Routledge, 2002), 75.

the task of speaking 'good' English. It is more likely, however, that the manners and speaking habits of women do not concern him, they are not important or central to his world – his remark is a comment on a handsome young waiter.

Unlike Lee, whose main characters (regardless of ethnic background) use primarily standard English, Koh employs Singlish in a few other contexts in addition to the one above. James's mother, Mrs. Ong, speaks in Singlish, and sometimes Colin and his friends revert to local idiom. The characters who do not speak 'proper' English seem under- or uneducated. However, in general the novel is written (and characters speak) in rather conventional or standard English. The overall tone, therefore, is still rather conventional and not much different from the writings of an English-speaker from anywhere else. Although not concerned with literal translation from speech in a completely different language from written English, writing in Singapore does involve some level of translation which is more a matter of transcription. Like Sa'at (whom I discuss later in this chapter), or Ihimaera or Duff (New Zealand), and to a lesser extent Wijesinha (Sri Lanka), Koh "moves along [a dialectic or linguistic] continuum in the dialogue of the characters."³¹⁷ However, because he is not as successful as Sa'at or Ihimaera in integrating or naturalising the range of speech in the novel, his use of Singlish reads like a bit of 'local colour' added in to authenticate the text and its setting.

In addition to his school's and the church's teachings on homosexuality, Colin is pressured by his family to do the conventional, socially acceptable thing. His mother practically gives him two choices, become a priest or get married. "My parents were not terribly Chinese, yet their concern with being taken care of in their old age, a sure sign of filial piety on the part of the children, extended to us" (GC, 52) Colin's excuse is that he is still too young to think about settling down. At a later date he tells his mother he plans on never getting married. "How can you be alone for the rest of your life? Who's going to take care of you when you get old?" she wonders (GC, 85).

James may not feel pressured by the Catholic Church, or put much store in its teachings, but

³¹⁷ Ashcroft, et al., 71.

like Colin he is hounded by his parents, particularly his mother, to find a nice girl, marry, settle down. Mrs. Ong tries to enlist Colin's help in finding James a girlfriend, little knowing the true nature of the relationship between the two boys. Colin uses the same excuse for James as he did for himself with his own mother. "Auntie, he's still young" (GC, 66). And, like his own parents, Mrs. Ong expresses her desire for grandchildren and the continuation of the family lineage. "One day, you will inherit your father's business.... You need a wife to help you. You need to keep the business which your grandfather and father have worked so hard to build up. Then you must pass it on to your sons. It's not that I'm pressuring you" (GC, 81).

In *Peculiar Chris*, Johann Lee describes the male homosocial worlds of both school before Junior College and the military after Junior College. In *Glass Cathedral* we have yet another indication of the bragging, story-telling, swaggering masculinity which discounts female experience – unless it somehow bolsters or affects the male.

The women, of course, had not the privilege of servicing the nation without remuneration. Social work did not count. Neither did motherhood. Hence, canteen stories of cliff climbing, parachuting, crawling and hacking through the jungle, ... exercises in prophylactic security with broomsticks and bananas as simulated weapons; these were the stuff of what it meant to be a man, the progressive Singaporean male, trained to wield the powers of leadership. (GC, 5)

This perhaps provides an important insight into the psyche of young men in Singapore. The line about prophylactic security is also an interesting play on words and images. At first glance it seems to be a straightforward enough description of mock-warfare. 'Prophylactic,' of course, means 'preventive' or 'defensive,' but it is probably more commonly known in relation to condoms, thus the weapons (broomsticks and bananas) in this passage become a metaphor for the penis.³¹⁸ It is difficult then to avoid the association of sex with violence and the further implication that the aggressor (the possessor of this penis/weapon) also needs to protect or defend himself, presumably from his female victim or enemy. The allusion to masculine/phallic power is made clearer in the final line where we read that the young men

³¹⁸ In fact, in many Sex Education classes or Safe Sex seminars students learn how to use condoms using various objects, including broomsticks and bananas.

are being prepared “to wield the powers of leadership.” There is also a touch of homoeroticism in the image of young army recruits practising their condom skills together.

The reader has already realised that Colin is ‘gay’ even though he is in denial and up to this point his refusal to identify his desires seems perplexing. He describes himself as “the fair maiden in the midst of tanned bulging knights” and declares that he appreciates “the male beauty wrought by the callisthenics of the army” (GC, 5). The flashbacks in the early section of the novel help explain why Colin is so conflicted about his feelings. In an internal debate, doubtlessly familiar to many homosexuals who have grown up in the Church, Colin rationalises his attraction to other boys as “merely platonic friendship, or a desire for one, and not a mortal sin deserving eternal damnation, cast out from God’s mercy” (GC, 24). During his first visit to James’s house they begin talking about relationships. James declares that he does not have a girlfriend because relationships are difficult to maintain. “Maybe that’s why gay relationships don’t last so long,” he comments out of the blue (GC, 13). Colin concedes that relationships require work and James asks whether he speaks from experience. The following dialogue ensues:

I’ve never had a girlfriend...
Or boyfriend? ...
You know that sort of thing isn’t approved by the Church...
Oh come off it, Colin. What sort of thing? If you’re gay, you’re gay.... I think you like men but are not admitting it to yourself because of your hang-ups about the Church. So, just admit it, you are gay. (GC, 14)

For the first time someone has put into words the otherness Colin feels. He is overwhelmed by James’s intuition and he runs away.

Despite having run away from James’s probing question, Colin is still attracted and the friendship continues to develop. While at lunch during their third meeting, James asks Colin why he ran away previously. Colin feels insulted and calls James presumptuous, then apologises for being rude. “Here [we are] quarrelling like lovers when we’ve only just met. It’s ridiculous. I mean, we’re two guys, for heaven’s sake.” “So? What’s wrong with two guys in love?” James responds (GC, 31). Once again they get into an argument about the teachings of the Catholic Church, and once again Colin leaves.

Later in the week, at his Catholic student group meeting (the Legion of Mary, Our Lady of Good Counsel), Colin talks about his interaction with James as part of his weekly report, as though it was a missionary action intended to convince James that homosexuality is a sin. A discussion results among the members, and Colin takes on the responsibility of enlightening the group on the teachings of the Church regarding homosexuality. "I felt right; right that it was a platonic friendship, right that James was wrong ... right that I was affirming to my brother and sister legionaries that homosexuality was a sin. I was right" (GC, 36). But on the bus ride home his conviction is shaken and he feels as though he has betrayed himself as well as James.

Colin is finally able to admit to James that he is 'gay' after talking with his spiritual advisor, Father Norbert. Colin also confesses his attraction to James. They both seem giddy with infatuation. "You do not know how happy you've made me," James declares (GC, 60). Colin begins spending every weekend at James's house. Unlike the protagonist in *Peculiar Chris*, however, Colin does not fantasise about having a family and conventional suburban existence with James. "It wasn't that I disliked [children]; I just did not have the inclination to procreate, legally or otherwise" (GC, 63). Another difference is that Lee's narrator is at pains to reassure the reader that sex between him and his lover was completely equal and reciprocal, whereas Colin is unashamed of his passive/receptive role: "I felt special, particularly loved and loved in a particular way" (GC, 64).

Though relatively freer of euphemistic clichés than Lee's *Peculiar Chris*, Koh's novel does contain some notable ones. For example, "I felt the virility of our passion," and "a shiver of love ran down my spine," are used in the first description of lovemaking between Colin and James (GC, 64). In other instances the clichés display a consciousness as well as mockery of the prudishness which both his society and the Catholic Church exhibit. One such instance is when Norbert talks about Father Tse's use of the phrases "carnal knowledge" and "wayward passions" (GC, 57).

Eventually, however, the relationship begins to cool and James decides he can no longer be 'gay.' Prior to meeting Colin, James had a sexual relationship with another boy. At some

point they had an argument and the boy called James “a bloody fucking faggot” (GC, 87). The boy claimed he was not a homosexual; their relationship had been an experiment to discover whether James was ‘gay’ and to see what it felt like “to screw the arsehole of a poof” (GC, 88). This seems classic homophobic behaviour which is meant to disguise self-loathing and denial. Unfortunately, the experience may have scarred James, but seems not to have taught him a lesson – or, perhaps, the lesson he learned was not the right one. He tells Colin, “In the eyes of society we will always be dirty, perverts, promiscuous, unstable.... We are criminals as far as the law is concerned” (GC, 103). He admits that he can no longer cope with the pressure to have a family, “to contribute to society through [his] children” (GC, 104).

The break-up is difficult for Colin, but he has the support of both Rani and Norbert. At the end of the novel Norbert and Colin are walking in a crowded shopping mall where they see James walking with his arm around the waist of a pretty young woman. Norbert tries to shield Colin, but Colin replies, “It’s OK... You can’t protect me forever” (GC, 116).

‘Gays’ in the Church

In examining the relationship between one’s religious faith and one’s sexual identity Father Norbert Lim presents an interesting character. He is a young priest in his late twenties who befriended Colin soon after Colin’s confirmation. But from the start there are small indications that there may be more going on than what either of them will admit to. “He rested a comforting hand on my thigh.... Father Norbert gathered me into his arms.... We liked each other” (GC, 41). Their friendship had aroused suspicions from parish members as well. Someone had asked Colin whether he was Father Norbert’s “particular friend.” This led to a discussion with Father Norbert about homosexuality, and the priest’s assurances that all was fine. So, years later, when Colin confesses his confused feelings about James he is surprised by Norbert’s response. “It’s all right. You can be attracted to another man. You can love another man. Not just as a friend. Not just as a Christian. But as David loved Jonathan” (GC, 45). Faced with affirmation rather than condemnation Colin finally admits he is ‘gay.’ “You must understand that there’s nothing wrong with being gay. That’s the way you were

born, God created you as you are," Father Norbert assures him (GC, 46). However, there is a greater shock in store for Colin. Norbert confesses that he has been in love with Colin since the beginning of their friendship. Colin realises that their mutual affection had been based on attraction and feels more confused than ever.

A part of Colin wishes he had never met James, or that Norbert had come out sooner. He also feels anxious about the possibility of Norbert's homosexuality being discovered by others.

If it had been the Episcopalian Church, Norbert would have had more sympathy. If it had been Europe or the States, he would have had unmitigated support from fellow Catholics. But it was here ... in Singapore, an island city ... where to be gay is to be criminal. (GC, 52)

However, Colin nurses the hope that Norbert will be able to remain in the Church so that he can provide guidance and support to other gay and lesbian Catholics (GC, 55-56).

After coming out to Colin, Father Norbert is unable to keep his sexuality a secret any longer. He tells his superior, Father Peter Tse, who recommends that Norbert attend a Jesuit centre in Chiangmai, Thailand, in order to "get in touch with God, and to rein in [his] unnatural inclinations" (GC, 57). At the retreat a compassionate and progressive Indian priest counsels Norbert, and convinces him that "homosexuality [is] not an illness, neither of the body nor of the mind" (CG, 83).

Some of the other texts examined in this thesis have touched on concerns to do with the aftermath of colonialism and the effects of racism and ethnic tension. In *Glass Cathedral*, Koh's target is the Catholic Church, which has been not only a tool used by the European colonial powers in their race to subdivide the globe but also an imperialist actor itself. Several characters in the novel question the authority of the Church or express suspicion about "decisions that [affect] millions of lives ... made in the secretive conclaves of the Vatican" (GC, 52) Father Norbert laments his obligation to live by and endorse Catholic precepts "even though they are erroneous.... There's nothing in the Bible to support the Pope's opinions [on homosexuality], but ... I can't tell the world" (GC, 46). James is a professed Catholic and even attends Mass regularly. However, he declares that he finds Catholicism problematic. "Eternal Rome is all too human. Yet, people actually obey it," he says incredulously (GC, 3). Colin

observes, “The Church’s professionals might be progressive when it came to socio-political matters, but tended to be stiff when confronted with the wilderness of human sexuality. The braver ones ... inevitably got shut up by the old crows in the Vatican” (GC, 58). When Colin worries about what “the Church” will say or do, meaning the religious authorities, Father Norbert reminds him, “you are the Church as well” (GC, 46).

Father Thulesiram, the Indian Jesuit who runs the Catholic retreat centre in Thailand, is an example of the progressive element within the Church. He is “one of those exceptional priests with a fine synthesis of the ancient spiritualities and a very ‘modern’ radicalness that kept in touch with scientific development” (GC, 83). Unconcerned with the possible causes of homosexuality, his advice to one struggling with his orientation is to pray and allow the Holy Spirit to guide. “[To] love another man in fidelity [is] a gift from God [one] should not deny” (GC, 83). The Catholic Church, of course, is not known for its progressive views on sexuality or its inclusiveness of homosexuals, so Father Thulesiram and the views he expresses are quite remarkable. We could analyse the meaning of his pronouncement on ‘fidelity’ (does it imply a monogamous or even platonic relationship, or is it a more generous understanding of personal integrity and honesty with one’s partner?), but that would be quibbling about the spirit of generosity which is revealed in this passage. Koh’s underlying message in this portion, and indeed the entire book, is that the Church has strayed from Christ’s teachings of love and acceptance, which, if embraced again, could provide a safe haven for Singapore’s sexual minorities.

In his discussion of Peter Carey’s *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), Bill Ashcroft identifies glass as representing the paradox of truth and fiction, or reality and interpretation. “Glass is the substance which best represents the indeterminacy of existence.... It represents the unity of truth and illusion,” he writes.³¹⁹ A glass object can be beautiful and delicate, but dangerous when broken. Glass can also appear to be invisible, we can look through and beyond it. Ashcroft declares that “If glass is the material symbol of the ambivalence of civilization in imperial history, a comparable motif in national history is invisibility.”³²⁰ Invisibility itself is

³¹⁹ Bill Ashcroft, *On Post-Colonial Futures: Writing Past Colonialism* (London & New York: Continuum, 2001), 136-137.

³²⁰ Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Futures*, 137.

an ambivalent notion. It can be the 'magical' ability of the oppressed to 'disappear' from view in order to escape their oppressors, or it can signify the marginalisation of minority groups in a nation's history. The potential invisibility of a glass construction can also suggest the imperceptibility or obscurity of political, economic, religious, and other social structures and discourses. Koh's title gestures to all these various interpretations. His glass cathedral represents not only the Catholic Church in Singapore, but also other socio-political organisations as well as subjectivities in his society. In the case of Carey's novel, as Ashcroft indicates, glass can also be out of place. The same could be argued for both the Church and for Colin and other sexual 'misfits' like him. In terms of the Catholic Church, its displacement in Singapore is twofold. On the one hand, as governed by the distant and foreign Vatican, its policies and pronouncements can be at odds with local realities. On the other, Christianity in general has had a fraught relationship with Singapore's political establishment. Chelva Kanaganayakam points out that in the 1970s and late 1980s various Christian groups were considered politically subversive because of their role in opposing the government's repressive policies and regulations.³²¹ Thus, the role of the Catholic Church in Koh's novel becomes even more complex, for it represents not only a legacy of the colonial past, but also a potential contemporary threat to the nation.

Although the book is primarily about Colin's growth into maturity and an acceptance of his sexuality, the novel also deals with the transformation of Norbert. He may start off as just another nice guy, but he becomes a man of convictions who is willing to give up what he assumed to be his life's calling in order to maintain his integrity. He begins working with society's outcasts, the poor prostitutes from ethnic minorities. Norbert galvanises Christian charity and humanism toward 'gay' men just by being who and what he is. The irony is that his parish congregation is so far removed from the example and teachings of Jesus that they do not recognise Father Norbert's actions as Christ-like, and instead gossip about and ridicule him. One parishioner lodges a complaint with the bishop, seemingly unaware that Jesus would have deplored him as one of the self-righteous and hypocritical Pharisees. Due to the growing scandal, Norbert leaves the priesthood and decides to become a teacher.

³²¹ Kanaganayakam, "Hunting the Minotaur," 80.

Dennis Altman suggests that Koh's main theme is the integration of the homosexual protagonist "into family roles and expectations."³²² While this may be true, his protagonist, Colin, struggles with the question of how to actually and effectively incorporate his (homo)sexuality with his social and familial responsibilities. In the end we are no closer to real integration than in the beginning. James, Colin's first lover, may be married, or at least involved with a girl, in a semblance of traditional and expected masculinity (like Ken in *Peculiar Chris*). But Colin remains on the periphery of social acceptability. His decision to live as a 'gay' man will not help him integrate "into family roles and expectations." Such a process is a possibility toward which Ihimaera gestures with his concept of the 'new gay tribe,' or that Selvadurai seems to suggest with the character of Bala in *Cinnamon Gardens*. Selvadurai, like Ihimaera in *The Uncle's Story*, looks to the past in order to recover alternative possibilities for the future. Another take on the question is presented through Sa'at's stories, which seem to move beyond the anxiety about one's sexual identity and instead examine various aspects of alternative and transgressive masculinities in practice.

Voices in the Corridor

Critically speaking, Alfian Sa'at is a better writer than either Johann Lee or Andrew Koh. *Corridor* won the Singapore Literature Prize Commendation Award in 1998, and his previous works (several plays and a collection of poetry) have received wide-spread praise. His style is concise, almost understated. Each story in *Corridor* is like a brief glimpse into the extraordinary and the mundane events and instances which make up an ordinary life, short vignettes both unique yet familiar to a young Singaporean readership. In his review of the book, Peter Nazareth compares the stories to "video clips from everyday life."³²³ And indeed they are like home movies one is subjected to after a relative returns from an unexciting vacation; or with the current trend for reality television, they are private moments captured by a hidden camera, ones you would rather not have exposed. Part of the strength of his

³²² Dennis Altman, "Global Gaze/Global Gays," *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 3.4 (1997): 417-436.

Reprinted in *Postcolonial and Queer Theories: Intersections and Essays*, John C. Hawley, ed. (Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 6.

³²³ Peter Nazareth, "Corridor," *World Literature Today* 74.3 (Summer 2000): 589.

narratives lies in the fact that these snapshots could have been taken from any family album, yet at the same time they are pictures more likely to be stuffed away in a closet or stashed in a box rather than displayed for easy viewing. Six of Sa'at's stories are in some way related to questions of masculinity and contain suggestions of, or allusions to, male same-sex sexuality. His characters come from different cultural, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds, but all are basically average, common, every-day Singaporean folk. Each story is told from a different perspective; some are narrated in first person others are related from a third person omniscient point of view. As a whole, the book reverberates with ethnic, class, and linguistic polyphony.

All of these stories share a common element. Their protagonists are lonely, isolated among the urban throngs. They are alienated and marginalised members of a society which does not understand, tolerate, or have time for the kind of intimacies they crave. They are part of a younger generation dissatisfied with the culture they have inherited, trapped in the interstices where social norms have not caught up to their realities. Four of the six are adolescents, and the oldest of all is only thirty-five: Salim, the fragile, self-conscious and uncertain teenager; Simon, the boy forced into untimely maturity by the needy and predatory sexual advances of an older man; Hafiz, the student with an undefined and unsettling fixation on his tutor; the high school girl unsettled by a transvestite on a train; the young man suffering from a mysterious illness, alone in his flat; and finally, Robert, the 'gay divorcé,' a sexual novice left floundering in a subculture with which he has nothing in common.

One of the major distinctions between the narratives here and those of Lee and Koh is the virtually complete elimination of reflection. This can be seen on several different levels. Sa'at does not refer back to colonial narratives or discourses, nor does he present his protagonists interacting with or reflecting British (or generally Western) modes of behaviour. Foreign texts and spaces such as Lee's use of *Maurice* and King's Cross, or Koh's distant Rome, are noticeably absent. Sa'at is not concerned whether he has a Western audience, or whether his work is accessible to readers beyond the Malayan archipelago. This is writing by an indigenous (Malay) Singaporean primarily for other Singaporeans; a text which excludes the

voice of the coloniser while employing the former coloniser's language. If one of the fundamentals of postcolonial literature entails (or even requires) 'writing back to the centre'³²⁴ *Corridor* undoubtedly belongs to a post- (after, beyond, or meta-) postcolonial stage, the slightly different order known as post-independence literature. A literature, I would suggest, which does not have to (nor should) be assessed, theorised, and critiqued in relation to a colonial past, or evaluated and compared against a Euro-American canon.

The lack of reflection in *Corridor* also manifests within each short story as a lack of moral judgment by either narrator or author. Sa'at is matter-of-fact in his writing, each narrator relates his or her tale without necessarily reflecting on causes or consequences, and every protagonist acts without a deep analysis of motivations. As stated earlier, each piece is a succinct, even minimal, view of mundane details. The reader is implicated as voyeur, stealing glances through private windows. And in looking we see ourselves, the ordinariness of our lives, reflected; our preconceived notions exposed, our insecurities revealed, our secret deceptions illuminated. However, any moments of contemplation are imposed by us, as we try to (re)construct the meaning of what we see (read), as we make value judgements, as we examine our relationship to these characters. The narratives are non-confrontational in tone and style, yet they confront us with their very insistence and persistence in presenting truth (or at least, reality) unadorned.

As in Lee's *Peculiar Chris*, the notion of borders arises in Sa'at's stories as well; crossing boundaries, negotiating limits, inhabiting the edges or margins. Lavina Dhingra Shankar declares that "we cannot operate without" names:

Personal names signify individual identity, making one human being distinct from another; in other words, names grant subjecthood; family names signify legal entities as well as lineage, breeding, class status, and often ethnic and national identities.³²⁵

She adds that subordinate peoples, including colonised subjects and marginalised groups

³²⁴ A paraphrase of Thieme's "writing back to the canon," based on the concept popularised by Salman Rushdie in his article entitled "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance," *The Times* (3 July 1982). John Thieme, *Post-Colonial Con-Texts: Writing Back to the Canon* (London: Continuum, 2001).

³²⁵ Lavina Dhingra Shankar, "The Limits of (South Asian) Names and Labels: Postcolonial or Asian American?" in *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America*, Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth, eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 51.

“have always been nameless [and] faceless.”³²⁶ Dhingra Shankar then goes on to expose the complex power relations involved in naming others and oneself. While this is true of the essentialising project Said describes as Orientalism, or the endeavours justifying imperial expansion, it is not the purpose or motivation in Sa’at’s decision not to name various characters, including some of his protagonists. Referring to Derrida’s work, Riki Wilchins asserts that to name is to bring into existence: if there is no name for something it must not exist, it cannot be discussed or analysed. Describing what *is*, also implies what it is *not*, thus description becomes an act of exclusion and erasure.³²⁷ According to this formulation, in an odd, paradoxical way, speaking silences the Other.

In Sa’at’s stories, however, the lack of personal names does not silence, but rather allows the Othered to speak more clearly. As Dhingra Shankar points out, names can signify ethnic identities as well as class status. Thus, anonymity can have the effect of eliding a character’s ethnicity, suggesting the freedom to cross social and cultural borders. This is a deliberate strategy so the reader will not be distracted by preconceived notions based on cultural typecasting but focus, rather, on the situations and emotions described. It is a way of pointing out that all people can fail or succeed, feel pain or joy, seek love and acceptance, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, or sexuality. Chelva Kanaganayakam posits that intentionally keeping characters unnamed “is a comment about survival, about boundaries.”³²⁸ Survival and boundaries are recurring themes in the fiction from Singapore examined in this chapter.

Salim’s Project

In the introduction I suggested that an island’s shoreline delineates its territorial land borders. However, in “Project,” the first story in this collection, the beach functions as a different kind of margin or boundary, a liminal space beyond which lie possibilities Salim cannot conceive of or allow himself to imagine (C12, 1-6). There is nothing so specific or overt in the narrative itself, but small details, such as the name of the beach, or a man’s gold

³²⁶ Shankar, 51.

³²⁷ Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2004), 38-40.

³²⁸ Kanaganayakam, “Hunting the Minotaur,” 78. See also, Chelva Kanaganayakam, *Configurations of Exile: South Asian Writers and their World* (Toronto: Tsar, 1995).

necklace, seem less than randomly placed within the text. Whether these function as discrete metonymy, 'codes' for the uninitiated non-Singaporean reader (like *Maurice* in Lee), or whether they can be understood as symbols recognised and accepted by a local audience is not as important as their actual presence.

The main character, Salim, is a student. He and his friends are gathered at McDonald's trying to work on a project for their History class. In the restaurant bathroom he notices the various graffiti messages on the walls, one of which reads, "Free Fuck and Suck. Call Adrian" (C12, 2). Salim's reaction is neither one of repulsion nor titillation. He is apparently unaware of the implications of the written offer and thinks of its author as pathetic: "[He] needed to get a life.... [He] needed to meet more girls" (C12, 2). The ensuing incident, however, belies Salim's casual dismissal and naïveté.

As Salim preens and primps in front of the mirror, a younger boy walks into the bathroom. The boy stands in front of the door, barring Salim's exit. "You stay here with me.... You wait for me," says the boy (C12, 3). There is a tone of underlying fear in Salim's initial attempt to ignore the boy and his deliberate refusal to look at or acknowledge him. In addition, the boy's request is ambiguous – why does he ask Salim to wait for him? Salim himself is both uncertain and apprehensive. He declines the boy's request, but the boy keeps repeating his appeal, increasingly impatient and pleading. The boy unzips his shorts and Salim can see his underwear. He is afraid to see the boy's penis, which he assumes will be uncircumcised, and notices that the boy smells of sweat. Why does the prospect of seeing foreskin frighten Salim? It is possible that the combination of sweat and foreskin indicates the boy is unclean in a ritual sense, for Salim is a Malay Muslim and the boy is a non-Muslim Chinese. But it is difficult to escape the suggestion that there is more than ritual impurity involved or implied here. Coming so soon after the 'dirty' offer on the wall, the boy's presence can be seen as its embodiment, a 'word made flesh' in very real and immediate terms. For Salim, the boy's request is dangerously close to an enactment of the cubicle wall offer. The notion expressed by the writing on the wall threatens to cross the barrier between playful or easily ignored obscenity and very real, physical action. And at this point, for all Salim or the reader knows, the boy could be Adrian. He pushes the boy aside roughly – it is an act of desperation as well

as violence – and the boy wets his pants.

This threat of a boundary breach triggers a memory of being rescued from near-drowning by a man wearing a gold chain. Singapore is not exactly known for its beaches, so the very specific naming of the location as East Coast Beach is significant. Besides the artificially-created strands of imported sand on the chiefly tourist-themed Sentosa island, the shoreline stretching between Singapore's CBD and Changi airport at East Coast Park is the only 'real' beach on the main island. Not only a favourite with locals and tourists, several sections of the beach are also popular 'gay' cruising areas, particularly after dark and on weekends. At the eastern section of this sprawling shore there is a wooded area, offering some protection from prying eyes and secret police. Some men even risk lying about in the nude to signal their availability.³²⁹ There is a good chance that the absence of joggers, strollers, picnicking families, and frolicking schoolchildren, especially during daylight hours, indicates Salim was in such a place. What was he doing there? Salim remembers that his rescuer had pumped his chest and that the man's face wore the expression of one praying. In all likelihood, the man *was* invoking divine assistance to ensure Salim would not die. But Salim's recollection highlights that look of concentration as though he were the one being prayed to, worshiped.

Though the text does not provide clear answers, the bathroom incident and the memory of the beach episode prompt Salim to ask his friend Wei Cheng, "Do you think I'm a bad person?" (C12, 5). Salim does not explain what brought on this question, nor does he reflect on the reasons for his actions. He does not analyse the feelings, fears, or motivations that led to the development of the toilet encounter, nor those involved in seeking comfort from his friend. He does not analyse why the man's necklace made an impression, or why that should be a significant detail.³³⁰ Furthermore, he neither examines why the incident in the bathroom triggers his memory of the rescue, nor does he dwell on or explain the "tightening in his

³²⁹ Richard Ammon mentions an area of East Coast Beach referred to as the 'gay' dunes. Richard Ammon, "The New 'Gay' Singapore '02," *GlobalGayz* (March 2002). Available online at <http://www.globalgayz.com/g-sing02.html>. 14 April 2004.

³³⁰ The man's gold necklace can be interpreted as a link to gay slang. As it glistens against his skin, it evokes the 'pearl necklace' one partner ejaculates onto another's face, neck, or upper torso. (Jokes along these lines made the rounds after Australian swimmer Ian Thorpe appeared wearing a pearl on a choker, in an advertisement for a jeweller.)

loins" (*C12*, 6). Despite Wei Cheng's reassurances, Salim desperately tries to call him again, but this time there is no answer. His sense of urgency parallels that of the young boy in the bathroom; his plaintive appeals to the unanswered telephone, "It's me.... Please," (*C12*, 6) echo the boy's pleas, and correspond to the man's silent entreaties.

What is one to make of this story? The boy could be seen as a mirroring Salim, casting back a reflection that makes Salim uncomfortable. Like the boy, who turns out to be intellectually challenged, Salim is impaired, impeded by some deficiency. Clues to what this defect might be are scattered throughout the brief narrative. Salim (which means 'whole' in Arabic) is afraid of dirtiness, of being 'bad'. In both religious and social terms, sexuality expressed in any way other than within the boundaries of acceptable heterosexual relationships (preferably marriage) is considered bad and unclean. Is Salim 'gay'? There is no way to be certain. However, in light of the question "Do you think I'm a bad person?" one could surmise that he has some reason to doubt his 'goodness.' While the event in the restaurant toilet may be reason enough to question his character, the nature and circumstances of that confrontation make Salim's question much broader in scope. His 'project' is to discover what it means for him to be 'bad' or 'good,' to construct an identity that will complete him.

Only One Pillow

The story entitled "Pillow" is also about boundaries and crossings (*C12*, 33-40). The narrator and protagonist is presumably male, though it is not until two thirds of the way through the narrative that his gender is confirmed, and not until the penultimate paragraph that we learn his name is Simon. At no point in the story is the character's ethnicity mentioned or revealed. If we are to guess, it would be Chinese, merely because of the location of their meeting. This would also be a safe assumption considering that Chinese are in the majority and they often use Western first names (much less common among Indians and Malays).

Simon is an eighteen-year-old boy in a relationship with a fifty-year-old man, who remains nameless. Neither Simon nor the man use Singlish, but this could be more a matter of

education and social class rather than race. Of course, we have even fewer clues about the man than Simon, so for all we know, he could be a Western expatriate, a long- or short-term foreign resident. This, however, is far from certain, even though it would be consistent with the fact that he is single. Although there are single middle-aged men, it is considered very strange and unusual, still not socially acceptable for a Chinese man to be unmarried at such an age. When Simon asks the man why he never married, the man replies, "Some things just don't happen. Some things don't work out like they should" (C12, 35). The imperative 'should' may refer to a belief in the conventional cycle of life and the responsibilities of the individual to work and raise a family as a productive, "good" and "useful" member of society.³³¹ It could also refer to the idea that being different, or being 'gay,' is not part of the natural order. Sons are important for carrying on the family name and perpetuating the ancestral lineage, which cannot be done by women in a masculinist society. William Peterson points out, "In the traditional Chinese context, the greatest shame one could bestow upon ones' [sic] ancestors and parents is failing to continue the family line."³³² As a result of patriarchal Confucian ideology, conventional prejudices against same-sex sexuality, especially intolerance of male-to-male relationships, are profoundly entrenched. Thus, it is an abdication of a man's role if he does not marry and produce his own male heirs. This is made worse if the reason he does not marry is because he prefers other men.

The man is a friend of Simon's father and we are not told when the relationship began – it could have been weeks, months, or even years. Simon had permitted the initial sexual contact to happen possibly out of curiosity and boredom, but allowed the affair to continue out of a mixture of pity and a feeling that he thinks may have been love. Now, however, Simon is tired of the relationship, tired of the man, tired of being the remedy for the hollowness in the man's lonely life. They are in a traditional Chinese teahouse and Simon is

³³¹ Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (often regarded as the father of modern Singapore) used the term "good and useful citizens" in his public response to the somewhat critical *Report on the Ministry of Education* in 1979. He said such citizens, "guided by decent moral precepts," were the ideal in Singapore. Cited in Peck Eng Soo, *Moral Education for Singapore: In Search of a Model*, Occasional Paper no. 18 (Singapore: Institute of Education, 1984), 18. The portion of Lee's speech dealing with morality, included values such as patriotism, filial piety, racial and religious tolerance, as well as personal cleanliness and punctuality.

³³² Peterson, "Queer Stage," 79. See also, Ang Ling-yin Lynn, "The Representations of Women in Suchen Christine Lim's *Gift from the Gods*," in *Interlogue: Studies in Singapore Literature, Volume 1: Fiction*, Kirpal Singh, ed. (Singapore: Ethos Books, 1998), 63-71.

trying to break up with the man. The man keeps pleading and crying, which serves only to further irritate and disgust Simon. They return to the man's house, where Simon intends on gathering things that he has left there during the course of the relationship. Instead, he takes off his clothes and allows the man to have sex with him, as a gesture of farewell, a parting gift. After the man falls asleep Simon thinks of all the friends he has lost because of the relationship.

The man is very aware of his age and appearance, and that, in general, the 'gay' community places a premium on youth and good looks. He dyes his hair, owns an Abdomenizer and a treadmill, yet is afraid Simon will leave him for a young 'stud.' (C12, 36, 37) Perhaps Simon does want to leave him for someone closer to his own age, though there is no indication that he has met that someone thus far. The man refers to his advanced age relative to Simon's at least four times in the narrative, and finally Simon uses this against him. "I'm too young," he retorts (C12, 37). But rather than a statement about the man, this is a comment on Simon. He could just as easily have said, "You're too old." Focusing on his own age makes it clear that Simon is not necessarily thinking about the inequality of their thirty-two-year difference, but on what he is missing out by maintaining this liaison. He is too young to be in a committed relationship, too young to settle into a life of classical music, shared bank accounts, and modern kitchen appliances. He has missed assignment deadlines (the homework mislaid in the man's house), misplaced favourite novels (mixed in with the man's more stodgy self-help collection), and lost track of school friends. But even more important than these, Simon has lost his innocence. The boundaries of age have been violated. Seduced at a young age by a family friend, he feels betrayed, exploited, forced to grow up too soon: "I tried to remember ... how my mother looked when I was four years old.... I had a feeling that if I were to come up for air my face would crack into hundreds of wrinkles" (C12, 40).

The title for this short story comes from a statement the man makes as part of his seduction: "I've got this king size bed ... but you know what? It's got only one pillow" (C12, 37). As the relationship progresses, the man allows Simon to use the pillow at nights. On this final night Simon decides to allow the man to have it, as a gesture of goodwill. Like the sexual act he endures one final time, it is also a farewell. But after the man falls asleep, Simon pulls the

pillow away and buries his face in it, a symbolic attempt at recovering his innocence and asserting his independence.

Up All Night

Like the previous story, "Duel" is also narrated in first person, and just as in that narrative, the protagonist is presumably male, though we are not sure until partway into his account (C12, 55-61). Again, we also have the idea of borders, of living on the periphery, and attempting to break through boundaries. According to Anne Brewster, the shared experience of high-rise living in Singapore constitutes a sense of community in Benedict Anderson's sense of imagined bonds.³³³ A light coming from a bedroom in the apartment block across the way fascinates the narrator. He watches every night but never sees it go out, and begins to fantasise about the occupant of the room. He feels compelled to communicate because of a sense of shared experiences, of similar suffering and the mutual understanding that can bring. Thus, "Duel" may seem like a strange or somewhat inappropriate title for a story in which one person seeks solace from, or solidarity with, another. However, I am reminded of "The Duelling Banjos" and similar pieces of music for other instruments, which are cooperative duets in 'call and response' form.³³⁴ There is give and take, each musician apparently trying to outdo the other, yet also playing together. The overall effect is of a lively, yet beautiful melody. In addition, the entire piece is scripted – each musician knows the part she or he must play. In this story, the narrator attempts to script the interaction through fictional encounters. The bedroom lights duelling into the night across the street, represent the emotional thrust and parry the narrator craves. Although his calls receive no response, the imagined duet comforts him.

It becomes increasingly clear that there is something different about this young man. He obviously does not work or go to school, but is apparently not disabled or an invalid. He takes long naps during the day and watches TV late into the night. Towards the end of the

³³³ Anne Brewster, *Literary Formations: Post-colonialism, Nationalism, Globalism* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), 105.

³³⁴ The song was popularised by the film *Deliverance* (1972), in which it appeared as a kind of contest between a guitar-playing man from the city and a deformed mountain boy.

story we realise that he is sick. He suggests his "condition" is serious, and jokes about the medications he must take, which he refers to as being "on drugs" (C12, 56). He also indicates that "one of the complications" of his ailment which he fears is the possibility of "going blind" (C12, 61). In a dream, he tells his mother, "I now shave twice a day because I don't like to look skinny and unshaven like they do in the movies" (C12, 60). She instructs him to visualise whatever is causing his illness, to sketch it as a way of drawing a boundary around it. "The virus is a small thing," she soothes as she helps him hold onto the pencil (C12, 60). All these clues are small hints that the young man may be suffering with AIDS.

Whether or not he is 'gay' is even less clear. In most of his fantasies the person in the bedroom across the street is a man. Although he sometimes likes to think of this "man" as his "companion" who does not wear a shirt to bed, these are not romantic or erotic scenarios. He feels compelled to meet this person and goes to the flat one afternoon. However, no one is home and he leaves a scribbled note saying, "I know exactly how you feel" (C12, 60). He hopes that the occupant of the bedroom is someone with whom he shares something in common: "Someone who stayed awake for the same reasons I did, who feared excursions into reminiscence because he was aware how riddled with holes his body was" (C12, 59). After waking up from a dream of his dead mother, the young man notices that the light is still on in the room opposite. It no longer matters to him whether the light goes out or when it will be turned off, for he has finally accepted his own mortality.

Chewing Gum and Dancing

Language can form a barrier between classes, ethnicities, and even generations. As indicated previously, in Singapore language is an area fraught with conflicting desires and anxieties. Although the indigenous Malay dialect is considered the primary language, it is only spoken by a few people, and is not a requirement in schools except for children of Malay descent. Mandarin Chinese is imposed on everyone of 'Chinese' background, and Tamil is perceived

as the language of the 'Indians,' despite the ethnic, cultural, or language group from which they trace their heritage within those vast regions. English is the official language because it is considered neutral.

Issues surrounding language use are central in "Umbrella," the tenth piece in this collection. The narrator's father usually speaks to him in Malay, but when he reprimands Hafiz for getting bad grades the father switches to English. Hafiz surmises "it's because [father's] supervisor scolds him in English, and he treats scoldings like those with absolute seriousness" (C12, 95). However, that seriousness is undermined by the father's imperfect grasp of the language, his use of Singlish and direct translation from Malay. Hafiz's mother does not speak much English, and this embarrasses her when dealing with strangers who do not speak Malay. In this family, just as in their society at large, there is a hierarchy of languages in which English is deemed more important, serious, prestigious. For Hafiz, however, it is not just any English which rates the highest. When he first meets Chris, his new Math tutor, Hafiz tries to impress him by trying to imitate an American accent.

Another boundary explored in this story deals with official proscriptions. One of the pervasive jokes about the extreme nature of legal regulation in Singapore is the prohibition of gum. It is one of the first things friends mention when one is planning a trip to the city-nation, it is the subject of those funny yet clichéd T-shirts for sale to tourists, and it is often mentioned by the foreign media when discussing Singapore's harsh penalties such as public caning or the death sentence.³³⁵ So it is very interesting that this story contains a few incidents involving chewing gum (C12, 96, 100, 101). Anyone who has visited Singapore can attest to the fact that the authorities do not arrest foreigners who bring small amounts of gum into the country. However, there is no consensus about the extent of the ban and the punishment for breaking the law. Manufacture, import, and sale of gum have been forbidden since 1992, and

³³⁵ It is ironic that at least three of the websites which discuss Singapore's legal system are essentially identical. It is difficult to ascertain where the information was initially published or who is plagiarising from whom, but the Expat Singapore organisation is usually fairly reliable and its website contains useful information. See <http://www.expatsingapore.com>. For a personal account by a foreign resident see Terry Gliedt, "Report from Tomorrow, Vol. 11: Singapore – Enter at Your Own Risk," in *Reports from Tomorrow: Letters Home from an Expat, 1998-1999* (24 May 1998). Available online at <http://www.hps.com/~tpg/singapore/vol11.html>. 6 April 2004.

strict littering laws also apply to the disposal of gum. What is less clear is how much gum one can bring for personal use, and whether or not one can “chew it discretely.”³³⁶

What is the significance of these seemingly minor yet jarringly prominent episodes? They do not serve any apparent purpose in propelling the narrative forward. I propose that gum here serves as metonymy for illegal/illicit activity. Its very presence in the story is an act of subversion and defiance. It may be stretching things to say that gum is a coded reference, à la *Maurice*, to alternative or transgressive sexualities. Perhaps its presence is meant to signal that Singaporeans are not all uncritical, conformist, law-abiding citizens. Or maybe it is intended to show that individuals still make their own choices, or choose to ignore unrealistic, excessive, or intrusive legalisms. In any case, Hafiz’s possession of several cartons of gum, his offer to share it with Chris, and Chris’s ruminating on the joys of chewing gum while drinking a cold soft drink, make both characters participants and co-conspirators in illegal activity. By highlighting the ridiculous nature of such a concept, Sa’at may be hinting that other preposterous prohibitions should be questioned. By showing the ordinariness and unremarkability of two people enjoying gum, he is planting seeds of doubt about the restrictive nature of Singapore’s legal system and, by extension, its anti-homosexual legislation.

Like the protagonist in “Duel,” it is not clear whether or not Hafiz (or even Chris) is ‘gay.’ But there is something in the interactions and the tension between Hafiz and his tutor, some undefinable sense that infuses the narrative, a kind of longing on the part of Hafiz, like unrequited love. Hafiz notices that Chris is freshly shaven, and considers him “quite handsome” (C12, 97). When Chris gets a mysterious pager call during the lesson, Hafiz asks if his girlfriend is trying to reach him. “Something like that,” Chris replies (C12, 99). Hafiz asks how long they have been together and Chris says two years, but then evades any other questions about his relationship. One rainy day Chris seems in a particularly bad mood and is frustrated with Hafiz’s lack of progress. When he leaves, Hafiz has a “sinking feeling”

³³⁶ Gliedt, 1998. See also, “Singapore to Partially End Gum Ban,” (Associated Press) in *CNEWS – Weird News* (Canada: 15 March 2004). Available online at <http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/WeirdNews/2004/03/15/383253-ap.html>. 6 April 2004; and “Law and Order in Singapore,” in *Expat Singapore* (12 March 2001). Available online at <http://www.expatsingapore.com/general/law.htm>. 6 April 2004.

(C12, 106). Chris does not return and Hafiz fails his 'O' levels again. "I think about what might have happened if Chris had stuck around with me," Hafiz wonders; "with us," he hastily adds (C12, 106). The only tangible reminder of Chris's presence is the umbrella he left behind.

There are supposedly no 'gay' clubs as such in Singapore, but there are a few which cater mainly to male patrons. In addition, many of the trendiest or most popular nightclubs are considered 'mixed' or 'gay-friendly.' They feature specially-themed nights and/or host parties and other events aimed at a 'gay' clientele (even though they are not necessarily or explicitly advertised as such). One of these is Zouk, the disco Chris talks about with Hafiz, although he does not mention which night of the week he attended. He also does not indicate whether any girls were present, but laughs, "the guys were all crazy" (C12, 104).³³⁷

Zouk's motto, "One world, one music, one tribe, one dance," is evocative of the slogan of the 'gay'-organised "Nation '02" party, "One People. One Nation. One Party."³³⁸ This in itself clearly parodies the theme song for Singapore's National Day, "One People, One Nation, One Singapore."³³⁹ Once again, a rather discrete reference can allude to much more than what is at first apparent. On the one hand, the declaration of 'oneness' by Singapore's ruling faction sounds more like an appeal in the face of ethnic, class, religious, and communal heterogeneity, and belies the actual experiences of people along the edges (like Sa'at who, as a transgressive Malay male, bears the brunt of being doubly minoritised). On the other hand, the 'gay' community's suggestion of 'oneness' is also a demand to be included as part of "One Singapore."

The 'Gay' Divorcé

³³⁷ At the time of writing, a predominantly male, 'gay' crowd gathers at Zouk on Thursdays. However, in 1999, the year *Corridor* was published, 'gay-friendly' events were held on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. "Gay Singapore," in *Dragoncastle's Gay Asia* (1999). Available online at <http://www.members.tripod.com/~dragoncastle/singapore.html>. 15 April 2004.

³³⁸ *Zouk*, (Singapore: 2004). Available online at <http://www.zoukclub.com.sg>. 13 April 2004. Stuart Koe, "Singapore Celebrates Gay Pride," *Fridae.com* (Singapore: 25 June 2002). Available online at http://www.fridae.com/magazine/en20020625_1_1.php. 14 April 2004.

³³⁹ Kean Fan Lim, "Where Love Dares (Not) Speak Its Name: The Expression of Homosexuality in Singapore," *Urban Studies* 41.9 (August 2004): 1776.

Following on from "Umbrella," we can easily imagine that "Disco," the final story in the collection, is set at Zouk (*C12*, 139-154). So let us follow Robert, a recently divorced thirty-five-year-old, into Zouk. Robert is an outsider here; he is not wearing tight clothes or a trendy hair style like everyone else around him. Most of the patrons are younger and more beautiful than he is. He cannot dance and does not like the music. Notwithstanding these impediments, however, Robert thinks he has found where he belongs:

Two men brushed past him, and he caught a whiff of the cologne they were wearing. Or maybe it was perfume, Robert thought wryly. You could never tell in a place like this. But the momentary friction of one of the men's exposed biceps against Robert's shoulder gave him a tingle, and he assured himself that despite the music that roused nothing in him, this was the place for him to be. (*C12*, 144)

Fortified with a glass of tequila, Robert approaches a teenaged boy standing in a group near him. Robert tries to make conversation by talking about the boy's baseball cap. The boy gives him his cap. "You'll look good in it," he tells Robert (*C12*, 146). Robert puts on the cap, then realises that the boy's friends are watching the exchange as if it is a spectacle. He feels embarrassed and a little humiliated. Unable to decipher the boy's enigmatic smile and his motives, Robert leaves the club. He tries to call his ex-wife but ends up talking to the maid because it is after midnight.

As in the novels by Lee and Koh, there seems to be a reluctance to name Robert's sexual orientation. There is a kind of coyness in the initial description of the club where some of the "people" wear eye shadow or carry little bags and others have huge pectorals "like fossilised pillows" (*C12*, 140). The shape and size, the smoothness and softness or hardness of those chests fascinates Robert. He is both frightened and excited by his urges and wonders "if it would be possible to pay someone during the night just to let him touch his chest, to see how it would yield to [his] curious, probing fingers" (*C12*, 141). Although the word 'gay' is never used, it is fairly obvious that this is the grounds for his divorce. Robert imagines this reason as a tumour, "and the only way to heal was to admit to himself that it was there and that if he did not do something about it then it would keep growing" (*C12*, 139). We read that he "knew how late it was to have arrived at such decisions" but that "he decided to tell the truth" (*C12*, 139). His friend "often nagged like a broken recorder that 'closets are for

mothballs” (C12, 141).

At home Robert listens to a late-night love-song dedication show on the radio. He imagines that among the callers making requests is the boy from the disco, who calls in to talk about his cap, and his ex-wife’s maid, who talks about being lonely. He falls asleep and dreams that he is at the beach with an unidentified woman. She wants to get married but demands that he stop wearing the cap. She takes it off and throws it away. “Robert, I like you this way,” she says (C12, 153). He wakes up clutching the cap “unwilling to move [it] ... as if afraid of what might lie underneath” (C12, 154).

The cap functions as a metaphor in several different respects. It is symbolic of Robert’s inability to relate to others, his social awkwardness, especially in relation to men he finds attractive. In addition, the cap stands for Robert’s (homo)sexuality, which he is no longer willing to deny or hide for the sake of a woman or conventional marriage. However, the closing line of the story indicates that he is afraid of exposure, not necessarily the revelation of his sexuality but the exposure of his vulnerabilities, the rawness of his fears and loneliness, his longing for someone to love. Finally, the cap represents the acceptance, affection, and intimacy he craves. It is a precious gift from a cute boy and he is reluctant to part with it. As such it signifies a small glimmer of hope that some day Robert will not be alone, that he will find someone with whom to share his life.

Transgressive Trannie

While the story titled “Bugis” (C12, 109-121) also deals with questions of masculinity and alternative or transgressive expressions of gender/sexuality, it is markedly different from the others discussed here because the narrator is a girl. In addition, a minor, yet also important, character is actually a transvestite. The Malay term used is *pondan*, “which has more sting, which makes one giggle,” as the narrator informs us (C12, 116). The title refers to the notorious street at the centre of Singapore’s former red-light district. Many of the establishments there featured drag shows, and transsexuals worked alongside female prostitutes. The street and its denizens have inspired many fictional treatments, including

Koh Buck Song's *Bugis Street: The Novel* (1994), which was based on *Bugis Street: The Musical* (1994), and the Hong Kong produced film *Bugis Street: The Movie* (1995).

Song's novel includes a transvestite character named Rosie. Although Sa'at's character has no name, we can easily imagine the story as a moment taken from a day in the life of Rosie. The unnamed narrator is hostile towards 'Rosie,' whom she and her friend, Salmah, meet on the train to school. She seems personally offended by 'Rosie's' very existence and continually refers to her/him by the derogatory epithet *pondan*. She justifies her distaste with a mental inventory: "I see him, his fake fingernails, fake wig, fake breasts, fake shaven shins" (C12, 119). The narrator's encounter with the transvestite triggers a sense of discontentment and anger which she believes is directed at disingenuousness and affectations. But rather than confront 'Rosie,' she ends up attacking Salmah and ripping off her *tudung* (Malay version of the hijab) as if "pulling the wig off the pondan's head" (C12, 121).

What is interesting about the minor character of the transvestite is how central (s)he is to the narrative. The story is ostensibly about the friendship between the narrator and Salmah. Their relationship is complicated and somewhat ambiguous because the narrator seems to harbour feelings of attraction towards Salmah. However, not only does Salmah have a boyfriend, but it is someone with whom the narrator has been obsessed. The narrator feels an ambivalent, unfocused jealousy – either because Salmah has snagged the boy she wanted, or because Salmah herself has been taken by a boy – which in the end is misdirected at Salmah. Though the transvestite acts as a catalyst for the narrator's confused emotions, (s)he also presents an alternative to both conventional masculinity as well as acceptable (or accepted) femininity.

According to Khoo Sim Eng and Anthony Guneratne, Bugis Street was "a living contradiction of the strict moral policies promoted by the island's conservative government."³⁴⁰ Although a favourite haunt for people of marginal sexualities, as well as their clients and admirers (or just plain voyeuristic tourists), by the 1980s Bugis Street had

³⁴⁰ Khoo Sim Eng and Anthony R. Guneratne, "A Singaporean Sense of Place: Urban Transformation in Koh Buck Song's *Bugis Street*," in Kirpal Singh, ed., *Interlogue: Studies in Singapore Literature, Volume 1: Fiction* (Singapore: Ethos Books, 1998), 93.

been levelled as part of the Housing and Development Board's urban renewal plan, and by the early 1990s the Tourist Promotion Board re-opened for business the redeveloped and 'restored' strip. Thus, in essence, Bugis Street is metonymic for Singapore; its makeover, commodification, and the nostalgia it evokes, an extended metaphor for the controlled and careful urban planning that has transformed the city-state into a Westernised metropolis.

Eng and Guneratne contend that Bugis Street nostalgia "participates in a discourse that is central to much of Singaporean literature: fond remembrance of a vanishing past combined with a pragmatic realization that change is not only inevitable but desirable."³⁴¹ In Sa'at's narrative, however, Bugis Street acts only as cipher; it is neither visited nor discussed, but rather performs the dual and simultaneous role of representing and being represented by the transvestite. Thus, if we revisit or relocate Eng's and Guneratne's assertion, Sa'at posits gender as mutable and unstable. In the case of the transvestite on the train, change is not only inevitable but desirable. The narrator is the one left grasping at vanishing certainties about selfhood, identity, gender, sexuality, and perhaps, ultimately, about nationality. If the most basic of principles (sex/gender) can be challenged, where does that leave assumptions about nationhood and other types of belonging? Sa'at's transvestite subverts not only notions of gender but also the very nature of Singapore and the stories it chooses to tell (about) itself. In this case, the latter may be the larger transgression.

Running for the Border

At the beginning of the new millennium, Jacintha Stephens declared, "It's not easy being creative in Singapore."³⁴² She cited several young Singaporean artists, including Alfian Sa'at, who still deal with government censorship and restrictions, albeit a little more relaxed than those faced by their predecessors. After nearly four decades of strict controls on free expression aimed at quashing and discouraging dissent in order to build itself up primarily as an economic power, the Singapore government is now looking to the arts as the new

³⁴¹ Eng and Guneratne, 95.

³⁴² Jacintha Stephens, "Anniversary: Pushing Back the Boundaries," *Asia Week* (23 Nov. 2000): ASWK13917789.

frontier for business expansion. In 2002, the Esplanade arts centre opened with great fanfare, amidst hopes to establish Singapore as “the region’s thriving arts hub,” ushering in a new age of creativity and cultural growth.³⁴³ However, artists themselves are ambivalent or unconvinced about the administration’s intentions and commitment to a more liberal social environment which would help foster artistic exploration and expansion. Sa’at worries that “[a]rt is being co-opted by the state.”³⁴⁴ Salil Tripathi states,

Singapore works on a Faustian bargain, which swaps political and artistic freedom for profit... The plan to become a global arts city will come up against Singapore’s firm belief in censorship and distrust of dissidents and artists who challenge the established order.³⁴⁵

One of Sa’at’s concerns is that homosexuality is still illegal and that ‘gay’ expression is still heavily proscribed. While he was allowed to publish *Corridor*, his ‘gay’-themed play *sex.violence.blood.gore* (1999) was censored. The most celebrated case of censorship aimed at a ‘gay’ artist was the banning of Joseph Ng in 1994 from public performance after being charged with public obscenity for his controversial New Year’s Eve show (1993), which protested against Singapore’s repressive anti-homosexuality laws.³⁴⁶ An official declaration was issued prohibiting all unscripted performances because they “pose dangers to public order, security and decency.”³⁴⁷ The Ministries of Home Affairs and of Information and the Arts issued a joint statement that such shows “may be exploited to agitate the audience on volatile social issues, or to propagate the beliefs and messages of deviant social ... groups, or as a means of subversion.”³⁴⁸

This was clearly an attempt by the regime not only to regulate but also to stifle uninhibited artistic expression; and though the decree did not encompass the writing and publication of literature, it is a vivid example of the repressive environment that does not permit the arts to flourish. In the introduction to his inaugural lecture at the University of Malaya (which

³⁴³ Salil Tripathi, “Mandarin Duck: Singapore Hopes to Become a Global Arts Centre,” *New Statesman* (1996) 131.4612 (4 November 2002): 38.

³⁴⁴ Stephens, ASWK13917790.

³⁴⁵ Tripathi, 39.

³⁴⁶ Peterson, “Sexual Minorities,” and “Queer Stage.” See also, Lee, “Chronology of a Controversy,” 1996.

³⁴⁷ *Straits Times* (Singapore, 22 January 1994); Cited in Tripathi, 39, and Lee, “Chronology of a Controversy,” 1996.

³⁴⁸ Cited in Lee, “Chronology of a Controversy,” 1996.

subsequently became the National University of Singapore), poet and academic D.J. Enright, asserted, "Art does not begin in a test-tube, it doesn't take its origin in good sentiments and clean-shaven upstanding young thoughts.... Art is not good manners and proper behaviour."³⁴⁹ Of course, he was roundly condemned by the government of the day, labelled a "beatnik" and "mendicant" in a media statement, and ordered to stay out of "local political issues."³⁵⁰ Enright's cautionary remarks sound prophetically accurate and are relevant even today: "Art will not thrive in any society which is run in the style of a children's nursery, whether the role of nanny is taken by a set of well-read dons or by a government department."³⁵¹ In some ways Singapore, still referred to as a 'nanny-state,' has changed little in the last four or five decades, despite its claims of wanting to foster creativity. No wonder, then, that there is so little in terms of cutting-edge fiction, or that what does get past the censors is substandard or immature in comparison to other literatures. Nevertheless, Koh's and Lee's first novels are an impressive accomplishment, given the circumstances. They have opened the door just a crack, allowing others, such as Sa'at, to push through creative work which would have been unthinkable a generation ago.

Peter Nazareth reminds us that a corridor "connects several rooms ... [it is also] a passageway between two separated parts of a country."³⁵² Sometimes the corridor itself becomes the focal point rather than the areas being connected (as in the commercial corridors already in existence or being developed around many major cities and between urban communities). Sa'at bridges the gap between the external appearance of normalcy in Singapore and the internal struggles of its citizens. In addition, he infuses each narrative with a sense of immediacy and reality that makes the sensitive reader empathise and even identify with every cry for acceptance, every pursuit of happiness, every desire to be free. This is the power of Sa'at's *Corridor*: not only does he bring several disparate or separated notions and experiences together, but he also makes that very connection important, meaningful. For a nation obsessed with economic progress and financial success, a society in official denial about ethnic and social inequities, a culture in turmoil over its identity and authenticity, the

³⁴⁹ D.J. Enright, "Robert Graves and the Decline of Modernism," *Essays in Criticism* 11.3 (July 1961): 322.

³⁵⁰ Cited in the editor's "Historical Note," prefacing Enright's speech.

³⁵¹ Enright, 336.

³⁵² Nazareth, 589.

voices in *Corridor* speak out on behalf of the unheard, the silenced or ignored individuals.

Sa'at has been quite prolific since publishing *Corridor* in 1999, penning several plays in Malay and English (including *Asian Boys Vol. 1* [2000], *Bulan Madu* [2001], *Causeway* [2002], and *Landmarks* [2004]), and another collection of poetry (*A History of Amnesia* [2001]). Yet even he has grown tired of pushing against the bureaucratic brick walls erected by government censors. Far from the ideal society envisaged by its founding father(s), Singapore's dystopian reality stifles freedom of expression through censorship, and oppresses marginal groups that don't fit its template of the "good" and "useful" citizen. The irony is evident in the Raffles City Shopping Centre motto, "If it's indulgent, it's in our city," and former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's statement that "In Singapore, we take our fun seriously."³⁵³ "I didn't know whether to be relieved or scared when I first heard that," Sa'at quips.³⁵⁴

Sa'at has chosen to devote most of his creative energies to the newer electronic medium of blogging. He keeps an active site called *Alfian's Secret Wank Shed* where he regularly posts new stories, poems, and non-fiction. In several online interviews Sa'at has expressed his growing disappointment, frustration, and disillusionment with the political processes in Singapore. In 2002, he exclaimed, "I've made a personal vow to publish one last book in Singapore, and that'll be me calling it quits with this country."³⁵⁵ His sentiments echo those expressed in *Peculiar Chris*. Chris declares, "there's nothing left here" (*PC*, 225). His brand of transgressive masculinity is unwelcome and cannot be expressed in Singapore. Similarly, in *Glass Cathedral*, believing he has no choice but to deny his sexuality in favour of family expectations, James proclaims, "There is no future for us here" (*GC*, 103). "Maybe we can emigrate," Colin suggests (*GC*, 104). They are reminiscent of Arjie, the narrator in *Shyam*

³⁵³ See photo by Dan Lim in Alfian Sa'at, "Censorship 2000-2005," *Alfian's Secret Wank Shed* (Singapore: 19 January 2005). Available online at <http://alfian.diaryland.com/cen2000.html>. 17 November 2005. Oleh Nizam Zakaria, "Interview with Alfian Sa'at," in the Nizam Zakaria Diaryland blog (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: 5 May 2003). Available online at http://www.nizamzakaria.diaryland.com/030505_95.html. 18 November 2004.

³⁵⁴ Nizam Zakaria, 2003.

³⁵⁵ "Recklessness Over Paralysis," *New SInterCom* (Singapore: 12 August 2002). Available online at <http://www.geocities.com/newsintercom/sp/interviews/alfian.htm>. 18 November 2004. Note: the 'old' SInterCom site was shut down in 2001, after pressure by the SBA (Singapore Broadcasting Authority) because it hosted debates on a variety of social and political issues. Sa'at, "Censorship 2000-2005," 2005. The website has moved to <http://www.newsintercom.org>, as of January 2004.

Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, who must traverse the border in order to find freedom.

Like these fictional characters, Sa'at also believes freedom lies beyond the periphery, past the national limits, across the border. At the end of that interview he revealed, "In 5 years' time, I hope to emigrate out of Singapore."³⁵⁶ And where would he like to go? Although he frequently mentions Kuala Lumpur as a possible destination, his first choice doesn't actually exist:

I prefer, actually, to say Malaya.... I don't want to live in either Singapore or Malaysia. I want to colonise an island in between.... On this island, Singapore Malays will live with Malaysian Chinese along with Indians.... It will be a place of refuge, a place for exiles.³⁵⁷

The Malaya I have in mind ... is a theoretical space which exists between the Singapore and Malaysia that we know of today. It is not formed through something concrete as re-merger, and hence has to be vigorously imagined.... It is a Malaya that is a Utopia ... anchored in the future.³⁵⁸

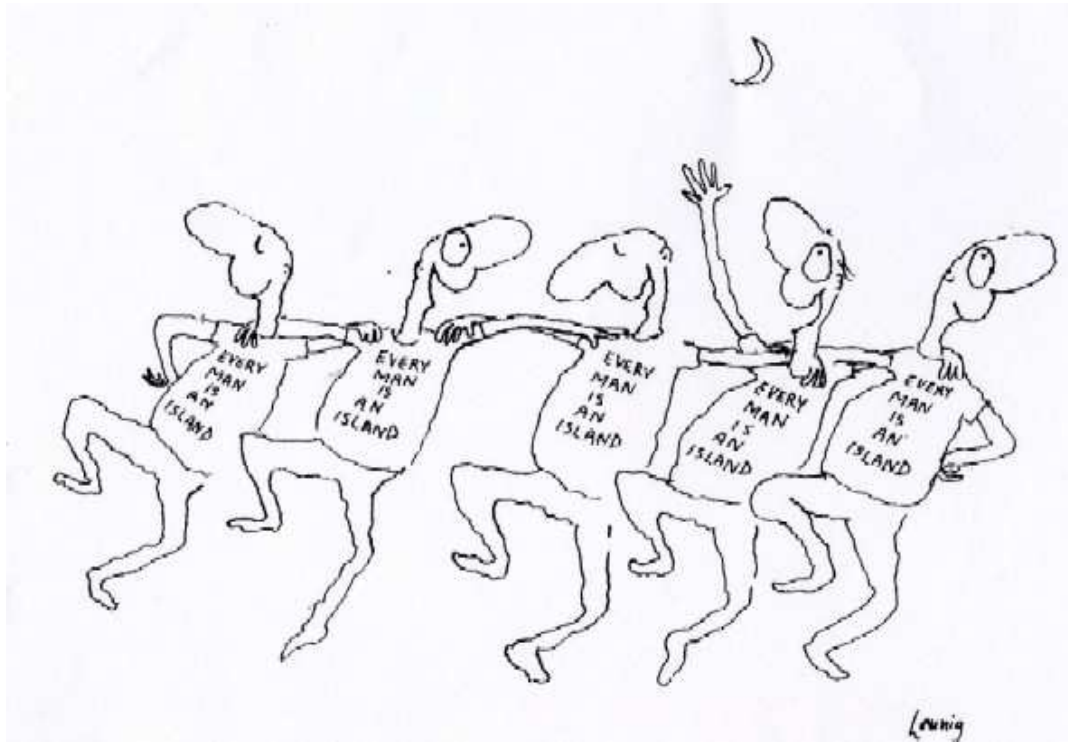
In his desire for an island utopia we hear echoes of Tane Mahuta's and Michael Mahana's dream for a 'new gay tribe' (*The Uncle's Story*). Ihimaera's vision is a bold reclaiming of kinship and ancestral rights. Sa'at's vision encompasses a wider range of marginalised and disenfranchised peoples, regardless of family ties or ethnic origin.

³⁵⁶ *New SInterCom*, 2002.

³⁵⁷ Pang Khoo Teik, "KL is Really Very Seductive," in *Kakiseni* (Malaysia: 28 September 2002). Available online at <http://www.kakiseni.com/articles/people/MD100Q.html>. 18 November 2004.

³⁵⁸ Nizam Zakaria, 2003.

V. DENOUEMENT



Making light of the old aphorism from Donne, cartoonist Michael Leunig irreverently lampoons both the often-quoted sentiment and individualistic assertions to the contrary. While each of the characters in the cartoon wears a T-shirt proclaiming “Every man is an island,” their exuberant dancing with arms around each other’s shoulders suggests the opposite. And so it is with the men in this thesis – both the fictional characters and their authors. I do not presume to know the private details of the authors’ lives, and there is no evidence to the contrary, but chances are (with the exception of Duff and Ihimaera) the seven authors gathered together herein have not all met each other. Needless to say, the fictional characters (again, with the exception of Ihimaera’s) exist in separate spheres, imagined realities that may resemble each other but do not overlap. As such, each author and character discussed in this thesis can be described as an island unto himself.

I purposely, yet somewhat arbitrarily confined my study to the fictions of island men, in part because I am one myself (born and raised in Cyprus), and in part because I believed that despite great differences islands would prove to have something in common. Although my research took me in many diverse and intriguing directions, none bore out my initial hunch. Besides the fact of British colonisation, finding the similarities between Aotearoa/New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and Singapore would be the topic of an entirely different thesis. Of course, there are many interesting facts which link Singapore and Sri Lanka because of their geographical proximity as well as their colonial membership in the network of East India Company trading posts. For example, the names ‘Singapore’ (City of the Lion) and ‘Sinhalese’ (People of the Lion) share the same Sanskrit root. In addition, many Malay and Tamil farmers, plantation workers, merchants, and others settled in, or crossed back and forth between, the two islands. No such links exist with Aotearoa and its Māori inhabitants.³⁵⁹ Nonetheless, most of the characters discussed are unified in their desire to be true to themselves, to be allowed to live and express their alternative masculinities within contexts which usually marginalise them. And every author discussed here performs the similar role of expressing aspects of their own experience, being a voice. Like islands they may be separated by oceans, yet are joined in an archipelago of similar concerns. At the risk of further mixing my several metaphors, I contend that taken together these authors and

³⁵⁹ However, Ashok Mathur manages to imaginatively connect Sri Lanka and New Zealand in his treasure hunt/detective adventure novel, *The Short, Happy Life of Harry Kumar* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 2001).

their fictions help paint a clearer picture and provide new levels of understanding in the vast sea of postcolonial theory and cultural studies.

In writing this thesis it has not been my intention to propose or create a new theory that can accommodate and explain transgressive masculinities in post-independence literatures. It is clear from the texts I have discussed that there are no overarching similarities among the authors and their subjects. Although some general themes may be discerned (such as masking, or border crossing, and, of course, transgression) these cannot be cobbled together to form a general and inclusive model. While this thesis does not set out to argue or prove a point, it provides a scope or space for the study of alternative masculinities and transgressive island identities. I hope that it has successfully highlighted the possibilities for further research and discussion of a topic that has been ignored or inadequately analysed within postcolonial studies.

My *erevna* or methodology in this thesis followed very loose guidelines based on four general stages, none of which was explicitly stated or elaborated. This was a deliberate strategy not only because I had no inclination as to where my research would lead, but also because I did not want to rely entirely on Euro-American theories or modes of study to dictate my direction or writing. First, I attempted to identify the existence of themes involving alternative or transgressive masculinities in the fiction of non-Western male authors from former British colonies. This included ideas such as characters' growing awareness of sexual possibilities and identities beyond heteronormative strictures, development of homosocial or homoerotic friendships and relationships, interaction and conflict with mainstream society and values, and 'coming out.' I approached the narratives as reflections of local social attitudes and/or changes, and, in some cases, I analysed the texts as factors in, or evidence of, growing political consciousness and activism.

Although I struggle with Euro-American structures and beliefs, I cannot and should not be so willing to reject the Western conventions of my upbringing and education, but rather, in true syncretist fashion, I must pick and choose what suits me, accept or adapt what I find applicable, and discard what is irrelevant or impractical. If I can celebrate, or at least

acknowledge, my own hybridity, I should also embrace the possibility of hybrid theoretical perspectives. In fact, my very position within, along, outside, and at the intersections of certain educational, social, political, national, racial, ethical, religious, and sexual boundaries demands that I promote and engage in such critical amalgamations. I also want to retain some of my ambivalence and hesitancy because I do not want to fall into the trap of theoretical orthodoxy, as does much current scholarship.

Perhaps in some small way my writing has crossed genre borders. One of my original aims in undertaking this task, in addition to examining post-independence transgressive masculinities from the view of the (post)colonised, was a desire to transgress certain conventions of personal and public exposition. I wanted to obscure the boundaries between story-telling and critical analysis, observation and theory, to blur the lines between (auto)biography and literary/cultural criticism, between private (inside) and public (outside) discourses. To what degree I have been successful remains to be seen. My desire has been to exercise the imagination (both mine and the reader's) while traversing the works of someone else's imagination.

In some ways, imagination is about what we are not: what we no longer are, what we've never been, what we haven't yet become. Yet, imagination can help us envision these things, these alternate realities, the lives and being of others. As such, imagination leads us or allows us to have empathy, to *imagine* life as the Other. And while imagining is not quite the same as direct, first-hand experience, it does go a long way toward broadening our world, our perspectives. The various authors discussed in this thesis present to us the fruits of their varied and individual imaginations. We, in turn, by reading and thinking about their work, exercise our own imagination. For some of us, these depictions may strike a chord. A few of us may be able to identify with a character or circumstances described in a particular text. For others, they may be a revelation.

Ultimately, the question remains, What has this thesis added to the fields of literary and cultural studies? (Why) Does it matter? First, a study such as this helps us understand the complexities of political, mental, as well as physical issues surrounding (post)colonialism

and the post-independence era. Second, it belongs to a sub-movement within postcolonial studies that seeks to investigate distinct regions and specific topics on a local scale (i.e., daily realities, particular cultural practices, specific events or phenomena), which up until recently may have been treated with broad strokes and generalisations as part of larger geographical or conceptual contexts. At present, even though there is growing discontent about the focus and content (even terminology) of postcolonial studies,³⁶⁰ many important issues and localities are still to be discussed. For example, postcolonial studies often tend to focus on the 'big' zones such as Africa, India (or 'the subcontinent'), and the so-called 'Second World' of settler colonies (i.e., North America, Australia, etc.). By looking at smaller groups within the larger national, ethnic, or gender confines we can get a better picture of individual concerns and realities. Thus, in terms of this project, looking at literature from relatively small islands is a valuable addition to the field. Furthermore, the selection of authors and texts herein allows us to be even more specific in our attention. This thesis engages with the sexually marginalised within the politically marginal. On the global stage no one cares about what happens in the 'little' nations, and yet such events have important ramifications for what happens elsewhere. Of course, 'little' does not always refer to size, but to the political and cultural influence a place exercises in the international arena. Thus, the 'little' island of England has had (and still exercises) a much bigger role than its size would necessarily warrant.

So, what could three very different island nations have in common? Other than a British colonial past, what these places have in common has not been a major concern of my project. While much of postcolonial theory is concerned with the metaphorical gendering of the colonial project, my work looks at the actual sexual history and current realities at the site. Not much has been made of Fanon and Nandy's treatment of gender issues, especially the

³⁶⁰ See, for example, Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London & New York: Verso, 1992) and San Juan, Jr., E., *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); or Edna Aizenberg, "I Walked with a Zombie": The Pleasures and Perils of Postcolonial Hybridity," *World Literature Today* 73.3 (Summer 1999): 461ff and Paul Brians, "'Postcolonial Literature': Problems with the Term," *World Literatures in English* (Washington State University: August 1998). Available online at <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/anglophone/postcolonial.html>. 10 March 2003. See also, Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, eds., *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies* (Durham, North Carolina & London: Duke University Press, 2001), especially Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, "At the Margins of Postcolonial Studies: Part 1," 3-23; Neil Larsen, "DetermiNation: Postcolonialism, Poststructuralism, and the Problem of Ideology," 140-156; and Ella Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial,'" 126-139.

various permutations of masculinity observed in their own contexts. I would argue that these were not issues of great concern to the theorists and critics who followed. For example, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) did much to bring postcolonialism to the fore, however, its authors are (by all accounts) white heterosexuals trained in Western academies. Returning to the metaphor employed in my title and introduction, postcolonial studies has mainly given voice to big names from big places. I, on the other hand, have attempted to provide a space for not-so-big names from not-so-big places to be heard. Many postcolonial analyses and critiques are either written from or involve the point of view of 'outsiders' (i.e., outside the postcolonial site). For example, when it comes to the (post)imperial masculine subject there are studies of Shakespeare, E.M. Forster, and Alan Hollinghurst, among others. Theirs are the stories people tell (themselves) about others, or the Other. While I do not pretend to be an 'insider' of the cultures I study, my thesis is intended as a glimpse into the stories people tell themselves about themselves, especially in relation to masculinities and sexual identities.

I set out merely to present, but hope that this study also has the potential of causing one to think, to analyse one's position in, and relationship to, an Other, to question Euro-American master narratives, received wisdom, and dominant cultural presumptions prevalent in Western(ised) academia. Perhaps as part of this new movement to which I allude above, my work can contribute to the understanding of alternatives which undermine the hegemonic practices supported by entrenched beliefs and stereotypes regarding alterity.

There is great potential for further studies in the fictional depictions of post-independence transgressive masculinities by native or indigenous authors. Terry Goldie's discussion of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (Canada, 1999), by Cree author Tomson Highway, is a step in this direction.³⁶¹ More work can be done on any one of the countries and authors in this thesis. Other works and regions can be dealt with; for example, *Drowning in Fire* (2001), by Craig S. Womack of the Muskogee Creek Nation in the United States and, from India, P. Parivaraj's *Shiva and Arun* (1998). New studies can encompass authors of diasporas or post-colonial immigrants in Euro-American centres. Timothy Mo's *The Redundancy of Courage* (1991), *Spirits in the Dark* (1993) by H. Nigel Thomas from the Caribbean island of St. Vincent, and

³⁶¹ Terry Goldie, *Pink Snow: Homotextual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003), 201-217.

whose song? and other stories (2000) by Thomas Glave, are but a few examples of such texts. Other novels with a strong focus on post-independence transgressive (although not necessarily same-sex oriented) masculinities from an indigenous perspective include *A Worm in the Head* (1987) by Kenyan Charles Kahihu Githae, *Moving Through the Streets* (1994) by Fijian Joseph C. Veramu, and *Benang: From the Heart* (1999) by Indigenous Australian Kim Scott. Film, theatre, and other media and art forms by indigenous artists are also legitimate fields for study. Such analyses, particularly those conducted by non-Anglo-American or European scholars, would be of great importance not only in promoting regional or marginal voices but also fostering an appreciation for the heterogeneity within Anglophone cultural studies, as well as increasing understanding of the complexities of post-independence identities and the residue of colonialism in the particulars of individual sites.

And now I am faced with the difficult task of bringing this thesis to a close. Mathur writes, "This might as well be the end of the story;"³⁶² but like the convict/writer in Cervantes' tale I muse, "How can it be finished ... if my life isn't?"³⁶³ I have invested so much of my time in this undertaking, and can foresee much more devoted to this topic. Thus, the theoretical predicament of writing a thesis exists in the implied conclusion which comes with the inscription of the final words. And so I conclude by performing the "deceptively simple gesture of [typing] 'The End'."³⁶⁴

³⁶² Ashok Mathur, *The Short, Happy Life of Harry Kumar* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 2001), 223.

³⁶³ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Adventures of Don Quixote* [1605-1615], J.M. Cohen, trans. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1950), 177.

³⁶⁴ This paragraph is indebted to Sara Suleri, "Criticism and Its Alterity," in *Borders, Boundaries, and Frames: Essays in Cultural Criticism and Cultural Studies*, Mae G. Henderson, ed. (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), 172.

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