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A CREATURE MOST UNFREE :
CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHANGE IN MILTON'S SATAN

by

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Change and freedom are ideas central to the theme of *Paradise Lost*. They are treated most clearly in the tale of man's fall and loss of paradise and serve to define an 'anthropological' core for the poem. Determinative value is ascribed to Adam's actions by tradition as well as by Milton's epic (unlike the actions of both Eve and Satan), in that it is what he does that defines the status of humankind in general. But our standing of Adam's predicament in the poem is formed in the context of other kinds of activity, divine, angelic, diabolic and feminine. Of the persons of *Paradise Lost* it is Satan and Eve who raise the question of freedom in the most radical fashion. In the myth that the poem transcribes, their influence on the course of events is undeniable; by a curious logic they traditionally absorb much of the responsibility for the fall, while remaining marginal to the concerns of Christian ideology. Equally their position in traditional thought is somewhat shadowy, more a matter of reputation than of hard facts. In *Paradise Lost*, we find that Eve is given a greater complexity of motivation than Adam. She surprises us, as she surprises Adam.

It is Satan, though, who has challenged critical perceptions most strongly. One is aware of the way he has served to advertise the cultural preoccupations of succeeding generations. Coleridge compared Satan to Napoleon[1]: the Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Datta (1824-73), writing a 'Satanic' epic on the myth of Rama and Ravana, thought that Milton was 'Satan himself'[2]. Christian readers have tried

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to do away with his emotional appeal by making him conform to his unilateral role as the adversary of God. It may be a more worthwhile project to try and see why Satan should be so much of a critical problem rather than trying to say what he is like. Satan's importance in the Christian tradition is primarily related to the unvarying position he inhabits in it.

> Who first tempted them to that foul revolt?
> the infernal serpent   (I.33-34)

There is surprisingly little about Satan in the Bible. The early books of the Old Testament do not mention him at all, and it is difficult to see the few references to him in the later books (I Chronicles, Job, Zechariah, Psalms) as conveying the same sort of meaning. His identification with the transformed Lucifer of Isaiah 14.12 is on the basis of supposed allusions in Luke 10.18 and Revelations 9.1-11. The name in Isaiah, however, has been explained as a reference to astral myth[3]. Mention of Satan is far more plentiful in the New Testament[4]. In the Catholic church the identification of Satan as a fallen angel is a matter of faith, following a resolution adopted at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215)[5]. It is the Christian imagination which assigns Satan a central place in the story of the Fall. He is conceived of as being real (i.e., personal) and symbolic (i.e., unidimensional) at the same time. John refers to him as the 'prince of the world' (12.31, 14.30, 16.11). he is variously identified as the adversary of God, the tempter of mankind and the instigator of discontent in the human psyche, and he stands for a force that is wholly negative. One is strongly reminded of Bertrand Russell's elegant metaphysical fancy of conceiving of the devil as a void[6].

The complexity of Milton's Satan obviously exceeds that of traditional thought, but it is important to understand the manner of his treatment. First of all, Milton satisfies the requirements of plot by

inventing new fictional situations, such as the episode of Sin and Death, and generally by giving consistency and fullness to Satan's story, from the rebellion in heaven to his transformation into a serpent. Augustine speaks of the fall of the angels as a parallel to man's fall[7], but Milton invests this parallel with powerful dramatic logic. But even apart from the need to give completeness to the narrative about Satan, Milton finds it necessary to extend his aetiological quest to Satan as well. He thus invents a 'character' for Satan, linking actions to psychological motivation. But Milton has also to take the traditional position of the figure of Satan: an identification with an absolute and unchanging notion of evil has to be maintained in some way, and *Paradise Lost* incorporates a narrative strategy which allows this ambivalence to exist in the poem.

At the simplest level, a distinction is made between what Satan is and what he appears to be, between essence and appearance. Milton turns to the most basic contradition recognized in western philosophy: if there was no difference between appearance and reality, wrote Marx, there would be no need for science[8].

The perception of a divided viewpoint is in itself hardly new; Coleridge saw in the presentation of Satan the contrast between self-love and self-denial.[9] Empson recognized this doubleness when he rejected the suggestion that the problem of Satan was merely that of a 'complex personality': rather, he said, what one had to contend with was 'one plain character superimposed on another quite separate from it'. Commenting on Satan's soliloquy after his first sight of Adam and Eve (IV.358ff.), Empson points out that there are two different voices speaking here: one has the 'delicious softness of the tormentor' as he contemplates Adam and Eve's destruction, while the other has 'the ruined generosity' equally characteristic of the speaker. For Empson, too, the contradictions emerge from the problematic character of myth. But whereas Empson could use such a perception to buttress his theory

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about the 'dramatic failure of character'[10], I would see Satan's ambivalence as resulting from a highly conscious effort of the poet.

That such a distinction should at all exist in Satan is significant, for it serves to characterise the doubleness of Satan's self. The clearest contrast to this in the poem is God, who is, most perfectly what he says. Satan is thus a binary construct, the product of two distinct and opposed narrative strategies. He provides his own account of his deeds and motives in his speeches. The relationship of this view with that of the epic narrator inherently, is one of conflict and not congruity. What we call the character of Satan, the density of his motivation, the strong suggestion of internal life, may be in great measure attributed to this double strategy. Satan's speeches are expansive and heroic. He presents his own version of events, speaks of success and failure, war and strategy. He aligns himself with forms of heroism that are easily recognizable because they are traditionally sanctioned. It is easy to see how this double perspective goes a great way in creating a sense of freedom for Satan. He feels repentant (IV. 79-80), experiences pity (IV. 373-75), he cries (I. 619-21). Or he thinks that he does: in most cases the epic narrator is quick to discount such feelings as mere hypocrisy, or confirmation of inner depravity. The narrative presents two distinct points of view about Satan, the second attempting to erase the first. The effect is to split the narrative about Satan, to generate internal pressure. There is no denying that Satan exerts a powerful attraction on the reader. It is also true that the epic narrator speaks about Satan from an unvaryingly negative standpoint. There is no point in arguing which is correct, what the real 'originary' Satan is like, for both approaches to him are textually valid. Of course this is only part of the narrative complexity of Satan: there are also the similes, the allusions, the startling parallels that the narrative momentarily uncovers. Then again, the narrator's comment may cause us to look back at Satan's words, to look beneath the veil of seeming, to discover that Satan's professions of fortitude conceal a lack of logical thought.

The speeches may be shown to be internally disrupted and therefore revelatory of his 'true' nature. Above all the whole endeavour may reveal disturbing ambivalences which obscure the simple distinction which we are trying to make. Nevertheless, the double perspective on Satan may help to explain the variety of critical responses to him.

Critics have, however, often failed to see the force of this doubleness in narrative strategy. A.J.A. Waldock's strictures on Milton for the incongruity between Satan's sentiments in I. 84-124 and the following narrative comment is a case in point.

> So spake the apostate angel, though in pain,
> Vaunting aloud, but racked with deep despair

(I.125-26)

Waldock is troubled by the lack of despair in Satan's words[11]. But clearly it is the incongruity that Milton is drawing attention to. The epic narrator's comment is a new narrative signal, a statement about Satan from a different standpoint. Whether the strategy fully convinces or satisfies one is a matter of opinion, but there is no doubt that Milton has evolved a method combining Satan's attractiveness and persuasiveness, vital qualities of his fictive character, with a hard moral viewpoint. This view derives powerful support from Stanley Fish's brilliant reading from the standpoint of reader response theory. Our reading of *Paradise Lost*, Fish suggests, proceeds between the poles of attraction and repulsion: we are drawn by Satan's rhetoric into an acceptance of his view of things until the narrator jolts us out of this compliance[12]. But whereas Fish emphasizes the failure of the reader to resist Satan's rhetoric, the point that this paper seeks to make is about Satan's freedom. The separation of narrative comment from the body of the speech also liberates it and makes its operation independent. The style of narrative guarantees Satan a freedom that is

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entirely alien to the traditional conception of his character.

We shall try to examine some aspects of Satan's actions and motives as they are presented in the poem primarily with a view towards understanding the nature and extent of his freedom. Satan's rebellion, we remember, was independently thought of. He even claims a claim of self origination (V. 853-61). It is interesting that Milton cannot conceive of the unfallen Satan at all and the description of his earliest deeds begins with his sense of discontent and grievance. Clearly the grounds of his disaffection go every deep, for he speaks slightingly of his subjection to God as well:

> prostration vile,
> Too much to one, but double now endured

> (782-83)

In the exchange with Abdiel he asserts self-sufficiency, preferring to believe that since he has no knowledge of the state of non-being he can deny it altogether: he is 'self-begot, self-raised' (860). Abdiel's defiance provides an early example of ideologically correct choice, the significance of which has important implications in the poem.

The most important thing that must have happened to Satan at this time is of course described much earlier in the epic. Sin speaks of her birth 'at the assembly, and in sight / Of all the seraphim' (II. 749--50) The episode of Sin and Death must be regarded as being the most mysterious in the poem, stoutly resisting attempts to explain it away as a coherent part of the poem's rational structure. On the contrary it invites us to see irrationality too as being part of the mental universe of *Paradise Lost*. Seen in the context of the poem's valorization of reason, the treatment of the irrational seems especially interesting. Reason and unreason are as much a part of the poem's

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binary frame as light and darkness or essence and appearance. In *Areopagitica* reason is the divine image; in *Paradise Lost* reason is 'twin-born' with liberty and identified with virtue (XII. 83-98). The rational theme of the poem identifies Satan with an extreme form of irrational. In the present epiosde, however, the forces of the irrational seem to defy the attempt to assign them a specific place and function. The horrific details of the appearance of Sin and Death, the violence of Satan's encounter with the latter, even the gruesome domesticity of Sin's attempt to mediate affect us deeply. The themes and motifs of the poem here in a state of fluid turbulence. The narrative attempts to deal with Sin and Death in Book X by showing that they are really instruments of divine vengeance. God calls them his 'hell-hounds' (X.630) and also promises their final defeat at the end of time. Sin and Death, Satan's progeny, are finally made part of God's universe, playing roles that are providentially determined.

The assertion does little to remove from our minds the obdurate power of these figures or the terror that they inspire. They remain to the end inalienably part of Satan's world and at the same time an extension of himself. In a special way they testify to his freedom, his independent creativity. It may be right to say that this freedom is located in the free play of irrational forces in Satan's mind, a process which, the narrative suggests, makes him unpredictable and partly unknowable. Milton's double strategy of narrative presentation in Satan's case is most clearly evident in the contrast between the way he sees himself, and the way the epic narrator sees him. But the contrast does not end her. It extends deeper into the work, operating for instance between the moral rigidity of Satan's role, of which sin, death and discord are natural extensions, and the dark revelations of his mind in which these terrifying monsters are bred. Our first approach to Satan's freedom was through the free access to our sympathies that the narrative standpoint allows him. The second we find is in the depth and unpredictability of his mental processes.

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The most frightening recognition that we have in this episode is that Satan has entirely forgotten about his earlier relationship with Sin. The failure of memory is hardly casual, for it draws attention to a common feature of his style of speaking. Satan's practice of revising the premisses of his arguments in the middle of speeches has often been presented as proof of his deceptive nature. In the first speech in Book I he starts off by admitting God's power:

> so much the stronger proved
> He with his thunder   (I. 92-93)

But later he is able to convince himself that God was afraid of him (113) and that he shook God's throne in 'dubious battle' (104-5). The other version of events, which is given by Raphael, divine action is described as being decisive and unilateral. The Son drives the rebels away 'as a herd/ Of goats or timorous flock together thronged' (VI. 856-57). This narrative is clearly authorially sanctioned, but it may be argued that the latter does not automatically negate the former here either. I think it is fruitless to argue over the point whether we should believe Satan or not; for whatever we say his self-glorifying accounts of the past remain a textual reality. I would like to suggest, however, that the discrepancies between versions of past events raises an important question regarding Satan's memory. We may say, in general terms, that the past has little importance for him. It may be interpreted in different ways, or ignored altogether. He fails to learn from experience, unlike Adam and Eve. But the complete lapse of memory with regard to his relationship with Sin afford deeper insight into his nature. All rational processes depend on memory and are guaranteed and validated by our apprehension of facts. Satan's forgetfulness must be seen as one of the ways in which his mental processes are at fault. Milton powerfully suggests in IV. 24-26 that Satan has no future, only the certainty of further deterioration. It may also be said that the past is only intermittently valid for him: the sense of a former happiness,

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now lost, is often conveyed, but Milton's unwillingness to describe Satan's primal happy state in specific terms places it beyond the margins of the text. It is only a point of departure; its lessons fail to affect present actions.

This awareness helps us to understand better Satan's 'failure' to change himself. It may be thought that the very idea of positive change is absurd, for Satan cannot change and still remain himself. What we have tried to demarcate is a space in the narrative in which the character stands and acts. It need hardly be said how tenuous and critical this space is, how constricted, in the Christian story of fall. It is the harness of the fiction, John Carey points out, that finally prevents him from changing[13]. Yet Satan dreams of change. In his long speech in Book IV (32ff) he appears to argue into a position out of which there is only one road, and that leads back to God:

O then at last relent (IV. 79)

One can say, of course, that Satan's failure to change himself confirms his insincerity: that his words are mere seeming, his speculation about repentance is hypocritical. But it cannot be denied that Satan claims a measure of freedom here, and his words are all the more persuasive for that he does not - or can not - change. A brief look at Satan's arguments in this speech helps us to formulate this problem more clearly.

The search starts with an address to the sun, but it quickly turns into a soliloquy. The urgency of Satan's thoughts is underscored by the way in which he interrogates and apostrophizes himself. He tries to recount to himself the cause of his rebellion. Initially there are no rhetorical subterfuges. He ascribes his rebellion to 'pride and ambition' (40). He is aware of his own ingratitude and speaks about God as 'heaven's matchless king' (41) with a humility that we have not

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seen before. He admits here (thought he denies it in V. 860-63) that God created him in 'bright eminence', and treated him fairly. It is interesting to note that he does not even hold the advancement of the Son against God. The absence of this common charge is surprising, even though one may detect a covert allusion to it in the address to the sun[14]. He also admits that the easiest and most natural response to God's favours would have been praise and gratitude on his part. Satan's first attempt at self-justification is to say that it was high station which prompted him to look higher. Having received earnest of success, he aspired for more, thinking that rebellion would set him free from God and from him the burden of gratitude. But this does not convince him at all. To acknowledge a debt of gratitude, he says echoing Cicero, is to repay it[15]. He again arraigns his high state in heaven, thinking that a lesser rank would have protected him from temptation. But this too he finds unconvincing, as rank would not have affected his moral standing. Lesser angels joined his rebellion as he might have followed another's standard. On the other hand, many angels who were as great as him withstood temptation. The failure to find satisfactory reasons for his rebellion drives Satan deeper into confusion. Having been forced to concede that he had the same measure of free will and power to withstand temptation, he first holds God's love guilty for his suffering and then blames himself.

This bald paraphrase of one of the most dramatic passages of the poem is not without point. Satan moves from angry resentment to a rational examination of his grievances. Clearly this is not the 'irrational' Satan whom we have discussed earlier, but a far more rational being, capable of rational self-examination and self-criticism and of resisting the impulse to justify himself. He condemns himself no less clearly than the epic narrator. Carey points out that it is difficult to think of Satan as a damned creature here[16]. He powerfully describes his state of damnation as a constant worsening of condition, a limitless descent which is the negative counterpart of the bounded and

definite process of moral transformation that is presented through Adam. Satan reveals the choice that lies before him:

> is there no place
> Left for repentance, none for repentance left
> (79-80)

Does Satan really repent? We may like to think that he does, or that even to conceive of the possibility is a step towards it. However, this may not be authorially supported: as Milton bleakly notes in *Christian Doctrine* the unregenerate often show signs of penitence but this is of no consequence[17]. But the force of the speech is not of theological proof but of emotional conviction. It is backed by an intense process of rational self-examination. Satan does not, we note, say that he can repent; the first formulation is interrogative, the second at line 93 is hypothetical.

> But say I could repent

It is wholly inadequate to say that Satan condemns himself further by not repenting. It might be more worthwhile pointing out that in a fiction where Satan cannot change in the slightest, Milton is able to impart to the question of this repentance a high degree of emotional intensity. Satan has thus to reject his own rational processes in order for the poem to continue. Carey sees him as the victim of an irrational fictional logic which requires him to persevere in a path that he knows to be futile[18].

Satan goes to ascribe his failure to change to his sense of shame. Shame can be called a form of critical self-consciousness which stems (as Satan himself confesses) from an overvaluing of the public self (82-86). Adam and Eve feel shame after the fall and try to hide their nakedness (IX 1094, 1095-98, but foretold in IV. 312-18).

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Northrop Frye comments that shame is the emotional counterpart of pride, the characteristic quality of the fallen state[19]. Having first provided a set of rational motives for Satan, Milton has now to devise reasons for not taking the rational path. Adopting E.R. Dodds' celebrated distinction between shame and guilt[20], we may say that in Satan's case the awareness of guilt is expunged by a strong 'dread of shame'. Adam, on the other hand, first feels shame, but learns to accept his own guilt by rationalizing his misfortune and seeing it as the consequence of his own violation of divine law. Satan is finally able to shift the responsibility of his sufferings on to God by saying that if he did repent, he would fall again and receive worse punishment. The severity of this hypothetical 'double smart' becomes proof of a divine conspiracy against him. Satan resumes his combative and hostile stance towards God. The space that Satan creates for himself is largely through hypothesis and conjecture. He imagines alternatives that remain unacted upon, and his moral speculations remain unfulfilled. Grammatically, this is reflected by the preponderance of verbs in the subjunctive in lines 93-102 (could repeat ... could obtain, 93; would ... recall, 95; would recant, 96; would ... lead, 100; should ... purchase, 101).

Satan's claim of self-origination, which Kenneth Gross calls his 'most intriguing lie'[21], typically involves the question of consciousness. One can assume that what he says is directly opposed to what the authorial discourse establishes; indeed it contradicts his own words in Book IV ('whom he created what I was/ In that bright eminence', 43-44). Even when one accepts it as a polemical exercise in the angelic debate, two points seem interesting from our present point of view. The first is that it involves a question about the range of memory; the other that in the sense that Satan *is* evil he is evidently self-made. Gross is right in pointing out that Satan is not enough of a solipsist rather than too much of one[22]. That is especially clear when we consider his sift of perspective in his speech in Book IV, where he

moves from a clear perception of his responsibility to a reluctant but inevitable confession of self-esteem. Shame, unlike guilt, involves a strong valorization of selfhood and resists ethical rationalization. Satan's claim of self-origination cannot be separated from his incessant self-making, and is ultimately part of the poem's general discourse on self-hood. It also draws attention to fragmentary and paradoxical character of Satan's 'memory'. It is in keeping with his general attitude towards past events that this claim about origins must be seen.

The description of the war in heaven raises issues about angelic nature in general, irrespective of moral nature. The pervasiveness of angelic presence in the poem often goes unnoticed. Angels, good or bad, figure in every one of the books of the epic and are as numerous as the principal actors are limited. They are also visualized in a number of roles: most importantly as tempter and adversary, but also as teachers, soldiers, messengers, guards and musicians. In action, the angels often combine violent energy with striking ineffectiveness. The fallen angels may in fact be slightly better off in this regard, because though they take recourse to guile and deceit they appear to be far more active and purposeful than their unfallen counterparts. Satan's escape from hell, his journey through the universe, his entry into paradise and the temptation show him succeeding in various projects, which lead us to question the efficacy of the good angels. Ultimately, of course, there is the absolutist argument of divine permission. As the myth requires Satan to tempt Eve, it is also necessary to see Satan, Sin and Death as instruments of divine will. But such rationalization cannaot fully exonerate the good angels from the charge of ineffectiveness. They are unable to prevent Satan's entry into the garden - or even his re-entry after they are warned and prepared. What one has to take into account is Milton's insistence that differences in moral nature do not extend to physical ability. This creates interesting situations both in the heavenly war and in the confrontation between Satan and Gabriel (Book IV). Michael is described as felling

'Squadrons at once' (VI. 251), though the fate of those who are felled is left unclear. The rhetoric of successful military action is a little surprising - and perhaps a little suspect too. The good angels, too, think of their struggle in terms of traditional epic warfare: even apart from the difficulty of reconciling angelic action with the poem's rejection of military idealism, the tale reveals problems of consistency and ethical positioning. If angels, even fallen angels, are incapable of being wounded or permanently damaged (VI. 344-53), it is difficult to see the force of

> And now ther mightiest quelled, the battle swerved,
> With many an inroad gored; deformed rout
> Entered, and foul disorder; all the ground
> With shivered armour strown, and on a heap
> Chariot and charioteer lay overtuned
> And fiery foaming steeds   (VI. 386-91)

How long do angels take to recover? The angelic battle is an anomaly because presumably both sides know that the other cannot be defeated. Satan's hosts feel pain and fear and fly away (34-97) but evince startling powers of recovery. Nisroc confesses his fear and hesitation (451ff) but Satan's words

> their drooping cheer
> Enlightened, and their languished hope revived (496-97)

They are inventive (e.g., their discovery of gunpowder); they alarm the angelic host; they check the latter's advance. The acts of the faithful angels invite comparison with the devils, a point subversively made by their assumption of the role of Giants. In Claudian's *Gigantomachia*, the Giants use hills as weapons against the gods[23]. In Milton's account both sides behave in the same way:

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> So hills amid the air encountered hills
> Hurled to and fro   (664-65)

God's words draw attention to the equality of the contest, and even perhaps to Raphael's partisan viewpoint

> in perpetual fight they needs must last
> Endless   (693-94).

Book IV also shows tbe angels pitted in equal conflict. Satan shows great courage in offering to fight the guardian angels singlehandedly (IV. 970-73). He may conceal the real purpose of his coming, but he still manages to score a number of hits. He comments on God's failure to guard hell-gate (897-99) and the inability of the good angels to defeat him unaided (926-29). He retains a majesty of appearance ('regal port', 809) and Gabriel recognizes him by 'his gait/ And fierce demeanour' (870-71) to be the prince of hell. His threat to drag Satan back to hell is probably an overestimation of his own powers, for God, fearing universal conflict, prevents the battle by apocalyptic prophecy. Here as elsewhere in the epic, Satan strains against his fictional role. The ethical scheme of the poem emphasises the absolute moral difference of the angels. The description of their actions dulls the edge of the distinction.

The character of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, thus, does not stand purely as a point of moral reference. Even as he incorporates forms of epic heroism that are unacceptable to the Christian poet, and is identified with false philosophies of the universe, he asserts for himself a space of action that is hard to deny. One is aware that the poem continually tries to limit this area through its narrative of events as well as by emphasizing his inconsistency, irrationality and reluctance to moral change. The kind of changes that the poem shows in him are physical and material. His final transformaiton is into a serpent. The

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fallen angels seek a change in their estate, but it is measured in terms of power and material comfort. Satan advertises his action as a great military victory and annexation of territory (X. 466--69). The poem reiterates its *de casibus* motif once again as Satan's moment of glory turns in disaster. But even if the moral tale of the poem shows that Satan is incapable of moral reform, is in fact the most unfree of the poem's actors, the experience of reading is inevitably ambivalent. At various points in the poem we lose sight of the hard moral divisions that the poem interiorizes and presents as its formal basis. He admires Eve's beauty so much that he momentarily forgets his true intention. He sheds tears, he is struck dumb by the sight of man. But most of all in his long speech in Book IV we become aware that the only way that he can continue to exist is by denying the rational, by suppressing his grief, by overcoming his moments of amazemnt. The narrative envisages rational action for him too. Its presence enhances the moral complexity of the work.

NOTES

All citations of *Paradise Lost* conform to the text given in The Poems of John Milton edited by John Carey and A.D.S.Fowler, Longmans, London, 1968. Book and line numbers have been indicated.

[1]Coleridge, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. D.A.Stauffer, New York, 1951, 480; [Satan's character] exhibits all the restlessness, temerity and cunning which have marked the mighty hunters of mankind from Nimrod to Napoleon'. On Romantic readings of Satan, see E. Newmayer, 'Wordsworth on Milton and the Devil's Party', *Milton Studies*, XI, 1978. Kenneth Gross in 'Satan and the Romantic Satan: a notebook' argues against the assumption of a monolithic notion of Satan in Romantic writings, (*Re-membering Milton*, ed. M. Nyquist and M.W. Ferguson, New York, 1987, 320).

[2]Michael Madhusudan Dutta, *Meghnad Badh Kavya*, ed. B.N. Bandopadhyaya and Sanjanikanta Das, Calcutta, 1958; 'He [Milton] is Satan himself. We acknowledge him to be a far superior order of being; but we never feel for him. We hear the sound of his ethereal voice with awe and trembling. He is the deep roar of a lion in the silent solitude of the forest', 14; also 'People here say that the heart of the Poet in Meghanad is with the Rakhasas. And that is the real truth. I despise Ram and his rabble; but the idea of Ravan, elevates and kindles my imagination; he was a grand fellow', 15.

[3]*A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. J. Hastings and others. New York, 1954; 'his allusion [Isa. 14.12] to a waning luminary possibly reflects some myth similar to the Greek Phaethon legend' 556-57. The point is made by J. Carey, *Milton: The Avoidance of Stereotypes*, Calcutta, 1986, 18.

[4]Cruden's Bible Concordance lists 33 N.T. references, 7 in Revelation.

[5]Walter Farrell O.P., 'The Devil Himself', in *Satan*, no editor, London, 1951 (a collection of essays translated from Etudes Carmelitaines,; Collection de Psychologie Religieuse, ed. B.de Jesus-Marie, O.C.D.), 3. The relevant decree is given in Denzinger's *Enchiridion*, 1911, section 428, 'Diabolus enim et alii daemones a deoquidem natura creati sunt boni, sed ipsi per se facti sunt mali', 1189. But see also the proceedings against the Manichaeans and Priscillians at the Council at Braga, 561 A.D.: 'Si quis dicit diabolum non fuisse prius bonum angelum a Deo factum... anathema sit (contraction expanded), 104.

[6]B. Russell, 'The Metaphysician's Nightmare', *Collected Stories*, ed. B. Feinberg. New York, n.d., 230.

[7]Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII, Angels fell away, man's soul fell away tr. E.B.Pusey, London, n.d., 343. See also *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, III, 10: we may follow the opinion according to which the angels that sinned inhabited ... [the] highest region before their fall in the company with their leader, who is now the Devil, but was once an archangel'.

[8]K. Marx, *Capital*, ed. F.Engels, Moscow, 1971, vol. III, ch. 48, section iii, 817.

[9]Coleridge, ed. Stauffer, 480.

[10]W. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, 2nd impression, London, 1950, 167-69.

[11]A.J.A. Waldock, *Paradise Lost and its Critics*, Cambridge, 1961, 78.

[12]S. Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, Berkeley, 1971, 4ff.

[13]Carey, *Avoidance of Stereotypes*, 24.

[14]Satan's anger at seeing the sun in its 'meridian tower' can be explained by locating a play on sun/Son; the sun's eclipse of the stars reminds him of the elevation of the Son above the angels.

[15]Cicero, *Post Reditum ad Quirites*, ix, 23: 'gratiam et qui rettulit, habet, et qui habet dissolvit', *The Speeches*, ed. N.H. Watts, London, 1923, 128. Fowler cites a passage in the later *Pro Plancio*, xxviii, 68 see Carey and Fowler, 612.

[16]Carey, *Avoidance of Stereotypes*, 25.

[17]*Christian Doctrine* I.xvi, *Complete Prose Works* (Yale) VI, New Haven and London, 1973, 458.

[18]Carey, Avoidance of Stereotypes, 25.

[19]N. Frye, *Five Essays on Milton's Epics*, London, 1966, 38.

[20]E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley, 1973, 17-18.

[21]Gross, 'Satan and the Romantic Satan', 330.

[22]Gross, 'Satan and the Romantic Satan', 331.

[23]Claudian, *Gigantomachia*, esp. 66-73; *Works* ed. M. Platnauer, Loeb, II, Camb. Mass., 1972, 284-86 In Claudian's account, the Giants are incited to use their weapons by their mother, Earth, and after they seize their weapons 'subsedit patulis Tellus sine culmine campis / in natos divisa suos'. The gods, on the contrary, use traditional weapons.

CONTEXTUAL STRATEGIES OF SOME UNIVERSITI PERTANIAN MALAYSIA UNDERGRADUATES IN READING ENGLISH TEXTS

by

Rema Lim

Purpose of the Study

This study attempted to examine the contextual strategies of High and Low proficiency students in the reading of English texts. More specifically, it sought to determine whether High proficiency and Low proficiency subjects differ in their ability to guess the meanings of unknown words and to state the contextual clues that helped them to arrive at the meanings. Additionally, it tried to find out whether the ability to guess the meanings of unknown words was dependent on the ability to state the relevant contextual clues.

The subjects were 30 undergraduates from Universiti Pertanian Malaysia, 15 of whom were taking the English Skills (Level 3) proficiency course (High proficiency) and 15 others taking the English Skills (Level 1) proficiency course (Low proficiency). All the subjects were asked to read two passages (refer to Appendix A). For Passage 1 they were required to guess the meanings of 4 unknown nonsense words by choosing the best answer from options a, b or c (nos. 1-4) and to state the clue/s from the passage which helped them do so. For Passage 2, they were required to guess the meanings of 4 unknown real words by choosing the best answer from options a, b or c (nos. 5-8) as well as to state the clues which helped them do so. These 4 unknown real words were selected on the basis of the results of an

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association test (refer to Appendix C).

The data were analysed using the statistical techniques of a) descriptive statistics b) t-tests and c) Pearson Product Moment correlation tests.

Findings of the Study

Based on the analysis of the data, these were the major findings of this investigation:

(1)   High proficiency subjects were more able than Low proficiency subjects at guessing the meanings of unknown nonsense words and at stating the clues that helped them to arrive at the meanings.

(2)   High proficiency subjects were more able than Low proficiency subjects at guessing the meanings of unknown real words but the two groups appeared to be equivalent in their ability to state the contextual clues that helped them to arrive at the meanings.

(3)   High proficiency subjects' ability to guess the meanings of unknown real words was positively correlated with their ability to state the clues that helped them to arrive at the meanings. However, there was no clear linear relationship between both these abilities in the case of the unknown nonsense words for the same proficiency group.

(4)   Low proficiency subjects' ability to guess the meanings of both types of unknown words, real and nonsense, was not correlated with their ability to state the clues that helped them to arrive at the meanings.

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The first finding was that High proficiency subjects were able to guess the meanings of unknown nonsense words and state the clues that helped them arrive at the meanings better than the Low proficiency subjects. This seemed to indicate that language proficiency could be a factor that would possibly affect students' ability to use the contextual clues to guess the meanings of unknown words. This finding is consistent with current reading comprehension research in both first language and second/foreign language. This view is that the proficient reader tends to comprehend a text better because he is more skilled at using contextual strategies to guess the meanings of unknown words in a text than the poor or average reader. (Twadell, 1980; Goodman, 1967 & Hosenfield, 1977). Several researchers like McKeown (1985) and Liu Na and Nation (1980) had all obtained similar findings in their studies.

Mckeown (1985) found that the High and Low ability groups differed significantly in their ability to identify the correct meaning of the target word, when they were given direct meaning clues.

The study of Liu Na and Nation (1980) found that groups of learners at high proficiency levels could successfully guess 85% to 100% of the unknown words while the group of learners at the lowest proficiency level only guessed between 30% and 40% of the unknown words.

The second finding with reference to the passage which used real unknown words was that the High proficiency students were more able than the Low proficiency at guessing the meanings of real unknown words, which is once again consistent with reading research. However, when it came to stating the clues which the subject said they used to guess the meanings of the unknown words, the pattern was different from that observed in the passage with unknown nonsense words. The High and Low proficiency groups did not differ

significantly in their ability to state the contextual clues they had used.

The above discrepancy possibly suggests that the Low proficiency group's command of lexical items was not large or discriminating enough to be able to distinguish between unknown words and words with similar meanings as represented by the options provided for the first part of the questions. This finding lends firm support to the theory that vocabulary is of crucial importance to reading comprehension. McNeil (1984) has suggested that one hypothesis explaining the strong correlation between vocabulary knowledge and comprehension ability is that when a person knows a word well he also knows other words and ideas related to it. It is this network of ideas that enhances comprehension. The more limited vocabulary skills of the Low Proficiency group in this study appear to have affected their ability to select the correct answer from the options provided. A few examples of the Low proficiency group's responses are given here to illustrate this.

Passage 1

1.   This trend can be reversed if the programmes organised by ASH are backed up by <u>lapki</u> (1) government policies like increasing duty on cigarettes ...

Subject 0016

1. c) greater   (Correct answer: stronger)

Clue: ... government policies like increasing duty on cigarettes as well as banning all advertising, promotion and sponsorship by tobacco companies.

The subject had singled out the correct contextual clue, i.e. the actual firm policies of the government to discourage smoking. But in his mind he did not see the difference between the two options: "stronger" and "greater" and mistakenly chose the latter as the word to replace the nonsense word "lapki" in Passage 2.

2.   The MMA's ASH committee works <u>regtycu</u> with the Health Ministry ...

Subject 0018

2. b) clearly   (Correct answer: closely)

Clue: It has been an active committee, holding exhibitions and seminars, conducting talks in schools, organizing a No-smoking Week and responding to related issues in the media.

      Here we see that the student had got the correct clue of the MMA co-operating and working together to discourage smoking but he was unable to make the distinction between "clearly" and "closely" as the word to replace the unknown word. Perhaps in his mind he had confused "clearly works" (which would be an acceptable answer) with "works clearly" (not acceptable).

      Here the fact that poor vocabulary skills may affect the ability to use contextual clues to acquire word meaning was also evident in the subjects' performance in Passage 2, which use unknown real words.

Passage 2

5.   At school, these children are suddenly asked to fit into a rigid schedule they have never had before.

Subject 0020

5. c) tough   (Correct answer: strict)

Clue: The idea that they should stop doing one thing because it is time to do something else is a strange one.

This student from the Low proficiency group had got the clue right which is that the idea of having to do things within a period of time is inflexible and strange but she could not go on to make the distinction between "tough" and "strict" to replace the word "rigid". Her inadequate command of English vocabulary probably rendered her incapable of seeing that "tough" indicates difficulty rather than inflexibility which is suggested by the word "rigid."

7. Most parents seldom provided instructions like "Finish your lunch so you can see your favourite TV programme at 1.30." or "First put on your socks, then your shoes."

Subject 0029

7. c) roughly (Correct answer: rarely)

Clue: ... the ordinary rhythms and interactions of a child's life at home and found that references to time were uncommon.

It is noted again that here the subject had given the right clue but had chosen the wrong option, "roughly". In spite of the word "uncommon" appearing in the sentence/clue he had chosen, he failed to go for the correct option "rarely". There are two words he was not sure of: he did not seem to know the meaning of the word "roughly" due to his inadequate vocabulary. He had also shown that he did not

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know the meaning of the word "uncommon".

Sometimes it seemed to be a case of not being able to distinguish between words that are quite close in meaning like "lowered" and "decreased". At other times, it was probably not knowing the meanings of some of the options like "roughly".

The Low proficiency group's poorer vocabulary skills were an illustration of the view expressed by Mckeown (1985) that the acquisition of word meaning from context is a complex process in which a series of processing steps must contribute to achieve a successful outcome. Stating the clue correctly is probably only one of many steps in this process. The complex problematic nature of deriving word meaning from context is described by the researchers Sternberg and Powell (1983). They set forth a theory of learning from context that hypothesizes that the process also depends on factors such as weeding out irrelevant information, integrating information gleaned into a coherent word meaning, and using prior knowledge which they term "mediating variables".

Yorio (1971) explains that in a foreign language the situation is more complex. Language use has not reached the "automatic, intuitive" level (Goodman, 1967) of the native speaker and depending on the level of proficiency, is a very conscious process that is also subject to interference from the native language.

The complexity of this process was borne out further by the other two findings of this study as regards the correlation between the objective scores and the subjective scores.

The High proficiency subjects' ability to guess the meaning of unknown real words was positively correlated with their ability to state the clues that helped them arrive at the meanings. However, in the

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case of the unknown nonsense words there was no clear linear relationship between the ability of the High proficiency subjects to guess the meanings of the words and their ability to state the clues that helped them arrive at the meanings.

For the Low proficiency subjects, there was no clear linear relationship between the ability to guess meanings and state the contextual clues for both unknown real words and unknown nonsense words.

Thus out of the four sets of correlation tests carried out there was only one significant positive correlation which indicated a clear linear relationship between the two sets of scores. This was for the passage that used unknown real words (Passage 2) in the case of the High proficiency group. In this instance, those who obtained high scores for the clues tended to obtain high scores for the meanings as well. This finding seems to point to a clear link between the words guessed and the clues used to help them make those guesses.

What is surprising is that in the other three sets, no clear correlation emerged between the meanings guessed and the clues stated by the subjects. Nevertheless, far from undermining the role played by language proficiency and the theory that contextual clues are an important strategy for understanding texts, these unexpected findings merely illustrate the complexity of the whole reading process.

This lack of a clear linear relationship between the two abilities of guessing meaning and stating the clues could be due to a number of factors. It may be possible that the topic of Passage 1, i.e. the campaign against smoking is a more familiar topic for students (school or university) in Malaysia than the more abstract topic of American kindergarten children from poor families not understanding the concept of time. Because of this, it is possible that they could have used their

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background knowledge (more than the contextual clues) to guess the meanings of the unknown words. Lipson (1982) speculated that readers, both average and poor, tend to rely more on prior knowledge than on text. Although no prior knowledge test was conducted by the researcher on the subjects for both the passages in this study, it does remain a possibility that the text on "Smoking" may have been more familiar.

The type of unknown words used may have been another factor which resulted in a clear linear relationship between these two abilities. Perhaps the subjects were not used to seeing unknown "nonsense" words and therefore were affected in some way by those words.

Another possible factor which may have contributed to the fact that the correlation coefficient was not significant for both passages in the case of the Low proficiency group was that there were a number of subjects who did not state the clues that may have helped them. This means they would not have obtained any marks for the subjective section because omissions were taken to be incorrect answers. This, coupled with the fact that in some instances they obtained the right clues for some questions but chose the wrong word to replace the unknown words, could have affected the correlation coefficient.

One of the findings of this study is that the High proficiency subjects had higher scores than the Low proficiency subjects when it came to guessing the meanings of unknown words (both real and nonsense). Even when there was no clear linear relationship between stating the clues and the words chosen to replace the unknown words for the passage with unknown nonsense words, it must be emphasised that the High proficiency group outperformed the Low proficiency group in both abilities for this passage. This means that despite the lack of a clear linear association between the two abilities in this case, the fact that the High proficiency group were better at both skills

indirectly reflects the decoding skills the High proficiency group possesses and are able to utilize in this complex process of reading comprehension. This means that the High proficiency group are able to comprehend the text better because they are more proficient at a number of skills ("the mediating variables") as well as being able to use the contextual clues in this text. In the passage which used real unknown words the clear association group makes it clear that the High proficiency students were proficient in both skills.

Implications for Second-language Teaching

This has some implications for teachers of second language reading comprehension. If this is a skill High proficiency students use directly or indirectly in their reading, then it would be beneficial to teach students to utilize the clues in a comprehension passage to guess the meanings of unknown words in it. The fact that the High proficiency group were able to perform better for both passages when it came to guessing the meanings of the unknown words indicates that even when there are other factors like prior knowledge or lack of it, types of unknown words -- "real" or "nonsense", the High proficiency students in this study appear to have directly or indirectly used the contextual clues as one of their many strategies to guess the meanings of unknown words. Researchers like Goodman (1967) and Yorio (1971) have described how predicting and modifying are such natural features of first-language reading but that these need to be taught when it comes to a second language. This indicates that there should be greater emphasis on teaching students how to make the links between clues and meanings as well as to help them widen their limited vocabulary during comprehension lessons. Olshavsky (1977) found that "use of context" was used only 10 times and only by good readers which implies that it needs to be taught more effectively. It is no

longer practical for teachers to ask students to go to the dictionary immediately when they encounter difficulties in the text. Nor should teachers give students the meanings of words even before encouraging students to try and use what they understand to see if they can figure out what they do not understand at first sight. In other words, reading must be looked upon as a much more active process where students become directly involved in obtaining meaning from printed text.

According to Gomez (1986), reading comprehension lessons have become too much of a testing situation where the teacher is far too interested in the product and completely ignores the process. Readers, poor ones in particular, have to be made aware that there are several techniques that can assist them and that, more importantly, these techniques can be learnt over some time. It would be timely for teachers to "use modified cloze, words-in-context exercises and context enrichment exercises as ways to practise guessing words from context." (Honeyfield, 1977)

However, teachers should also be made aware of the problems involved when requiring students to guess meaning from context. The lack of a clear linear relationship between the ability to guess meanings and the ability to state the clues which helped the subjects to guess those meanings suggests that there may be several other factors involved in the reading process. For instance, one of the findings was that although Low proficiency students were able to identify the clues, they were unable to select the exact word to replace the unknown words in the passage because their vocabulary was limited. The strategy of contextual clues should thus be used in tandem with other strategies to help students in the reading of English texts. Teachers should also bear in mind that texts vary in the number and kinds of contextual clues so that students are not taught to expect every text to provide explicit clues.

Limitations of the Study

The findings and the conclusions of this study were based on the responses of the sample populations to the two passages. The sample sizes were relatively small and only two passages were used. Each passage had only four unknown words. While limiting the generalizability of the findings, the data, nevertheless, tended to support the theoretically-based hypothesis that the more proficient in the reading language the students were, the better they were at guessing the meanings of the unknown words in a text. Another limitation concerned the written technique of testing the processes taking place in the minds of the subjects involved, be it Low or High proficiency students. It was difficult to examine or observe what actually happened between these two processes, i.e. stating the clues and guessing the meanings with the written technique. This information may have led to a better understanding of the lack of a clear correlation between guessing the meanings of unknown words and stating the clues which helped in that guessing in three out of four instances. The interview technique may have given more information in this area if the subjects could have expressed themselves orally. This oral method may have worked with some of the High proficiency students but it is doubtful if the Low Proficiency students could have verbalized their thought processes in English.

Other factors which could have affected the scores of the subjects like text organization and the extent to which the passages had inbuilt contextual clues were not examined in this study.

No detailed comparisons were made with other studies because of the fact that there were few similarities in terms of subjects, text-types and question-types (involving correlation measurements).

Implications for Further Research

The results of this study indicate the need to investigate further the role of contextual clues in understanding comprehension texts.

One possible research project could use the same passage, which is administered first with real unknown words to one proficiency group, either High or Low, and then with nonsense words, to another group of the same proficiency level. The two sets of scores can then be compared to see which type of words (nonsense or real unknown) is easier to guess.

In this study there was no attempt to categorize different texts or the various types of contextual clues. This is an aspect well worth looking into as it would provide very specific insights into the nature of the effects of texts and clues on the reading comprehension process.

APPENDIX A

PASSAGE 1

The number of smokers in Malaysia has increased in spite of the large number of anti-smoking campaigns carried out by the Malaysian Medical Association's 'Action on Smoking and Health' or ASH committee. This trend can be reversed if the programmes organised by ASH are backed up by lapki (1) government policies like increasing duty on cigarettes as well as banning all advertising, promotion and sponsorship by tobacco companies. Such a ban would ensure that the habit is no longer misrepresented as part of a glamorous lifestyle.

The MMA's ASH committee works reqtycu (1) with the Health Ministry and assists in the implementation of regulations to discourage smoking. It has been an active committee, holding exhibitions and seminars, conducting talks in schools, organising a No-smoking Week and responding to related issues in the media.

In this context, it is relevant to recall the effectiveness of the efforts of ASH in Britain. 25 years ago, in Britain, 60% of the adult population were smokers but now the percentage has fyeghio (3) to 30%.

Thanks to ASH, Britain has been experiencing two major development as regards smoking. Firstly, quite a number of companies have banned smoking or introduced a no-smoking area in the workplace. Secondly, people have taken legal action against tobacco companies for not revealing the additives in their products.

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With all the nuoke (4) publicity, the tobacco industry is fighting back. It is trying to turn public opinion in its favour by providing funds to certain groups to conduct research to refute whatever medical evidence has been found on the ill-effects of smoking. However, this seems to have had little success as borne out by the fact that the sale of tobacco products is declining steadily.

(The Star, Sept. 5, 1988, Section 2, p. 10)

For a child in kindergarten, the day is carefully divided into time for listening, colouring, playing, snacking and napping. Middle-class children, raised by parents whose lives are governed by time, adapt easily to this regimen, first at kindergarten and then at school. But for many disadvantaged inner-city youngsters, the pattern of the school day is unfamiliar. The idea that they should stop doing one thing because it is time to do something else is a strange one.

The explanation is that at home they do not develop a sense of time that enables them to adapt well to a timetable. At school, these children are suddenly asked to fit into a rigid (5) schedule they have never had before.

For several years, Professor Norton of Chicago University has been regularly videotaping children of low income families from their infancy. She let her camera roll up to four hours at a time, capturing (6) the ordinary rhythms and interactions of a child's life at home and found that references to time were uncommon. Most parents seldom (7) provided instructions like "Finish lunch so you can see your favourite TV programme at 1.30" or "First put on your socks, then your shoes." Daily routines, such as Daddy or Mommy leaving for work and regular times for bed and meals, are usually nonexistent in these slum (8) areas where even the most hard-working mothers have trouble storing food in the cupboard and keeping their children away from gang violence.

Children from these homes may be able to read a clock, but that does not mean they understand time. Norton found that most of her young subjects scored lower than average on seriation tests which

measured their abilities to understand the sequence of events. The less a mother talked to her child about time over the years, the worse the youngster performed.

(Time Magazine, Vol. 33, Feb. 27, 1989, p. 74)

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS

Anda dikehendaki menggantikan perkataan karut yang bergaris dengan jawapan betul dari a, b atau c. Pilih satu jawapan sahaja. Dalam bahagian kedua, anda dikehendaki menyatakan maklumat mana dari petikan yang menolong anda memilih jawapan di bahagian pertama.

Contoh: It was only eleven years ago that Louise Brown became the first baby to start life outside a mother's womb. Since then, the business of in-vitro fertilization -- conception in a test-tube -- has grown even faster than Louise has. Some 200 IVF clinics have sprung up in the U.S., and they have been responsible for more than 5,000 births. The krotos demand stems from the high rate of infertility in the U.S.: about 1 married woman in 12 has not been able to conceive a child despite a year of trying.

X. krotos

a. desperate
b. rising   Key: rising
c. severe

X.1

Clue: the business of in-vitro fertilization --conception in a test-tube - has grown even faster ...

Nama:

Lelaki/Perempuan:

Semester: Program:

Time: 40 minutes   Masa: 40 minit

Passage 1

1. lapki

a. bigger
b. stronger   Key: stronger
c. greater

1.1

Clue: ....

      ....

2. regtycu

a. completely
b. clearly   Key: closely
c. closely

2.1

Clue: ……………………………………

……………………………………

3. fyeghio

a. lowered
b. decreased   Key: decreased
c. sunk

3.1

Clue: ……………………………………

……………………………………

4. nuoke

a. unfriendly
b. adverse   Key: adverse
c. unkind

4.1

Clue: ……………………………………

……………………………………

Passage 2

4. rigid

a. tough
b. strict   Key: strict
c. tight

5.1

Clue: ....

....

6. capturing

a. trapping
b. getting   Key: recording
c. recording

6.1

Clue: ....

....

6. seldom

a. rarely
b. scarcely   Key: rarely
c. roughly

7.1

Clue: ....

        ....

8. slum

a. isolated
b. developed   Key: crowded
c. crowded

8.1

Clue: ....

        ....

APPENDIX C

Association Test

Anda dikehendaki menandakan (/) perkataan-perkataan di ruang sebelah kanan yang ada perhubungan dengan perkataan di sebelah kiri. Anda boleh pilih sama ada satu atau semua.

raised
    excite
    flag
    promote
    brought up
    lift

unfamiliar
    stranger
    Greek
    unknown
    foreign
    new

rigid
    inflexible
    army
    discipline
    rules
    school

capturing	kidnapping
	filming
	taking
	soldiers
	robbers
seldom	bluemoon
	rare
	scarce
	hardly
	infrequent
slum	squatters
	dirty
	disease
	gangsters
	streetfights
subjects	respondents
	geography
	citizens
	topics
	themes
adapt	adjust
	change
	fit
	alter
	modify

measured

tailor
carpenter
tape
height
scales

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THE USE OF VERSE AT THE PRE-SCHOOL LEVEL

by

Devikamani Menon

This is the second part of an article written in two parts by Devikamani Menon of the Language Centre, University of Malaya. While Part One dealt with the benefits that can be derived from the use of verse for infants and pre-schoolers as well as the types of verse that can be used for pre-schoolers, Part Two deals with the criteria for the selection of verse for pre-schoolers, some of the techniques and activities that can be used in class, as well as some of the findings of a survey done on the use of verse in a few pre-schools.

Part Two

5. Criteria for the Selection of Verse for Pre-Schoolers

There are certain criteria for the selection of verse for the pre-schooler. It should be mentioned that no verse can fulfil all of the criteria mentioned here. These criteria are only to be regarded as guidelines for the choice of children's verse.

5.1 Brevity

Firstly, children's poetry should be brief. This is because they have a short attention span, and also because poetry is often only a brief intermission between the teaching of other subjects. They should be like little gems of verbal delight shining with universal wisdom.

5.2 Simplicity

Secondly, the vocabulary and structure of children's poetry should be within their potential range of understanding. The child should react to the poem with pleasure and not with bewilderment. Even if the poem may have deeper meanings when read by an adolescent or adult, it should have at least "surface simplicity" whereby it is "linguistically accessible to even the weakest members of the group" (Tomlinson, ELT, 40/1, January 1986:35). It has been suggested that not more than ten new words should be in a poem, and even those should have been taught in a preparatory lesson (Donen, Forum 1974:331-336). This may be acceptable for the 5-year-old and 6-year-old child, but not for the 2-year-old. For these children the vocabulary should be strictly familiar, and structures and imagery should be very simple.

5.3 Familiarity

Poems chosen for children should deal with subject matter that is familiar to them, so that they can identify with characters as well as visualize situations and locations. Poems about experiences familiar to children would be easier for them to understand at first hearing.

5.4 Novelty

At the same time, the subject matter should be dealt with in a novel and exciting way to sustain interest. It should say something meaningful to them in a language that is familiar, yet at the same time exciting enough to "titillate their egos, strike happy recollections, tickle their funny bones, or encourage them to explore" (Norton, 1987).

5.5 Concreteness

Poems for children should deal with the concrete rather than the abstract. The imagery used should be fresh and vivid to enable children to clearly visualize the scene being created by the poet. At the same time, the poet should induce the child to make comparisons between different interesting images, and to go through the gateway of words to a new world beyond.

5.6 Rhythmical quality

Poems with strong patterns of rhythm and rhyme provide greater auditory pleasure to children than those which have subdued rhythm and rhyme. In this respect, it is essential for a teacher or parent to know the specific purposes of rhythm in poetry.

First, rhythm increases enjoyment in hearing language. It encourages children to join in orally, experiment with the language and move to the flow of language. Hearing language then becomes a fun activity rather than a chore.

Second, rhythm can highlight and emphasize specific words. Poets often use stress to suggest the importance of words, as in the

following example:

> "You are old, Father William,"
> The young man said,
> "And your hair has become very white
> And yet you incessantly stand on your
> head,
> Do you think at your age it is right?"

> From 'Father William'
> by Lewis Caroll

Third, rhythm can create a dramatic effect. Fourth, rhythm can suggest the mood of the poem, or can enable a child to visualize the background events through the pattern of repeated sounds, or the pace of these sounds. For example, the rhythm of David McCord's 'The Pickety Fence' suggests the sound a stick might make if a child dragged it along a fence:

The Pickety Fence

> The pickety fence
> The pickety fence
> Give it a lick it's
> The pickety fence
> Give it a lick it's
> A clickety fence
> Give it a lick it's
> A lickety fence
> Give it a lick
> Give it a lick
> Give it a lick
> With a rickety stick

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Pickety
Pickety
Pickety
Pick.

David McCord

This poem also illustrates the next criterion for the selection of children's poetry, namely repetitive quality.

5.7 Repetitive Quality

Children love hearing repetitive sounds, and every teacher or parent knows that they enjoy repeated reading of stories as well as poems.   Hence, children's poetry have repetitive lines or words, especially if it is used as a tool for teaching a new language. When a teacher or parent reads aloud verse which has repetitions, he or she is actually re-inforcing the learning of new vocabulary. Besides, when a pre-school child recites a repetitive verse from his memory, each time he does it, he will be refining his pronunciation of new words learnt.

Another aspect of good children's poetry is that it should be memorable, and should sound fun even after repeated readings, and even after the lapse of several years.

5.8 Dramatic and Choral Potential

Poems that encourage physical response, creative dramatizations or choral reading, should be given greater priority when choosing poetry for pre-schoolers rather than poems which are merely enjoyed as patterns of rhythmical language. This adheres to the maxim that children learn fastest by doing rather than by just listening.

Poems that encourage children to soar through the air like birds or crawl on the floor like other animals, enable children to briefly 'become' something other than themselves. This is a fascinating journey of discovery even for the most timid child in a group.

Then there are 'skipping' rhymes and 'dancing' rhymes which the children can immediately use outside the classroom. However, the most exciting poetry is that which has potential for creative dramatization. Many types of children's verse can be dramatised but the most interesting dramatizations would be that of narrative poems (The subject of creative dramatization will be dealt with later in this paper). The narrative poems suitable for pre-schoolers cannot be too long like 'The Piped Piper of Hamelin' by Robert Browning. They have to be brief, simple and with plenty of scope for character roles. A good example is 'The Wishes' by Christina Rossetti.

Apart from having dramatic potential, poems for children should provide scope for choral speaking. Not all children's verse lends itself well to choral speaking. Many of the Mother Goose rhymes offer scope for the various choral speaking arrangements that are possible.

5.9 Potential for Illustration

Poems which deal with concrete subjects provide some potential for illustration, both on the teacher's part as well as on the part of the pupils. By 'illustration' here, we mean visual, auditory or tactile illustration. A poem which can be illustrated by the teacher through the use of realia or aids such as slides, films, photographs, music or other props, can be a boon to the pre-school teacher, in terms of organizing interesting pre-reading or post-reading activities.

Furthermore, it has been observed by some teachers that poetry lessons can be related to projects in arts- and-crafts. The children themselves can draw, colour or paint whatever impressions they have after the reading of a particular poem. This linking of art-and-craft with poetry will be discussed in a later section.

5.10 Potential for Singing

Any verse that can be sung should be preferred to verse that can only be recited. However, a resourceful teacher can invent a tune for every verse that he or she teaches. In this respect, the language teacher should work hand-in-hand with the music teacher.

The following section will deal with some techniques which can be used for presenting verse to pre-schoolers.

6. Techniques for Presenting Verse to Pre-schoolers

6.1 Pre-reading Activities

First, the presenter has to decide if there is to be some introduction to create the right mood as well as to introduce the theme or subject matter of the poem.

One way of doing this is to encourage the pupils to view a variety of visual illustrations such as drawings, photographs and realia, which are thematically linked to the poem. A resourceful teacher can use pictures from large commercial calenders, or from old magazines. A teacher good in art can even draw a vivid sketch on the blackboard. Furthermore, the teacher need not bring the realia to class. The pupils can be told in advance to bring them

Secondly, the teacher can use auditory illustrations through the use of sound aids - the tape-recorder and radio. The sound recorded can induce the correct mood, for example a tape-recording of the sounds of the sea to form the background to the singing of 'My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean'.

Another pre-reading activity could be telling the pupils anecdotes, or singing a song related to the theme of the poem. If the poem deals with objects related to nature or out-door scenes such as trees, flowers, wind, sunshine or sky, the pupils could be taken out to the school compound or a park where they can be asked to use their auditory, visual and tactile senses to describe their perceptions of these objects of nature. For example Carolyn Graham's jazz chant entitled 'Tall Trees' should be first introduced to pre-schoolers only after such an outdoor activity involving trees. If the above activity is not

Tall Trees

CHORUS	SOLO
Tall trees Tall trees Big tall trees.	
Tall trees Tall trees Big tall trees.	
Tall trees, tall trees Big, tall trees.	The coast of California is a beautiful sight,
Tall trees, tall trees Big, tall trees.	with the tall trees, tall trees, big, tall trees.
Tall trees, tall trees, Big, tall, trees.	The coast of California is a beautiful sight,
Tall trees, tall trees, Big, tall trees.	with the tall trees, tall trees, Big tall trees.
Big trees, tall trees, Big trees, tall trees, Big trees, tall trees, Big tall trees.	

Carolyn Graham

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possible, a simple view from a classroom window can be used to stimulate discussion before a poem on nature can be presented to the class.

6.2 Reading Aloud

The first reading of a poem is very important. If it is carried out with appropriate expression so that meaning is conveyed by tone and inflexion, it will evoke vivid images in the children's minds, and set the correct mood and tone for the poem. If done well, this initial encounter will be memorable to them. It must be remembered that unlike the older child, most pre-schoolers are unable to read the lines of a verse. So they are totally dependent on the teacher to develop what T.S.Eliot referred to as their 'auditory imagination'.

Before reading aloud a poem in a meaningful way, the teacher or parent has to have a clear idea of the aesthetic meaning of the poem. He or she should first seek answers to the following questions:

- What is the poem really about?

- Is it a bit of delicious nonsense?

- Is it a precise word picture?

- Is it an insight into a way of reacting to
  something actual or tangible?

- Does it deal with something that a young child
  would consider important?

- Is it an appealing story?

Secondly, he or she should decide on how the poem should be best read, namely the correct tempo, pitch and intonation to convey the tone or mood of the poem. The teacher or parent should seek answers to the following questions:

- Are there quiet lines? Loud ones?

- In what tempo should it be heard?

- Are there tripping lines? Slower ones?

- Which words should be stressed?

- Is the poem to emphasize action or meditation?

- If there are 'dialogue' lines in a poem,
  should different characters speak at
  different pitches?

Alternatively, the teacher or parent could use a tape-recording of the poem instead of his or her own voice. However, the writer feels that recordings are no substitute for the teacher's or parent's authentic voice, as the former lacks the necessary 'body language'. However, a tape-recording may add another dimension to a young child's experience.

When reading aloud to a child, the presenter must bear in mind that poems come in an infinite variety of tones. The dramatic tone is only suitable for certain types of children's verse, and even for these, for very selected stanzas. Therefore, he or she should not impose a dramatic tone on all poetry, as it may not convey the correct tone.

Another aspect of poetry-reading is that the adult who reads

aloud to the child should have clear enunciation and an understanding of the sense of the lines. The use of pause or inflexion should be determined by the poem's punctuation as well as its sense.

Finally, it must be borne in mind that poetry is a condensed form of message when compared to prose. it is a compact unit in which the energies of language and thought have been focussed. Therefore, poetry-reading should be slower than prose, specially when it is read to a young child. Listening to poetry demands more concentration than listening to prose as the former needs a longer time to decode. The child needs time to imagine the word-pictures poetry often creates, and the total impact of a poem is only felt after the second or third reading.

6.3 Moving to Poetry

The rhythm, sound, character or things in many poems or songs encourage physical responses from children. We have already mentioned finger play and action verses in an earlier section. In this section we will focus on four types of physical movements which can be associated with verse, namely, skipping or dancing, moving in various ways across an open space, games and creative dramatization. ^The pre-school teacher or parent can use a combination of all four types in a single activity.

6.3.1 Skipping/Dancing Rhymes

Skipping rhymes have a strong rhythm that can enable the verse to be chanted in accompaniment to the jumping movements of a child. Many skipping rhymes are popular with children in English-speaking countries. Some of these may be actually taught by the teacher to pre-schoolers in the ESL situation. An example of this is:

> Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn around,
>> Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch the
>>> ground,
>> Teddy bear, teddy bear, close your eyes,
>> Teddy bear, teddy bear, be surprised,
>> Teddy bear, teddy bear, climb up the
>>> stairs,
>> Teddy bear, teddy bear, say your
>>> prayers,
>> Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn out the
>>> light,
>> Teddy bear, teddy bear, say good-night.

Among the dancing rhymes that can be taught to pre-schoolers is 'Boogie-Woogie':

> You put your right arm in,
> You put your right arm out,
> You put your right arm in,
> And shake it all about,
> And do the boogie-woogie
> And turn yourself about,
> That's what's it's all about.
>
> (Repeat with 'left arm', 'right leg', 'left leg', 'right hip',

'left hip', etc)

6.3.2 Moving Across Open Spaces

Some poems provide scope for moving across open space, such as a playground, a hall or an empty classroom. An example of this is the nursery rhyme, 'Oh, the Grand Old Duke of York'. In Table 11 the writers have indicated how the children can move to each line of this rhyme or song. Before the song begins the children stand in a line across the room.

6.3.3 Games

There are some games that can be accompanied by the chanting of verse. Among these, there is a game called 'Poison Letter', in which all the children except one sit down in a circle. The chosen one runs round the outside while the song is sung and drops a handkerchief behind one of the seated children on the words "dropped it" in the song. The seated child picks up the handkerchief and chases the first child round the outside of the ring. If the first child reaches the vacant space in the ring without being caught, he or she sits down there, the game continues and the song is sung again. The song is as follows:

> I sent a letter to my love
> And on the way I dropped it;
> One of you has picked it up
> And put it in your pocket.
> A-dree, a-dree, I dropped it.

6.3.4 Creative Dramatization

'Creative dramatization' refers to a whole range of miming or acting that can accompany the reading or chanting of a rhyme. Children love to imitate animals and other objects that can move or even act out the roles of people referred to in the poems. Children can act out the role of horses or horse riders when reciting 'trotting-horse rhythm' verses such as 'A Farmer Went Riding Upon His Grey Mare'. Alternatively, they can act like kittens and cats when reciting the Mother Goose rhymes 'Three Little Kittens' or 'Pussy Cat, Pussy cat, Where Have You Been?' Or they can actually dramatize a scene when reciting 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' or 'Hey Diddle Diddle'. When doing these creative dramatizations, the children can use props they have made such as papier-mache animals and masks.

Narrative poems can be skilfully utilised by teachers to enable children to identify with characters, situations and locations. However, as pointed out in Section 5.7, narrative poems for pre-schoolers should be short and simple enough for even the weakest child's understanding.

Mime is a form of creative dramatization suitable for pre-schoolers. A popular song that encourages mime is 'Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush', whereby the children mime the different actions they do every morning before going to school. In fact, at the pre-school level, it is safer to confine all dramatizations to simple mime rather than expect the children to be able to act out scenes, complete with dialogue and simulations.

6.4 Choral Speaking

Choral speaking includes the concepts of choral reading and verse choir work. Basically it implies the employment of several voices to render, for the most part in unison, a prose or poetry selection. Choral speaking has many advantages in increasing children's interest in verse.

Firstly, a teacher who introduces choral speaking enables the child to discover a new dimension in the poem. He or she translates print into meaningful sounds, through which emotional undertones are revealed. The combination of voices at different volume, pitch, etc. helps to build a mood, that renders the poem intelligible even to the non-reader.

Secondly, it is an excellent form of speech training. Children have to articulate the different syllables clearly and they also learn the basic principles of voice projection and voice control. As in drama training, the individual who becomes more and more skilled in choral speaking becomes better at using his or her voice to greater advantage, especially in a public speaking situation.

Choral speaking also helps to 'tune' the ears of children to meaningful and expressive renditions of poetry or even literature in general. As a teacher uses this technique more often, the children themselves will become the best judges as to which choral speaking renditions are 'excellent', which are 'mediocre' and which are 'poor'. During choral speaking, children discover that speaking voices can be combined as effectively as singing voices in a choir.

In addition, it is an ideal activity for socialization or developing social skills. Every child is part of the group effort, so they are forced to modify or upgrade their performance according to the needs of the

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group. Shy, self-conscious children are supported by other members of the group, while the most assertive children learn self-discipline, as they have to share responsibility for the success of the presentation. The result is that all the children acquire an increasing sense of identity and importance with their peers.

Even young children who cannot read can join in during repeated lines or can take part in rhymes and verses they know from memory, while older children can chose anything suitable within their reading ability. The most effective presentations, however, are those which are memorized and planned for rather than those which are merely read out aloud.

The first experience of choral speaking is a very important one. The secret of successful choral speaking lies in pleasurable beginnings. And especially for young children, it lies in successful first attempts. So the teacher should only begin with verse which is already known and enjoyed by the group. Nursery rhymes are therefore natural starters for most young children.

The role of the teacher or 'director' is also crucial, especially at the beginning. The teacher's enthusiasm and perseverance is important. Even if the first choral speaking is ragged, drags or is done in a sing-song way, he or she should not give up hope, but should urge the children on to give of their best.

To make the direction easiest, the teacher groups the children in a standing position where they all can see and be seen. The signal to commence should be given only after every child clearly understands what is to be done, and is ready. Verbal instructions should be kept brief and to the point. Otherwise, attention wanders and interest lags.

Above all, the teacher himself or herself should be a good model for choral speaking. As quoted by Shelton Root (1965): 'the most effective single means of instruction is the example set by the teacher as he leads the children'. From the teacher's own oral rendition, the children take their cues concerning phrasing, tempo, diction and emphasis. It is the teacher who must help the children understand that with choral speaking, every word must be clearly understood by the listener.

6.5 Poetry and Arts-and-Crafts Projects

One of the functions of good poetry is that it can help a child verbalize an emotion or stimulate him or her to see the world in a new way. Children should be encouraged to paint scenes that emerge in their minds as a result of poetry reading. Such artistic interpretations will have some pedagogical functions for the language teacher. Among these, the teacher can check to see if the new vocabulary items taught have been sufficiently understood by the children. Furthermore, by choosing a poem that highlights cognitive concepts which the children are already supposed to have been taught, the teacher can actually test the success of his or her teaching. Children who are unable to illustrate the different concepts may not have understood them in the first place.

After teaching a lesson on colours, it may be interesting to teach the following poem by Christina Rossetti, followed by illustrations of the pictures evoked in the minds of the children:

Colours

What is pink? A rose is pink
By the fountain's brink.
What is red? A poppy is red
In its barley bed.
What is blue? The sky is blue
Where the clouds float through.
What is white? A swan is white
Sailing in the light.
What is green? The grass is green
With small flowers between.
What is violet? Clouds are violet
In the summer's twilight.
What is orange? Why, an orange.
Just an orange.

This poem consists of seven pictures. So the class can be divided into seven groups of seven. Each of the seven groups, or each child in a group of seven, can be given paper and colouring materials to draw one of the scenes or subjects being described, namely, rose at fountain brink, poppy in barley bed, blue sky with clouds, swan sailing in light, green grass with small flowers in between, violet clouds and an orange.

After drawing the pictures each group can hold up the relevant picture while the poem is being read chorally. The various groups can compare each other's efforts. Through all these activities, the pupils' interest is aroused, their imaginations are stimulated, their horizon is widened and their vocabulary is enriched.

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The arts-and-crafts projects associated with poetry can focus on the preparation of materials that can be used as props for creative dramatization, or for other language games. An example is the preparation of dog and cat masks for creating a game based on the modified nursery rhyme 'Mary Has a Little Cat' (Wilcox, Forum: October-December 1974).

For this activity the class is divided into four groups. One group prepares cat masks, another dog masks, another 'fish' masks and yet another 'meat' masks. Then, two parallel chalk lines about 9 meters apart are drawn in the middle of the classroom. The 'cats' and 'dogs' get in the middle, between the lines, while each of the 'fish' and 'meat' get behind one of the lines. Then the whole class begins singing 'Mary Has A Little Cat' and when the song reaches 'eating fish', the 'fish' try to run across to the other side without getting caught by the 'cats'. Next would come the verse about Mary's dog and the 'dogs' would try to catch the 'meat'. If the 'cats' catch more 'fish' than the 'dogs' catch 'meat', the cat team wins. Otherwise the dog team would win.

Besides the above game, the masks could also be used for a simple dramatization of the modified nursery rhyme. In the next section, the writers will discuss the findings of a survey done in six kindergartens in Petaling Jaya.

7. Findings of the Survey

A survey was conducted in six kindergartens in Petaling Jaya to determine the types of materials used, the types of verses most often utilised and the activities related to the teaching of verse.

7.1 Types of Materials Used

In all six kindergartens it was found that books were used more as resources for teachers rather than as materials for children to handle or look at. In some kindergartens whole bookshelves of books of the Ladybird series were hidden away in the teachers' staffrooms, for fear that the children would mishandle these books.

On the other hand, charts were used as teaching aids when teaching the children. Poems from books were transferred to charts which were used and re-used. Perhaps the teachers felt that the children were too young to look at books on verse. The writers feel that this misconception may delay a child's direct contact with a vast collection of children's books on rhyme, unless parents take the initiative to introduce their children to these books.

In five out of the six kindergartens the children came from homes where English is used widely so they were said to be familiar with nursery rhymes and children's songs. However, in one kindergarten, the children only spoke BM at home, so they had little exposure to verse in English. The writers feel that this is the situation in many rural kindergartens. So if even in the urban areas children are not being exposed to books in schools, in rural areas this situation would severely obstruct the early development of a love for reading among children. Therefore, we recommend that all kindergartens invest in sets of books on children's verse rather than spend a great deal of time and money on purchasing or preparing charts, flannelboards, etc. We believe that every child should be allowed to handle books on verse under the supervision of teachers or parents.

In the school in which the children mainly spoke BM, the teacher concerned steered clear of traditional nursery rhymes, saying that they were culturally biased. The writers would like to suggest that

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this teacher and others like her try modified nursery rhymes whereby the difficult structures and lexical items are simplified. Later, the children should be taught the original nursery rhymes, so that they can be introduced to the 'cultural baggage' of the native speakers as an important preliminary step in learning the English language. In fact, one of the teachers who did not use nursery rhymes admitted that they provided a good foundation for the later learning of English. She even observed that children who are learning a new language identify better with verse than with stories.

In one of the kindergartens there was a gradual progression in the use of audio-visual aids: tapes were used first to introduce the non-readers to verse; later, as the child began to read, a combination of books and charts were used. This appears to be a good strategy for other kindergartens to follow.

7.2 Types of Verses Used

Almost all the kindergartens used a wide variety of verse types: finger play and action verses, nursery rhymes, jingles, riddles and musical games. The writers would also like to recommend the use of 'tongue-twisters', limericks, nonsense verses, jazz chants and narrative poems, especially if the children are already fluent speakers of English.

It was interesting to note that all the kindergartens used number rhymes, and other rhymes teaching cognitive concepts. This has confirmed our view that verse is the best channel for teaching cognitive concepts to the pre-schooler.

The teachers in a number of kindergartens suggested that more commercially prepared teaching aids should be made available to them. In one of the kindergartens the teachers overcame this problem by

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collectively translating the traditional rhymes and writing them on large manila cardboard charts. Whenever an English nursery rhyme was taught, the following week the same teacher would teach the BM version of the same rhyme. This appears to be
a sound strategy to follow.

7.3 Rhythmic Activities For Pre-schoolers

In all the kindergartens surveyed, the teachers were already using a number of activities suggested such as creative dramatization, games and moving across open space. Among the pre-reading activities used, the most common one was the description of illustrations used on charts, books or reading cards. Another pre-reading activity which was suggested, which is being implemented in one kindergarten is going for walks in the school garden to collect small items. A post-reading activity suggested which only one kindergarten has implemented was the preparation of paintings or drawings related to the poem learnt. However, the writers were told that this activity was only done towards the end of the year.

In one of the kindergartens the children were even being encouraged to compose their own rhymes. Apparently the teacher teaching rhyme is a very creative person. The children are encouraged to explore what they can do with their bodies and the different ways they can move in space. They are even provided with simple musical instruments to enhance the activity. However, the teacher concerned did not indicate whether all these were pre-reading activities or post-reading activities.

The two rhythmic activities which the writers would like to recommend are dancing and skipping while the rhyme is being recited, and choral speaking. While the former can be done easily, the latter

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requires precise instructions, and knowledge on choral arrangements and voice combinations. Choral reading or speaking can be done at the pre-school level when children love to do things in a group. Like singing, it is an ideal form of language presentation at concerts and other social occasions. Perhaps pre-school teachers should try out this activity to see their pupils' response to it, as well as acquire the related skills.

7.4 Problems Faced by Teachers and Recommendations

Among the problems faced by the teachers was the lack of time available for the regular teaching of verse. One of the teachers said that so much time was taken up for preparing the children for Standard One, that there was little time left for free play. There was tremendous pressure on the teachers to equip the children with the 3Rs, so that play activities could only be done on an ad hoc basis.

While teachers of English-speaking children complained that there was not enough audio-visual material available in BM, teachers of BM-speaking children complained that they lacked the necessary cultural exposure to understand the traditional nursery rhymes. Another problem faced in some kindergartens was that there was no co-ordination between the music teacher and the teacher who taught the rhymes. Hence there was little scope for certain rhythmic activities such as dancing, miming or moving in space according to the rhythm of music. The writers recommend that in every kindergarten the music teacher and the language teacher should work closely together in order to provide more scope for such activities.

There was also a comment that there is lack of co-ordination between kindergartens where singing or reciting verse is concerned.

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There was a suggestion that bodies such as Persatuan Tadika Malaysia organize singing, poetry-reading or choral speaking contests, so that teachers and children from different kindergartens can meet and compare each other's efforts.

Finally, there was a suggestion that there be follow-up activities at the lower primary level. It was observed by one teacher that not all primary schools are using poetry in English during English lessons. The writers believe that verse should be taught throughout the primary as well as secondary levels, and that there should be no age limit for the teaching of verse at any level. After all, every individual enjoys rhythm and music, irrespective of age.

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SHAPING A NEW NATIONAL DESTINY
WITH DIALOGIC VISION

by

Mohammad A Quayum

Lloyd Fernando, *Green is the Colour*, Singapore: Landmark Books, 1993, pp. 194.

Fernando's second novel, *Green is the Colour*, is set in the post 13 May 1969 interracial riots in Malaysia that shook the entire nation and the author captures the ambience of this crisis quite successfully in the novel. The riots are over now, but the tensions are still high: there is commotion everywhere; insurrections are breaking out intermittently; soldiers are scattered in all places; civilians are moving around openly with guns; cars are being put on fire; shops are being looted; streets are littered with broken glasses and roadblocks; sounds of bomb explosions peal through the air in several places. Malaysia is in the grip of hatred, feverish unrest, lawlessness, and disorder. "Human beings were mutilating each other. Hate, dread, suspicion and loneliness had entered into every house" (146), Sara, the central female character in the novel, ruminates, sitting in the car of her lover Yun Ming, effectively summarising the mad, macabre situation that her country is caught up in and it is precisely this disturbing phase of national history following independence that the author depicts in the novel with a view to discovering what actually went wrong and where lies the remedy.

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The novel is primarily written in third person narrative voice, although the occasional intrusions of first person voices and points of view, for example, of Lebai Hanafiah, Sara's father, in chapter 9 and of Sara herself in chapter 14, make it polyphonic. There are also incidental uses of dream symbolism, flashback technique, kaleidoscopic narrative, and time shift, giving the novel a flair of experimental writing that is still so hard to come by in this part of the world.

The novel combines the attributes of historical as well as sociological novel. It is written in the vein of a historiographer or, in Bellow's phrase, an "imaginative historian," in which Fernando is seen re-living and reconstructing a particular phase of national history by animating his personal fractured memories of it with imagination. However, beyond this historical panorama is the author's concern about the future of Malaysia and its destiny as a nation. His attention is focused on the serious moral and sociological problems confronting this newly independent country with a legacy of colonial past and a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious makeup. How can Malaysia with its plurality and multiplicity find unity? This is the question that the author centrally poses in the novel and his answer, both implicit and explicit, to this is: through understanding, love, mutual respect, natural integration of races, and above all by shunning extremist as well as ultra-radical, racial, and religious views in favour of a dialogic vision that accommodates widely different outlooks for the sake of promoting fellowship and peace. He recommends a *we* instead of an *I* relationship to society that unites instead of dividing; however, his collective vision is grounded not in Marxism but liberal humanism.

Fernando brings home this message in the novel by introducing a small group of characters within the larger historical canvas and by dramatising their feelings as well as their moral and psychological reactions to the crisis. How they try to cope with the situation and fight the odds to overcome the deadlock is his major preoccupation.

All his characters seem to be on a quest or in search of a country, although their *modus operandi* and vision of nationality are not necessarily the same. This sets the novel into motion, creating tension among the characters, setting them apart or bringing them together as the case may be. Among these are Siti Sara, a young university lecturer and her Harvard graduate husband, Omar; Sara's father, Lebai Hanafiah; her colleague, Gita; an English educated lawyer who later marries Gita, Dahlan; Dahlan's friend from university days and now a civil servant, Yun Ming; and, finally, Panglima, a corrupt bureaucrat heading Yun Ming's Department and a friend of Sara's father, lasting for Sara ever since he met her.

Of all the characters, Dahlan seems the most enigmatic to the reader. He is in favour of racial equality and religious tolerance and yet his speeches at rallies bring more violence. This is because, despite his ideology, he lacks the stability to act upon it in a proper way. He is theatrical and thrill mongering and does not have a proper sense of perception. He does not know how to tailor his imported Western ideology to the local context. His friend Yun Ming asks justifiably, "Is not Dahlan wrong just to bring an idea in without asking how it should be brought in for different cultures?" (14). For his recklessness and lack of a sense of realism his *Penaung* dismisses him as a "foolish idealist" (171). He is moreover corrupted by vanity and self-love. His sacrifices might look nobel and selfless, but his own ruminations and Gita's remarks about him bring out the phoney aspect of his character. "In an age when the major revolutions were over, he was interested in making gestures, he wanted attention" (61), Gita says. "He thought: I am fooling no one but myself. He had thought of himself as someone who 'cared'; he was surprised to find out how little the thought actually governed his life" (54), the narrator recounts, baring Dahlan's consciousness. However, although Dahlan eventually redeems himself by regretting his actions before his death, he is certainly not one of author's prototypes in the novel nor does he wish to establish him as

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a true martyr.

Omar and Panglima, on the other hand, epitomise excessiveness. Both are equally bigoted and fail to appreciate the viewpoints of others, although I would not think that Omar shares the deviousness and malevolence of Panglima. Omar's religious zeal is the result of a misguided search for "native" culture; to shed his Western sensibility and find freedom from the mammon-worshipping, materialistic, modern civilisation he goes to the extreme of joining an Islamic commune. His quest leads him to a blind alley and turns him into a "monster." He becomes disrespectful of his wife Sara, suspecting her of having sexual liaison with everyone; fails to appreciate her feelings and forces her to join him, resigning her university position; and even assaults her physically one night for signing a fund raising petition for a temple by his friend Sabapathy. By the end of the novel, however, Omar outgrows this phase; realises his error of having joined a fundamentalist group and returns to his "natural" self; and even make amends for all his past cruelty towards Sara by rescuing her from the clutches of Panglima, who is the real villain of the novel.

Panglima is a crook who often abuses his power of Political Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs for gratification of his whims and sordid desires. He is in favour of forced cultural assimilation and urges his Chinese subordinate Yun Ming, whom he finds most trustworthy and is even looked upon by the other as a mentor, to "Understand us" (143), meaning the Malays. His extreme racial intolerance is obvious in the way he schemes Dahlan's abduction and death for preaching racial equality openly, albeit in a wrong way. He believes that since Malaysia needs a "single set of values" to prosper and "keep [itself] together" (183), the onus is upon the migrant races to sacrifice their ethnic identity and integrate with the local culture. Of course, Panglima's bigotry is overshadowed by his sexual

longing for Sara that determines much of what he does and eventuates in his rape of her in the final chapters of the novel. This incident gains a special significance if Sara is deemed a symbol of Malaysia, which is perhaps one of author's intentions behind putting her at the centre of the novel and associating her with the country side and the natural beauty of Malaysia from time to time. In that case, it manifests the author's worst fears about the future of Malaysia if corrupt politicians and bureaucrats like Panglima are allowed to remain at the helm and rule the country. They will then abuse the country in the way Panglima does Sara.

The characters that elucidate the author's philosophy of fellowship and understanding and his wish to build a multi-racial Malaysia by bringing together all the races through mutual dialogue are Lebai Hanafiah, Siti Sara, and Yun Ming.

Hanafiah, Sara's old, ailing father who has been a religious teacher for forty years and experienced the "beauty of belief" (115) and glory of Islam, is a true humanitarian. His faith does not make him doctrinaire or disrespectful of other races and religions. On the contrary, he remains amiable and warmhearted towards everyone. He does not mind his daughter's relationship with Yun Ming and wishes them happiness instead before his death in one of Sara's dreams, which is certainly an exemplary act, considering the racial violence in the country. For his religious and racial tolerance, he is regarded a traitor by the Islamic fundamentalists. But he is not disturbed by this in the least and calmly brushes aside their orthodoxy in the following words that succinctly sum up his sagacity, sense of selfhood, and brotherly love: "There are so many who want to force you to follow the right path. Each one's right path is the only one. I am tired of seeing the folly spread in the name of such right paths. I fear those who seek to come between me and love for all humanity. They are the source of hate and destruction" (116).

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This spirit of love and individualism is also inherited by Sara. She too shares the moderate outlook and mediatory approach of her father. This is evident from the way she breaks up with Omar and falls in love with Yun Ming. Her dispute with her husband, causing divorce, is ideological. She too is on a quest like Omar, willing to extricate the colonial past and find a new direction for the country, but refuses to tread the latter's strictly religious path. She shuns Omar's orthodoxy because it goes against her liberal grain. Distressed by Omar's conversion and the way he starts treating her after joining the Islamic commune, she begins gradually moving away from him and establishing a new relationship with Yun Ming, who not only shares her liberal ethos but also provides her with a new hope and possibility in the midst of death and disorderliness:

> He was unlike any man she had ever known.
> He seemed to have no politics, yet by the way
> he spoke, he reminded her again of a wider
> world that she had dreamed of. She had
> accepted that it had been smashed, but here he
> was, a blithe reminder that it was there all the
> time. (44)

Yun Ming is a warm and affectionate young person, who stands out for his sangfroid, sensitivity, selflessness and sacrificing spirit. He is all for unity and peace. He will go to any length to establish harmonious relationship between the races; " if disregarding a fact will make a bridge, I will disregard it" (143), he contemplates. He sees everything "from the human point of view" (142) and shuns his friend Dahlan's riotous ways for they breed more unrest; he shares the other's objectives, but not his self-destructive and self-dramatising traits. For his moderate outlook and reconciliatory nature, Dahlan accuses him of lack of fortitude and cowardliness, but Yun Ming's integrity and love for the country can hardly be questioned. He is a

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second generation Chinese migrant, but he has already picked up the local language and can speak it fluently; when his English wife, Phyllis, pressed him to move to England, he decided to stay back at the cost of his separation with his family; his only brother who lives in Brisbane insists that he migrates to Australia for a better future, but he dismisses his offer, considering him a knucklehead; during the riots, when the country is divided into zones and everyone is busy protecting himself, he "[goes] with the van taking goods for distribution to the Malay areas" (94), ignoring all risks. All these speak for Yun Ming's commitment and courage. He is valiant, but not violent or vain; patriotic, but not prejudiced; "usually honest in his perceptions" (143), but never stubborn or austere. He knows that in a multi-cultural society, specially when it is embroiled in interracial riots, it is important to keep oneself flexible and open to understanding, and this is, indeed, the hallmark of his personality. Even Omar who suspects his wife of having a relationship with him acknowledges this, when he says quizzically, actually to test her feelings about him and assert his racial superiority over the other, but unwittingly paying tribute to his innately sympathetic nature: "He tries to understand. How many people understand?" (92).

Yun Ming's warmth and willingness to understand, keep afloat without going under, reach out to other races ignoring risks, calmness and certitude at the face of crisis, bring him closer to Sara. Their first meeting is, of course, incidental, but what keeps them going, weathering all odds, is their ideological kinship. Their bond that takes so much of beating for breaking the established social norms forms the central unifying symbol of the novel, holding the work together and giving a concrete illustration of Fernando's dialogic vision. The author's hopes of shaping a new destiny for Malaysia lies in the mutual relationship of Yun Ming and Sara; in their possible union rests the potential coming together of the divergent races in the country, especially its two major components, the Malay and the Chinese. By

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bringing them together, Fernando shows how people of different races can live mutually, establishing meaningful relationships between them, when, instead of being obsessed by their racial identity, they learn to affirm their humanity.

The novel ends in a hopeful gesture as the lovers gather by a river side to cross a ferry after a period of considerable suffering. They have come to the end of the critical phase of their life and are about to enter a new one as they will probably take the boat in a while and go to the other side. Their principle sources of persecution, Omar and Panglima, are no longer there to stand on their way, as Omar has already changed and turned to his natural self and Panglima has been exposed and arrested. They are therefore at liberty to build a new country of their wish that will be free from present disorderliness and hostility and in which people will hopefully have the right to live in fellowship and harmony, forgetting their racial and religious taboos: in "an illusion of harmony" (47), if true harmony is unattainable in an imperfect world.

Reading Fernando's novel was a fascinating experience. It is more than just a good book -- it is intricate, richly detailed, thought-provoking, edifying, and enjoyable. The author deals with a complex theme and storyline in it with dazzling assurance. But its main weakness is the failure to do justice to some of its many characters. For example, Gita is problematic; she seems to be at the centre and yet pushed to the periphery. What has Gita's abuse by her father got to do with the main story? Why is not what happens to her after Dahlan's death recounted? Same with Safiah; she does not seem quite germane to the story and used more to cushion Sara and bring out her affectionate nature than for her own sake. Omar's metamorphosis is also not related, although it seems important, specially considering that it is after this change that he comes to the rescue of Sara, without which the novel's course would have been different. Another point of

a separate nature that needs to be brought up here, which is not necessarily a weakness but poses a practical problem to the reader with no background in Malay language, is the lack of glossary. Without a glossary, understanding the novel becomes an uphill task, as the author uses so many Malay words and expressions in it.

I suppose Fernando deserves special thanks for the way he handles the sensitive topic of religion in his novel. I can see him walking on a tightrope: offering many constructive criticisms and yet not going overboard. This kind of balance and authenticity is what is required of a good writer and not cheap sensationalism. In art, as Sainte-Beuve had assured us in the nineteenth century, there is no place for sensationalism and charlatanism. He said, replying to Nepolean's claim that charlatanism prevails in all spheres of life, "Yes, in politics, in the art of governing mankind, that is perhaps true. But in the order of thought, in art, the glory, the eternal honour is that charlatanism shall find no entrance; herein lies the inviolableness of that noble portion of man's being." Fernando does so well by keeping to this line of argument and not engaging in publicity stunts as some writers have done of late.

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