Mas Marco: *Mata Gelap*, Crossing Language

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Shawn Callanan

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Shawn Callanan

Master's Essay

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Crossing Language

"„Apakah maksoednja perkata'an kekanda *Soebriga* itoe ? Baikkah ? Atau boesoekkah ?'' Sesoenggoehnja tiada hairan bahwa itoe si gadis bertanja sebagai itoe. Sebab toean-toean pembatja tentoe soedah makloem boenjinja perkataän, „Alle begin is moeilijk''." (71)

ALLE BEGIN IS MOEILIJK

Mata Gelap seems rather uncomfortable. It wants to jump out of its skin as a novel. It will often be cinematic, visual, as though it wants to tell its story with images, and not with language. It is full of tanda, signs, *non-linguistic* signs – someone swallows her spit, someone bites his lip – and these signs tell us something about the person's thoughts and feelings, without that person using words. Characters in *Mata Gelap* have gone to the movies. It seems Mas Marco has been to the movies, too.

Maybe *Mata Gelap* is uneasy because it is full of productive energy, like its author must have been. Maybe this energy makes the text uncomfortable with its linguistic textuality, makes it lean hard toward another mode of expression, cinema, perhaps, or even out of represented reality, and into the non-linguistic "real world".

Then again, perhaps the remarkable unconventionality of this text is less a result of the text wanting to escape linguistic textuality, and more a reaction to the problem of stuffing the non-linguistic into the vessel of a linguistic text. Of one character, we read that "seloeroeh boeloe badannja berdiri bersama-sama keloearnja peloeh (kringat)" (71). Later, after "makan pagi (sarapan) kira poekoel 9 ketiga pemoeda ini sama pergi" (74). At the end of the narrative we read of a "peniti rante dari emas Belanda bermata smaraga (tjemeroet)" (120). These parenthetical words are kind of internal translations. Among other things, they reflect the multilingual[1] environment Mas Marco was living and writing in.

The thing being eaten there in that first citation is "makan pagi (sarapan)"[2]. It is both those words, we suppose, and so definitively neither. Having two signifiers describe the thing being eaten here allows us language-users to triangulate around the signified. We can approach it from the signifier of "makan pagi" or from the signifier of "sarapan". Approaching it thus, from two different directions, triangulating, if you will, around the signified, rather than approaching it from one direction, one signifier only, the signified becomes three-dimensional. It escapes from language, pops out and off from the two-dimensional page. Mas Marco's writing is richly imagistic, but Mas Marco, often, is not painting with words. Mas Marco is making sculptures.

We can look at his signified from "makan pagi"; we can look at it from "sarapan".

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[1] Although this text was written in Malay, Malay is not the first language of the writer of *Mata Gelap* nor, probably, has Malay ever been the first language of most – maybe even the great majority – of this novel's readers. (This puts Mas Marco in the company of his contemporary Joseph Conrad, another writer whose greatest works were written not in his native tongue, another chronicler of colonialism and colonies, another writer who traveled around the Archipelago and who wrote about it, another writer, no less, who spoke Malay, though surely not so artfully as Marco.) The author of this Malay-language text and his contemporary "toean-toean pembatja" are not the only non-native speakers of Malay whose relationship to *Mata Gelap* will need to be taken into account. The writer of this essay you are reading is also a non-native speaker of Malay, and, chances are, so are *you*, tuan-tuan pembaca, who are reading it.

[2] In English, we would approach this thing through the word "breakfast".

We can feel it from "kringat"; we can feel it from "peloeh". We can touch it by "smaraga"; we can touch it by "tjemeroet".

Mas Marco does not need to give us an infinite number of signifiers to suggest the infinite number of angles of approach from which we can look upon, feel, experience his tangible signifieds. For a plurality of signifiers, two suffice. As with our eyes. Seeing from only one point, seeing with only one eye, one cannot experience depth or three-dimensionality. Seeing through two eyes, seeing from two points, two signifiers, even only slightly separated, even only so far apart as "sarapan" and "makan pagi", one now perceives (the *truth* of) the depth and three-dimensionality – one now perceives the fullness – of what one is looking at. Looking through the stereoscopic writing of Mas Marco – a product of his stereoscopic thinking – one now experiences the depth and roundness of the full signified.

BEGINNING IMPLICATIONS

The crossing between the linguistic and the non-linguistic in Mas Marco's work was not unidirectional. Not only does reality roundly enter into Mas Marco's words, but his words concretely affected concrete reality, too. In this way he resembles Radèn Ngabéhi Ronggawarsita III, born in 1802, and who died in 1873, seventeen years before Mas Marco was born. In *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future*, Nancy Florida notes that writers like Ronggawarsita "wrote with an acute awareness of the potential power of their words in the world. These writers wrote strategically to produce considered effects in the sociopolitical milieus in which they wrote. They meant to produce texts which were prophetic not just as records of already determined foreseen futures, but rather as

kinds of writing whose very inscription itself could (or would) materially effect what was to come. Often writing about the very distant past, the sometimes anonymous *pujongga* wrote these texts of material prophecy self-consciously to affect the practical and political realities of both the historical presents in which they wrote and the imagined futures toward which they wrote" (21).

Like the pujongga, Mas Marco often wrote to produce effects in his own sociocultural milieu. Much of his writing was committed to effecting change. He was a brave writer, berani. He loved to cross lines. This eagerness to cross lines no doubt made him very irksome to those who were trying to run the colony, for running the colony meant maintaining the status quo, ensuring that no lines were crossed, and that everyone stayed where they belonged.

In the epigraph that opens this essay, the narrator of *Mata Gelap* turns to us, the readers, and speaks to us directly. He tells us something important. He reminds us of something we already understand, namely, the Dutch expression "Alle begin is moeilijk". All beginnings are difficult, as we surely know.

To say that all beginnings are difficult is (I hope) an appropriate way to begin an essay, both for the one writing it and for the ones reading it. It is also, it seems, a very fitting thing to say in order to encourage the crossing of lines. To begin something (be it an essay or anything else), it says, is difficult; to cross that line into a new activity, a new experience, is hard. What is implied here is that once you've crossed that line, it will get easier. So cross that line then. It is like what a karawitan teacher, Pak Murwanto, told me: in a gending, as in life, it is the transitions where we are most likely to make mistakes. To

transition from one irama to another is difficult. To cross from one way of being to another is hard. To begin is moeilijk. But then it will be easier, is the suggestion, and it may well be even better than it was before we transitioned, before we crossed, before we began[3].

By informing us that "alle begin is moeilijk", Mas Marco would be exhorting us to cross lines. By assuming we already know this truism, Mas Marco powerfully presupposes that we're already conscious of the inherent difficulty in beginnings, and therefore that we're already to some extent advocates of crossing lines. We need no convincing; it turns out we're already convinced.

If you've already read *Mata Gelap*, you know that indeed it follows this doctrine. Those contained within this narrative, and even the narrative itself, are not shy about crossing lines. By undertaking a close reading of this novel, I hope to show just how fundamental are the lines crossed in *Mata Gelap*, and just how richly that book's composer crosses them. In so doing, I hope to bring new attention to this "venerable laid-by work" (1), so that this work will perhaps be a little bit less laid-by, and more frequently picked up, and read.

SAYA MAKAN, YA?

To just take food that is offered might, in some places, be considered rude. We can often mitigate that breach of etiquette by announcing directly that "I am going to eat, okay?". By being seen as not trying to get away with anything, by announcing our

[3] To complicate things even further, Mas Marco may have meant this passage to be taken ironically. Or even both ironically and sincerely, and other ways, too, and so multivocally and indeterminately. The baik and busuk of Soebriga's maksud, the outcome of what this gadis is about to begin, and much else in this passage, are quite open to divergent interpretations and evaluations. Part of what makes this book what it is is that we perhaps cannot know for sure one way or another.

rudeness, we become less rude. This is the effect I hope to create here, by calling attention to and explaining some of the breaches of proper custom committed in this paper.

The epigraph at the head of this paper is separated from the rest of the text. No other citations are, even long ones. To so separate them would, I believe, set them apart from the rest of the text in a way that might partially imply that they are not a part of this text, but are still a part of their original one. If a citation is removed from its original context, it cannot now mean what it meant there, in that original context.

I hope to use my citations respectfully and responsibly and intelligently, employing them in this text for meanings very similar to the ones they appear to have in their original context. This is impossible to do completely however. To cite is to rip one's citation from its original context, its original meaning, its original home. By integrating them relatively fully into this text, marking their citedness with only quotation marks and possibly some minimal parenthetical information, I hope to move these citations smoothly into their new context, into their new meanings, so that they seem comfortable.

Related to the problem of citations, but bigger and more frightening, is the problem of translation. I could have written translations of passages from the text of *Mata Gelap* that I would be working with in English in the main body of the essay, with the Indonesian originals in accompanying footnotes. This was most unsatisfactory. One reason is that, often, I am working with individual Indonesian words. The very material that forms the center of my attention should not be relegated to, and then drawn from, the footnotes. (Actually, I didn't even consider doing this.)

I did consider writing passages from the Indonesian text in the body of the paper

with English translations in the footnotes for non-Indonesian speakers. This is a fairly acceptable idea, except. Except, to do this would very much center this essay in English, I believe, and would make Indonesian merely a guest. Now, of course this essay is written in English. It is a fulfillment of a condition for graduation from an American university. However, the text this essay discusses is in Indonesian (or Malay). The words this essay closely examines are Indonesian. Therefore, Indonesian cannot be relegated to the footnotes[4], nor should it be present in the body of the paper only to be explained, proved, represented, that is to say, translated, rendered into English in the footnotes. Indonesian words, in this essay, should stand on their own. This is an English-language essay, but only relatively so.

Now, I don't want to be totally unaccommodating. I have said that non-English words will "stand on their own" (7), and that they will not be given translations in the footnotes. Many non-English words, phrases and sentences will, however, be made more widely comprehensible by *restating* them in English. This, I believe, is a more natural-feeling, smoother, subtler, more conversational way to impart the words' meanings. Rather than a block of English claiming implicitly to be equal to a block of Indonesian, we will present an Indonesian passage and then a restatement of that passage in English; that is to say, we will read a reconfiguration of those words, those meanings, but said now in different language. This is something that we do all the time.

Forgoing blocks of translation, the writing will flow better. Also, by not explicitly translating every non-English sentence into English, we will avoid implying that English is the center where truth is, and that all non-English words in this essay are merely orbiting around English, are merely aberrations that must eventually fall back to English,

[4] I am greatly aided in this project, of course, by the fact that my two readers are fluent in Indonesian.

must be translated into it and thereby corrected, in a way, in order to be understood.

Another important argument in favor of restatement versus translation is that I can not even come close to capturing Mas Marco's meanings in English. The writing is too subtle, too skillful, too alive; I am devastatingly ignorant of the (linguistic and non-linguistic) context in which he is writing; Indonesian words he uses simply have no appropriate English matches. Restatement allows one to convey some of Mas Marco's meaning, while not implicitly claiming to be the English version of what Mas Marco's Indonesian said[5].

Also, I do not restate everything; we will leave some play in the language. However, so that non-Indonesian speakers or those who haven't read the novel (it's very hard to come by) can understand what's going on, and so they can know where, more or less, the passages I address fall in the course of the narrative, I have included a short summary in English. In this summary, the eighty extant pages of *Mata Gelap* have been reduced to about ten. It is so radically shortened that it cannot be mistaken for a translation. It is a distillation, but a distillation whose qualitative effects are reversed: rather than becoming sharper, it has become softer and much less exact. It is *Mata Gelap* seen from far away and through a gauze of English.

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[5] For my fist week in Indonesia I took part in an orientation for all of that year's Darmasiswa Scholarship students. One of the other students there was a Canadian hippie who played the guitar very well and smelled like what may have been corn nuts. He had traveled all over, including to Taiwan, and spoke fluent Mandarin and, I believe, several other languages too. I remember he said once that actually there are not many, many languages in the world, but in truth only one, and we various language-users all just understand different parts of it. Considering the source, and considering the ridiculousness of the statement, I am disinclined to believe it. But there is something compelling about it too. Recently, for instance, I read that, while North Frisian, Saterland Frisian, and West Lauwers Frisian are mutually unintelligible, they are considered the same language by some linguists. This is also ridiculous. While the Canadian guitarist's statement about language may be quite unhelpful for those of us trying to learn, translate, and deal with different languages, at least it explicitly refuses to draw boxes around different languages – boxes that, it turns out, language experts themselves have a very hard time knowing how to draw. It is a statement refreshing in its refusal to presume (arbitrary) boundaries. It is counterintuitive, and, in many important ways, deeply untrue. If we look at language in this way, translation becomes an absurdity and restatement the only possible way to restate meaning in this monolingual world.

SOME BACKGROUND

Mas Marco Kartodikromo was born some time around 1890 in Tjepu, in central Java, near the very center of the Dutch East Indies, the colony that was his home. He died on 18 March 1932, in the Dutch prison camp of Boven Digoel, on the island of New Guinea, not far removed from that colony's spatial and temporal limits.

We know that Mas Marco died on 18 March 1932 at the Boven Digoel hospital. We know the date because the colonial government kept good records of their prisoners there. Most sources tell us he died of tuberculosis. Takashi Shiraishi tells us it was malaria he died of, Soe Hok Gie that it was malaria hitam ("black malaria", so named for the dark color of the urine of those sick with this disease and approaching death).

Regarding Mas Marco's birth, less is known; he was not yet a prisoner of the colony. Henri Chambert-Loir's estimation of the year of Mas Marco's birth, as put forth in "L'Éducation Politique", seems to be the one now settled upon. He believes Mas Marco was born in about 1890. Other sources have claimed that he was born in 1897, and even 1904. His parentage is also subject to debate. Some say that Mas Marco's family was a member of the priyayi kecil, the petty nobility; others tell us that his father was a trader. Of course, both could be true.

In his article "Pahlawan Jang Dilupakan", Soe Hok Gie points out that around Tjepu at the time of Mas Marco's youth, there was significant civil unrest, especially with regard to the conditions of Javanese working for the Dutch. He believes this unrest probably was an important influence on Mas Marco's later political activities and formulations.

WORK

Mas Marco wrote for or edited a number of newspapers, in Bandoeng, Batavia, Semarang, Soerakarta, Salatiga and very possibly in Yogyakarta and elsewhere besides. He apprenticed under the pioneering journalist Tirtoadhisoerjo, worked closely with Soewardi Soerjaningrat, later known as Ki Hadjar Dewantoro, founder of the Taman Siswa School movement, and in Semarang helped a young Semaoen develop his craft as well.

Among the papers Mas Marco worked for were *Medan Prijaji*, in Bandoeng, where, in 1911, apprenticed to Tirtoadhisoerjo, he began his career in journalism. In 1912, he then joined *Sarotomo*, the official organ of Sarekat Islam in Solo, until it ceased publication shortly thereafter. In 1914, in Solo, he formed the IJB, Inlandsche Journalisten Bond, or the League of Native Journalists, as a way, says Takashi Shiraishi, "to say what he wanted to say without leaving anything unsaid. Unlike Soewardi, however, he intended to do this in Malay" (82). Other important figures in the IJB, in addition to Mas Marco, Chairman, were the activist and journalist Radèn Sosrokoernio, Secretary, the wealthy batik trader Mas Hadji Bakrie, Treasurer, Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, recently returned from exile, and Mas Darnakoesoema, another prominent journalist and activist.

Mas Marco published *Doenia Bergerak* as the official organ of the IJB. Later this paper merged with Darnakoesoema's *Goentoer* and moved to Semarang to become *Goentoer Bergerak.* Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo then took over the direction of this paper, the name was changed to *Modjo Pait*, and Mas Marco, writes Henri Chambert-Loir, "se

déclara publiquement non solidaire" (204).

After this, Mas Marco worked on *Pantjaran Warta* in Batavia under the direction of Radèn Goenawan, and then for *Sinar Djawa*, organ of the "Red" (that is, strongly Communist) Sarekat Islam branch in Semarang, with Semaoen and Darsono. *Sinar Djawa* later came to be called *Sinar Hindia*, and then *Api*.

Mas Marco left the Dutch East Indies twice: once to Singapore in 1915 for two months, and once to The Hague from 1916 to 1917 for five months.

He was first imprisoned from July 1915 to March 1916 in Semarang, then from July 1917 to March 1918 in Weltevreden, from April to October 1920 in Batavia, and from December 1921 to December 1923 in Batavia. All of these were punishments for persdelicht, that is, for press offences. When Mas Marco arrived at Boven Digoel, on the island of New Guinea, on 21 June 1927, never to leave, it was not for a press offence, but for his supposed connection with the Communist revolt that began on Java on 12 November 1926.

Aside from his journalistic output – much of which was written under pseudonyms – his works are as follows.

- *Mata Gelap: Tjerita Jang Soenggoeh Kedjadian Di Tanah Djawa* (Bandoeng: Drukkerij Insulinde, 1914), a novel in three volumes, never serialized. All sources I have found say that this novel is incomplete. Some say that only Volume III is still extant; others that both II and III are. I have been able to obtain the last two volumes.
- *Student Hidjo* (Semarang: N. V. Boekhandel en Drukkerij Masman & Stroink, 1919), a novel. Originally published in installments in the periodical *Sinar Hindia*

in 1918, then in 1919 as a book. The edition I am using in this paper is *Student Hijo* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Aksara Indonesia, 2000).

- *Sair Rempah-rempah* (Semarang: Drukkerij N. V. Sinar Djawa, 1918), a collection of poems. It was later republished in Solo in 1931.
- *Matahariah*, a novel published only in installments in *Sinar Hindia* between 7 August 1918 and 11 January 1919.
- *Kromo Bergerak*, a play that was published in *Matahariah*.
- *Persdelict Dan Soerat Perlawanan (Di persidangan oemoem Landraad Djokjakarta pada hari Kemis 8 December 1921, dengan poetoesan vonnis tanggal 8 December 1921, no. 989/1921)* (Djokjakarta: Tjip Sneldrukkerij Pakoealaman, 1922), a publication of the accusations of press offences against Mas Marco, and his defense.
- *Rasa Merdika: Hikajat Soedjanmo* (Semarang: Drukkerij V. S. T. P., 1924), a novel published in installments in *Sinar Hindia* from 19 April to 30 May 1924 under the pseudonym of Synthema, then as a book (except for the last chapter) under the pseudonym of Soemantri.
- *Three Early Indonesian Short Stories by Mas Marco Kartodikromo (c. 1890 – 1932)* (Melbourne: Monash University Department of Indonesian and Malay Working Paper number 23, 1981), translated and introduced by Paul Tickell. This monograph comprises three stories that appeared only in installments, in *Sinar Hindia* and its continuation, *Api*. They are: "Semarang Hitam" (translated as "Black Semarang"), by the pseudonymous Synthema, which appeared in *Sinar Hindia* from 29 March to 8 April 1924; "Tjermin Boeah Keroyalan" ("Images of

Extravagance"), "advice from Synthema" (13) that appeared in *Sinar Hindia* and then in its continuation *Api* from 30 September to 6 October 1924; and "Roesaknja Kehidoepan di Kota Besar" ("The Corrupted Life of a Big City"), by Synthema, serialized in *Api*, 27 December 1924 to 2 January 1925.

- *Pergaulan Orang Buangan Di Boven Digoel* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2002), a collection of Mas Marco's dispatches from Boven Digoel, originally published in the Medan newspaper *Pewarta Deli* from 10 October to 9 December 1931 in fifty-one installments, now edited and introduced by Koesalah Soebagyo Toer.

Of these works, I've been unable to come by the novel *Matahariah* and his play *Kromo Bergerak*, which was included in that novel. Part of the reason for this may be that *Matahariah* is the only one of his novels not yet published in book form. Of Mas Marco's novels, all except *Mata Gelap* originally appeared serialized, and all of them in the newspaper *Sinar Hindia*, published in Semarang. Like *Mata Gelap*, the novels *Student Hijo* and *Rasa Merdika* were eventually published as books, too.

I have been unable to get the original Malay-language versions of the three short stories published in *Sinar Hindia* and its continuation, *Api*, where Mas Marco was editor alongside Semaoen and Darsono. I have, however, been able to read Paul Tickell's English translations of these three stories in his monograph, *Three Early Indonesian Short Stories*.

Of Mas Marco's many writings, this paper will focus on his first novel, *Mata Gelap*. It was published in three volumes by Drukkerij Insulinde, in Bandoeng, in 1914. The first volume, as far as I have been able to find out, has been lost. If anyone finds it,

please let me know.

THE INCOMPLETENESS OF THE TEXT

The fact that, of this novel's one hundred twenty pages, fully forty pages are missing, introduces a number of implications. The first, and perhaps most fortunate, is that it may impede us making any too-grand statements, or advancing any (ostensibly) air-tight theories. (Or, perhaps we can, but while always looking over our shoulder at the hole where those forty pages should be.) We cannot, for example, advocate for the otherwise fine thesis of Retna Poernama as anti-heroine. Likewise, we cannot, despite the textual evidence of the final two volumes, make any definitive judgements on the characters. Maybe, if we could read the first volume, we'd see, for example, that Retna Permata is actually an evil person, and Amtje is quite lovable.

And even though Retna Poernama seems to appear only in Volume II and therefore we can say that the missing Volume I does not diminish our view of her at all, the characters she interacts with, like Soebriga, Soetjina, and her own sister Permata, all seem certainly to be present in Volume I. What they do in Volume I would effect how we understand who they are, and therefore would affect our understanding of Poernama's interactions with them. So even if her character is not present in Volume I, her later interactions with characters who are present there could certainly take on a very different color depending on what we see of those characters in the first volume.

It seems, then, that "reality", that is to say, the non-linguistic world, has intruded on Mas Marco's textual construction, depriving us of its first third. This will limit the kinds of things that I, the writer of this paper, can confidently say about it, will limit the

kinds of systems we can build and see with surety in Mas Marco's story. It is perhaps very fitting that the non-textual – alias "reality" – has made itself present so roundly, so fully, so three-dimensionally, in the textual world of Mas Marco's linguistic construction. The first third is missing, and this lacuna fits quite well; it may be just what the playful Mas Marco would have wanted.

In one of his later books – in *Student Hijo* or *Rasa Merdika*, for instance – missing an entire third of the narrative may have been a bigger problem. Those two books have much more obvious objectives, which are largely to teach. As far as *Mata Gelap*, Henri Chambert-Loir tells us that "l'auteur dit lui-même sur un ton d'excuse qu'il ne contient aucun enseignement. C'est une histoire frivole et comique" (206). Mas Marco, as translated and cited by Henk Maier in *We Are Playing Relatives*, himself has this to say about his debut novel: "Let us be straight about it: this book does not contain lofty lessons, it contains the all too familiar story; it is like those Dutch books called *roman*. Likewise, we should not forget to warn all of you, *toean-toean*, who will buy this book. Let it not be read by children who have not yet come of age, neither boys nor girls. In particular the children who are still studying, they should definitely not read this book. So the ones who should read it are people who have much experience of life, the ones who can tell bad from good and have already acquired a stable way of thinking" (169).

As Henk Maier rightfully points out, what better way to make people want to read your book than to tell them that maybe your book's too dangerous, that maybe, in fact, they shouldn't be allowed to read it. This novel is less a helpful, earnest, instructional tome from a writer with certain firm and practical political convictions, and is more of a series of explosions, of wild experiments that cross many different kinds of boundaries,

mixing the textual and the non-textual together, to intermingle and interact in radical new ways; it thus changes the nature of what the textual is capable of, redefines what the linguistic can be. This sort of assault will surely require a reader who has already developed "a stable way of thinking".

BEGINNINGS: *Pandita Satria*

In *An Age in Motion*, Takashi Shiraishi tells us how, in 1924, Marco set out to write a Malay-language history of Java, *Babad Tanah Jawa*. This was important, Marco felt, because almost all important historiography on Java was in Dutch. Marco wanted to take back this history, putting it in a language very many Javanese could understand. Mas Marco's other project at this time was a collection of biographies of Indonesian heroes under the title *Korban Pergerakan Rajat*. Takashi Shiraishi states that "Indonesianization of Javanese history and hagiographical compilations of Indonesian national heroes thus began with Marco's projects" (304). That is to say, Marco did nothing less than single-handedly create two important new genres of Indonesian-language writing. Eventually, however, he decided to move back to Soerakarta, to become chairman of Soerakarta Partai Kommunis Indonesia, and the Sarekat Ra'jat. This can be read as Marco's decision to go from being pandita to satria, going from quiet and withdrawn man of letters and learning to involved man of action and self-sacrifice. Rather than write of exemplary, heroic korban pergerakan rakyat, of martyrs of the people's movement, he chose to fully become one himself. Rather than write an Indonesian-language history of the land of Java, he would make that history, not recording it with his pen, but writing it with his actions.

This tension between "satria" and "pandita", between man of letters and man of

action, between the linguistic world and the non-linguistic, is present not only in Marco's decision to move back to Solo in 1924 and become involved in the movement there; it is felt, indeed, throughout his life. After all, Marco's actions themselves, those dangerous things he did that forced the Dutch to imprison him time and again, were his writings.

He was a journalist, and his presence was – and is – most strongly felt by the words that he wrote. The writing and publication of a history book are historical events, to be sure. But such texts are conventionally envisioned primarily as documentations of history, or interpretations. Historians do not often expect that their history books will alter significantly the direction of history after their publication. In fact, a history book that clearly does want to be history-changing will often be dismissed as tendentious. Mas Marco's razor-sharp texts often intended to do that very thing, however. They were written expressly to change history. They were language-constructions in Indonesian designed to affect and change non-language, generalized conditions in Indonesia. It seems undeniable that, to some extent, they were effective.

BEGINNINGS: *The Indonesian Intellectual*

Henri Chambert-Loir writes that Mas Marco "est l'une des rares figures du nationalisme naissant qui soit d'humble origine" (204). Of course it is always inspiring for those of us who are not rich to see someone else who is not particularly privileged make history, as Mas Marco does. However, there are further implications to Mas Marco's "humble origins". Numerous writers, such as Chambert-Loir, Takashi Shiraishi, James Siegel, and Henk Maier, duly note that Mas Marco's abilities in Dutch were less than perfect. Takashi Shiraishi explains that, in terms of education, Mas Marco "was

inferior to early pergerakan leaders such as Tirtoadhisoerjo, Tjokroaminoto, and Soewardi. They all received the best education then available in the Indies – the ELS and then the HBS, the OSVIA, or the STOVIA – and not only read but wrote and spoke Dutch fluently. Marco also read Dutch, but his writing and conversational ability in the Dutch language was never great. He never mingled freely with the Dutch and all his writings were either in Malay or in Javanese. Things Dutch and European being the embodiment of modernity, he was by definition less advanced than such pergerakan leaders as Tjokroaminoto and Soewardi. Perhaps it was his uneasiness about this that made him become infatuated with symbols of modernity and drove him to appear in public in European style like a sinyo, while Tjokroaminoto and Soewardi usually appeared in public in Javanese dress" (81).

This is an interesting reading. Mas Marco, who is much more committed to Malay than to Dutch, who prefers to appear in public in European style, is "less advanced" than men who are more comfortable in Dutch and appear in public in Javanese dress. It seems to me that Mas Marco is actually several decades ahead of his own era, anticipating a time in Indonesia when only old people will know the obsolete Dutch language, almost all public business is conducted in Malay, and European dress is much more common than Javanese clothing. As far as his being "infatuated with symbols of modernity", that is an infatuation that seems to have been shared by such other contemporary writers as Walter Benjamin and Emilio Marinetti. Rather than being a poorly-educated bumpkin from Tjepu who couldn't speak correct-enough Dutch, Mas Marco is better understood as comfortable and active co-creator of the global avant-garde.

Perhaps even more important than his global place as an artist in the world is

Marco's local place as an artist in the Archipelago. He was not a high priyayi, so he was not intensively educated in Dutch from an early age. He had to learn the language from a Dutch private tutor after he'd already begun working as a clerk for the Netherlands Indies Railway in Semarang, at the age of about 15. Mas Marco was therefore not shaped by Dutch nearly as profoundly as were such thinkers as Soewardi and Tjokroaminoto. That is to say, he was not shaped so much by the blandishments that the Dutch colonizers bestowed upon the native upper classes, nor – perhaps more important still – was his mind, or his conceptions of the world, formed nearly so much by thinking in the Dutch language. While Mas Marco does sprinkle some Dutch in his writings, employing these words as, among other ends, "symbols of modernity", Mas Marco simply does not write in Dutch. He wrote in Javanese, his mother tongue, or, more often, in the language of every single one of his published works: Malay. Mas Marco was the first important Indonesian writer to use Malay – Indonesian – as his primary medium of written expression. Far from making him inferior, this fact makes Mas Marco, as a committed Malay-speaker and Malay-thinker, arguably the Archipelago's first important Indonesian-language – that is, specifically *Indonesian* – intellectual of the twentieth century.

Mas Marco was an Indonesian intellectual. He lived in what became the Republic of Indonesia, he used the word "Indonesia" to denote what was still officially the Dutch East Indies, and, he spoke, he wrote, and – though we may not be able to prove it, we can be sure – he thought in Indonesian. As perhaps the first modern writer to compose novels, poems and short stories in Indonesian, Mas Marco was at a crossing. Were he a writer born fifty years earlier, his compositions would have probably been in Javanese. But Mas Marco did not write primarily in Javanese, nor in Dutch, like many of his contemporaries.

He wrote in "Indonesian", in Malay, and his and others' writing in that language, the body of journalistic and literary work he and others created in it, no doubt had some part in making possible the Sumpah Pemuda, the youth oath that established Indonesian – Malay – as the language of Indonesia, thereby helping to bring about the Indonesian nation.

As that oath was being taken, in 1928, Mas Marco was in Boven Digoel. Four years later, he would die there. The Dutch exiled Mas Marco to New Guinea precisely for being too eager to cross lines, too disrespectful of established boundaries. They sent him to Boven Digoel where he could cross no important lines. But they were too late. The damage had already been done. Mas Marco had crossed the line. He was a modern and important Javanese intellectual who did not depend on Dutch. Something an independent Indonesia would need had come into being. The independent (of Dutch) Indonesian (language) literary tradition had been born.

A SHORT SUMMARY OF *MATA GELAP* IN ENGLISH: *Volume I*

Volume I of *Mata Gelap* has been lost.

A SHORT SUMMARY OF *MATA GELAP* IN ENGLISH: *Volume II*

Mata Gelap, such as it comes down to us, begins on page 41, at the beginning of Fatsal VI (of XV, of which I through V are lost), which is also the beginning of Bagian II (of III, of which the first is lost). Semarang is quiet. Amtje, the Javanese[6] youth,

[6] Amtje is a Dutch-sounding name though, so the possibility exists that Amtje is Dutch, or, far less unlikely, Indo. If Amtje *is* Indo or Dutch, then his lucklessness in wooing Retna Permata would be consistent with what takes place in *Student Hijo*, in which the Dutch man pointedly does *not* get the Javanese woman.

remembers the beautiful Retna Permata's instructions to him to "bitjara sama baboe saja" (41) when this maid goes to the market if he wants to pass along any messages to Retna Permata. Amtje is thus forced to go to the market, and look there for Retna Permata's maid, named Kiprah.

Seeing that Amtje is following her, Kiprah thinks that he is in love with her. When she finds that Amtje is more interested in Retna Permata, though, she takes it in stride. The two retire to a more private place, Djambon, which is known as a "tempat....." (42), which I take to mean a place of prostitution (or other disreputable activities). Once there, Amtje instructs Kiprah to tell Retna Permata of his love for Retna Permata. Kiprah promises she will, but asks for a "presen" (43). He gives her one rupiah, "f 1.–" (43). Looking Kiprah over, Amtje decides that she looks not unlike Emmatje, a woman who lives with her husband Soedjahtera in the same house as Amtje[7]. Seeing as how there is no one else around to see them, Amtje figures he may as well "....." (43) Kiprah. And so they do.

At one in the afternoon, the two leave Djambon, parting ways. Upon returning home, Kiprah "mentjeritaken tentang ia bertemoean di pekan dengan Amtje" (43), first to Retna Permata, then to Permata's (secret) lover (and Amtje's friend), Soebriga, who is there also, and then to everyone else in the house, and "lantaran tjeritera itoe bisa membikin ketawanja orang-orang jang ada di dalam roemah ini" (43). Since the reaction to Kiprah's story is so casual and lighthearted, it would seem that she only tells her audience about what Amtje *said*, and not what she and Amtje did afterwards.

Shortly after this, Soebriga leaves to go home and Retna Permata departs for the

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Incidentally if Amtje is Indo – and even more so if he's Dutch, I imagine – it is very likely that the narrator would tell us this. If the narrator ever did, this information is lost in the missing Bagian I.

[7] I believe that Soedjahtera and Emmatje are Amtje's bapak and ibu kos.

city. Soebriga gets home by five, but goes out again at six, to the alun-alun, to catch a glimpse of Retna Permata.

The square, or alun-alun, is a scene of pleasant keramaian, filled with people reading the movie programs, or watching the soldiers play soccer next to their barracks, or sitting around making small-talk, or with prostitutes, night butterflies showing off their colorful wings, trying to earn their living. Amtje is walking all about, alone amid this convivial scene. Before long he meets up with Soetjina, and then Soekrana arrives, and then Soebriga and Soedaba, who met each other on the way, join them too. As these five youths sit around talking, Amtje remarks that he was with Retna Permata earlier that day, and that she said she wouldn't be coming to the alun-alun that evening. Not long after, Retna Permata rides by in her carriage. Amtje's friends point out this contradiction. He is so embarrassed that he immediately leaves.

Amtje arrives home at seven thirty, where tuan Soedjahtera and his wife Emmatje are waiting for him. They see that Amtje is upset, and ask him why, but he responds only that he "baroe tidak enak badan" (46). The next day, when tuan Soedjahtera leaves for work, Amtje stays home, because he's sick, he says. Emmatje cares for the ostensibly sick Amtje. Because she's so good to him Amtje thinks she is interested in him romantically. He makes tentative advances, but Emmatje ignores them.

Fatsal VII begins on page 48 with a return to the alun-alun and the four remaining friends of Amtje. After Amtje leaves, they go to a coffee shop. Soebriga sees Retna Permata's carriage cross the alun-alun, so he leaves. He hails her and gets in the carriage, closing the cover "Maski waktoe ini soedah poekoel 7 malam dan soedah gelap" (49).

Here it is clear that Soebriga and Retna Permata's relationship is a secret; he doesn't want anyone to see them together. Soebriga tells Retna Permata not to be angry, but he can't accompany her on her trip back to her home town of "....." (49) the following day because he has to work. Retna Permata becomes very angry. Soebriga relents, telling her that he will accompany her. Permata suggests he go into work the following morning and ask for at least six days off.

We now return to Amtje. At six thirty in the evening he arrives at the seaside and meets Pak Troeno. Pak Troeno is a fisherman and a dukun. They go back to Pak Troeno's shack. Even though it's very dirty and in bad shape, Amtje doesn't care at all: "roemah Pak Troeno ini dikiranja roemah *Retna Permata* jang amat bagoes dan besar" (52). Amtje tells Pak Troeno that he's come to seek his help in attaining the love of Retna Permata. Pak Troeno says he can tell him how to do this, but only after twelve or one o'clock at night. While they wait for the correct hour, Pak Troeno sends a neighbor to go and get the supplies they'll need.

After twelve o'clock, Pak Troeno burns some incense and prays, then asks some questions about Retna Permata. He then instructs Amtje that in order to win Retna Permata's love, he must spread flowers near where Retna Permata passes by every day and spit betel juice near there as well. Amtje is overjoyed and pays the dukun a rupiah before he leaves.

Fatsal VIII opens the next day, on page 54. That evening, Amtje does just as "goeroenja" (55), Pak Troeno had advised. He then goes home and fantasizes about what life will be like with Retna Permata.

The following morning, Amtje waits for Retna Permata and her maid Kiprah at the market. When they arrive, Amtje follows, clears his throat, makes himself noticeable, expecting Retna Permata to fall all over him. When she doesn't, he asks Kiprah if Retna Permata didn't notice the flowers spread out near her house. Kiprah says she did, and in fact there was quite a to-do, as everyone in the house was wondering what in the world those flowers were doing there.

Fatsal IX begins on page 61 with the ringing of the alarm clock at five in the morning as Soebriga, Retna Permata and Kiprah wake up to set out for Retna Permata's home town. They take the train and it passes by forest, hills, jungle, and coast. At six in the evening they arrive in Cheribon, where they spend the night in the house of some friends of Retna Permata. At seven the next morning they set out in a carriage to Retna Permata's parents' house, arriving there at eleven. Everyone is very happy to see them.

In the back of the house, Kiprah is telling all about the glamorous life of Retna Permata and Soebriga – the touring about, the going to the cinema, seemingly non-stop. Listening to this is Retna Poernama. Retna Poernama is a pretty girl, about 16 or 17 years old, who looks almost the same as Retna Permata, and "ini satoe tanda bahwa ia soedara moeda dari *Retna Permata*" (65).

When Retna Poernama goes out and stands in the doorway to check out her guest, her older sister tells her to come over and sit with them. Retna Poernama, embarrassed, hides behind the door and smiles. Retna Permata calls her again, insisting that Retna Poernama come and meet tuan Soebriga. When she finally comes over, Retna Permata introduces the two to each other.

When Poernama comes out and sits by her sister, Soebriga is struck by how similar the two girls look. This makes "rasa hati *Soebriga* laksana prahoe digontjang-gontjangkan gelombang besar" (66).

At five, the three – Soebriga, Retna Permata and Retna Poernama – go sightseeing. The clothing of each one is very fancy. They have so much fun that they stay out even after dark. It takes wind and rain to finally send them home.

At about eight, the five – the two hosts and the three youngsters – are all sitting in the front room. Retna Permata offers Soebriga some brandy. After a couple of glasses of brandy Soebriga is quite drunk, it seems. He then becomes overwhelmed by the equally powerful "Electriciteit" (70) that comes from each of the girls. He must hold onto a book and breathe deeply to "mengobati penjakitnja" (70). But it only gets worse. The interest between Soebriga and Retna Poernama grows.

Later, they eat, and at eleven everyone retires to bed – Retna Permata and Soebriga in one bedroom, with the two hosts and Retna Poernama in another, and Kiprah with the hosts' servants in the back.

Fatsal X begins on page 72 the next morning, with Soebriga and Retna Poernama flirting in the garden. Retna Permata comes out and suggests that Soebriga cable his work and request five or seven more days off. Soebriga is powerless to resist. Once this is done, the three go sightseeing and shopping. In the market, they meet the aunt of Permata and Poernama. Seeing her with Soebriga, this aunt asks Permata if she's broken up with her Dutch tuan. Permata answers, "Tidak ! tapi. . . . . " (76). The aunt then invites the three to her house, farther up the mountain. Near there, there are some spring-fed public

bathing pools where they can swim and refresh themselves.

When they get to the house of Permata and Poernama's aunt and uncle, the aunt shows the three youths that they will be sleeping in the same room, Soebriga and Permata in one bed, and Poernama in the other. Later that evening, Retna Poernama goes out to the garden and reflects on the fact that she and Soebriga will be sleeping in the same room together. Soebriga comes out and joins her in the garden, and asks her if she knows what is going to happen later that night. Poernama says that if he knows, then of course she knows, too. After talking for a while, Soebriga tells her how much he wants her, then kisses her, "moeloet sama moeloet" (80). Later the two enter the house, but they are so distracted that they can think of nothing but each other. The servants debate whether or not Soebriga and Poernama have in fact already had sex.

At eleven, Permata and Poernama go to bed. Soebriga reads a book, but cannot concentrate. When the clock strikes twelve, he feels that "ini waktoe jang baik oentoek menjampaikan niatnja" (82). He checks to make sure Permata is asleep, then joins Poernama in her bed. "Didalam tempat tidoer ini kedoea pemoeda itoe melakoekan kehendaknja dengan tertib" (83). By two o'clock, "soedah sampe tjoekoep boeat kasih pengadjaran gadis jang baroe molai beladjar" (84), and Soebriga returns to his own bed to sleep next to Retna Permata. Overtired, Poernama cannot get to sleep until three thirty. But she gets up at five anyway and bathes to wash away her tiredness. So ends Fatsal X and Bagian II.

A SHORT SUMMARY OF *MATA GELAP* IN ENGLISH: *Volume III*

Bagian III and Fatsal XI begin on page 85. Everyone in the house is awake except

for Soebriga, "sebab pajah kebanjakan pakerdjaän mengadjari *Retna Poernama*" (85). Poernama is very quiet at the breakfast table. When Permata asks her what's wrong, Poernama responds that "ini hari memang koerang sehat" (86).

The aunt suggests they go to the baths. The aunt and Permata ride in one carriage and Soebriga and Poernama in the other. Soebriga and Poernama are very happy.

At the baths, there are three classes of bathing room. The four guests rent two first-class rooms. The four then go swimming. The aunt begins to feel cold and gets out. Then Permata goes to clean off, leaving Poernama and Soebriga alone. They then go to Poernama's empty bathroom where "Toean-toean pembatja tentoe sampai mengerti, apa jang telah kedjadian di dalam kamar itoe, barang kali ....." (91). Afterwards they join the other two and they all eat. The food is delicious.

Fatsal XII begins on page 91. It turns out that the nyai of the Dutch tuan van der Kiphok, who runs the baths, is a woman from Djocdja named Warningsih, an old friend of Retna Permata from the days when they both lived in Semarang. The two are overjoyed at their unexpected meeting. Because she wants to spend more time with her old friend, gambling at cards like they used to do, and since it would be "koerang enak" (94), both for Warningsih and for the four bathers, if they all stayed the night at Warningsih's house, the aunt, Soebriga, and Retna Poernama return to the aunt's house, while Retna Permata sleeps over at her friend's. Soebriga and Poernama are very happy with this arrangement, as now they will be able to "memenoehi kehendaknja dengan sampoerna" (94).

As Fatsal XIII begins on page 95, it is nine in the morning, and Warningsih accompanies Retna Permata to the house of Permata's aunt and uncle. Warningsih then leaves, and Permata goes to sleep, for she didn't sleep at all the night before, having stayed up all night at the house of her friend. While she's asleep, Soebriga and Poernama go sightseeing. Everyone who sees them as they tour around takes them not for "soedara ipar" (96), but for husband and wife. They even kiss in the street without the least compunction. It is as though Soebriga has forgotten all that Permata has done for him – a humble clerk, with a salary of no more than fifty rupiah – in the past six months. Permata would never have suspected that such a nice-seeming boy would, on his very first visit to her parents' house, be "brani main **Mata-Gelap,** berlakoe jang tiadā lajak" (97), and with her own sister, no less.

Permata's aunt wakes her up at one in the afternoon, tells her that Poernama and Soebriga have gone sightseeing, then relates to Permata what her friends have already told to her about Soebriga and Poernama's affair. The aunt then calls her servant in, so Permata can hear it first-hand. Permata is extremely distraught.

Fatsal XIV begins on page 99 with Soebriga and Poernama returning from their sightseeing trip[8]. From his cold reception, Soebriga guesses that his activities have been found out. Shortly after, they eat lunch. The mood at the table is tense. Permata is very angry. Soebriga tries to assuage her, being as sweet as he can. When he kisses her, right on the face, right there at the dinner table, right in front of Permata's aunt and uncle and little sister, "hilang sebagian besar meneselnja" (101) Retna Permata. The tension starts

[8] When Soebriga arrives back from his sightseeing trip with Retna Poernama, his shoes say, "Kijét ! kijét !" (99). The only other time we hear this odd sound in this book is from Amtje's shoes as he walks toward the Djohar market at the beginning of Bagian II.

to lift, and people at the table begin talking. When Soebriga offers Poernama some sambal, though, Permata can't bear it, and storms off to her room. Soebriga follows, trying to make it up to her. Retna Poernama then gets up, goes to her room, and begins packing, to return to her parents' house. No one inquires after her.

Soebriga and Permata wake up at ten till seven in the evening. They then bathe together, and Permata's aunt comments on how happy they sound. When they finish bathing and come out of the bathroom, Permata's aunt tells them that Poernama has left. Permata is unconcerned; Soebriga is disappointed. The two then put on nice clothes and go sightseeing.

As Fatsal XV begins, on page 106, it is six in the evening, and Retna Poernama has just arrived back at her parents' house. She pretends that nothing is bothering her, so that her parents will not suspect anything unusual.

After trying and trying to figure out some way to run off, she steals thirty rupiah from her mother's wardrobe, packs a suitcase, and orders one of the servants to bring a carriage to the house at two o'clock later that night, which she will then take to Cheribon.

She arrives at the Cheribon station at six in the morning. Soon after, she leaves on the train. She has only fifty rupiah – thirty that she stole from her mother and twenty rupiah of her own – so she chooses not to "naik diklas 2 Europeaan" (108), but rather to buy a cheaper ticket. She eats very little, is delighted by the passing landscape, and is amazed by the many languages she hears – "Soenda, Djawa dan Melajoe" (108). At six in the evening, she arrives in Semarang. Poernama is very confused; she's never seen anything like this. She has no idea where she'll even spend the night.

She sees a noble-looking young Javanese man in the second-class European car, and asks him for help. It turns out to be Soebriga's old friend, Soetjina. Struck by Poernama's beauty and by her resemblance to Retna Permata, Soetjina decides he must help her, even though he has no money. He finds a hotel room "boeat orang doea" (110), installs Poernama there, and leaves, telling her he'll be back at about nine.

He goes out, borrows three hundred rupiah of "oeang t.t.t." (111), that is, a very high-interest, informal, short-term loan, buys some food and beer, and comes back to the room. Soetjina tries to convince Poernama to stay in Semarang and not continue on to Soerabaja, as she plans to do the following day, telling her that he can look for a fine nobleman for her to marry, but she refuses, saying she would rather "djadi istrinja koeli di Soerabaja, dari pada djadi istrinja prijaji di Semarang sini" (114).

Soetjina and Poernama drink the beer and eat the food he's brought. He asks her if, for instance, there were someone who would follow her to Soerabaja, would she consent to marry that person? She says gladly. Soetjina's further efforts to convince Poernama to stay in Semarang just a little bit longer are in vain. He realizes he will have to ask for a week or two off of work, so he can go with her to Soerabaja.

Retna Poernama asks where the bathroom is, for she wants to bathe, even though it's eleven o'clock at night, because it's very hot in Semarang. After Soetjina takes her to the bathroom, he returns to the hotel room and wonders how he can support the two of them in Soerabaja on a clerk's small salary of twenty or twenty-five rupiah. He must figure out a way, though, for he cannot allow Retna Poernama to "djatoeh ditangan orang lain" (118).

Poernama comes back from her bath feeling refreshed and wearing only a slip that

leaves her arms and lower legs uncovered. She looks very beautiful to Soetjina. He is overcome with sexual desire for her. He gets up to lock the door. His lust is so strong that he decides that if Poernama "tiada soeka menoeroet apa jang koemaksoedkan, soedah tentoe *Retna Poernama* koepaksa" (119).

It is eleven thirty. The two make small-talk for a time. The last sentence of the book is: "Poekoel doea belas malam kedoeanja molai melakoekan apa jang dimaksoedkan toean *Soetjina*" (120). So ends Fatsal XV, Bagian III, and *Mata Gelap*.

(PASSAGE ONE)

WHAT MEANS MAKSUD

In Bagian II, Fatsal IX, Soebriga and Permata arrive at her parents' house. After lunch and an afternoon nap, at five o'clock, Soebriga, Permata, and Poernama get dressed in very fine clothes, and go out sightseeing around the town. For a goodly spell, they walk around, joking and laughing, looking strikingly happy and beautiful. Time is of no consequence to them. They only want to continue this exquisite enjoyment. At this point we read the following passage.

"Matahari soedah moelai mejemboenikan sinarnja, itoelah kasih mengarti soepaja ketiga pelantjong lekas poelang, sebab waktoe ini telah habis temponja mata-hari bersinar.

Toean-toean pembatja boekan soedah mengarti, bagaimana keada'annja di doenia kalau sinar mata-hari bersemboenji gelap boekan ? Tetapi ketiga pemoeda pelantjong itoe beloem mengarti agaknja, bila kelinjapan mata-hari itoe bermaksoek menjoeroeh poelang kepadanja. Meski keada'an ini waktoe soedah gelap, tetapi mareka itoe misih dapat pertoeloengan sinarnja lentera-gasoliene jang berdjedjer oeroet djalan besar. Inilah

seolah-olah obat jang menjemboehkan kesoesahan mareka itoe dari sebab kehabisan sinar mata-hari.

Ta lama poela datang angin menempoeh mareka itoe seolah-olah gelombang besar soearanja. Ini poen boeat ketiga pelantjong tiada mengapa, sebab masing-masing soedah bawa mantol oentoek menahan kekoeatan angin jang terlaloe dingin itoe. Kedoea sehabat mata-hari dan angin itoe agaknja sia-sia sadja penggagoeannja, dari itoe kedoea sobat itoe mentjari daja oepaja soepaja ketiga pemoeda itoe lekas poelang djangan terlaloe lama berketawa-ketawa'an sepandjang djalan. Dengan segera kedoea sahabat itoe minta pertoeloengan kepada hoedjan, soepaja soeka mentjoerahkan airnja didalam kota ini. Akan memenoehi perminta'an kedoea sehabatnja itoe, sekonjong-konjong datang air dari atas.

Terpaksa *Retna Permata*, *Retna Poernama* dan *Soebriga* mentjari perlindoengan jang bisa melawan moesoehnja itoe, laloe mareka itoe bernaoeng dibawah pohon-beringin sambil marahi kepada moesoehnja. Oleh karena soedah ada setengah djam hoedjan ini mentjoerahkan airnja datang angin poela seakan-akan memberi nasehat kepada hoedjan soepaja berhenti, sebab ketiga pelantjong itoe roepa-roepanja terlaloe soesah. Apabila hoedjan dan angin soedah hampir linjap, dengan segera mareka itoe berdjalan setjepat-tjepatnja poelang keroemah. „Na ! tahoe rasa kau orang sekarang.'' Begitoe kata hoedjan, barangkali teroes melinjapkan airnja" (68 – 69).

Were we to restate this passage in English, we might read that the sun had already begun to hide his rays away, and this meant that the three sightseers should quickly return home, for now had ended the time for the sun to shine.

Now you, my esteemed readers, surely know what it's like in the world when the

rays of the sun are hidden away into darkness, don't you? But our three sightseers do not understand, it would seem, that the disappearance of the sun means for them to run along home. Even though it was dark now, they continued to get help from the shining of the gasoline streetlights that were all lined up in a row on the main street, lights that were like medicine, healing the difficulties caused by the sunshine's ending.

Not long after, the wind arrived and blew so hard, it sounded like giant rolling waves. Even this was no problem for the three sightseers, for they had each brought a jacket to protect themselves from that exceedingly cold gusting. It seemed that the efforts of these two friends, the sun and the wind, were in vain, and so they tried to figure out some way they could make these three youngsters return home quickly, not laughing and carrying on all along the way.

Before long, these two friends asked for help from the rain, so that she would spill down her water on the town. Fulfilling the two friends' request, all of a sudden, water came down from above.

Retna Permata, Retna Poernama, and Soebriga were forced to look for some protection against these adversaries of theirs, and so they sheltered under a banyan tree while they vented their anger at those who had done this. Since it was already a half an hour that the rain had been pouring down her water, the wind then arrived, as though suggesting that the rain stop, for it appeared that the three sightseers had had enough. When the rain and wind were almost finished, the three youths quickly went home, just as fast as they could. "So! I hope you've learned your lesson!": that's what the rain said, as she was stopping to rain.

Matahari sudah mulai menyembunyikan sinarnya, we read. The sun has begun to hide his[9] rays, and this signals that the three youngsters should go home. We imagine the sun putting his rays away in a box, not unlike the dalang at the end of a night's performance. This action by the matahari "kasih mengarti" to the three sightseers – lets them know, informs them – that it is time to go home. The sun's hiding of his rays, as though putting them away in a box, is meant as a sign, a well-meaning, cheerful communication, with the expectation that these intemperate youths will understand.

The reason that the sun is putting his rays away and thereby informing the three pelancong that it is time to go home is not the rotation of the earth, or even the sun's own volition. Rather, it is "sebab waktoe ini telah habis temponja mata-hari bersinar". Because now had ended the time for the sun to shine. Daylight, or daytime, is here an event, like a stage play, for example, or a wayang kulit performance. It has its allotted time, and at the end of this time, the matahari's "performance" is over. At this point, those who have come out to enjoy this performance by the actors, or the dalang, or the matahari, should properly return home.

After this short paragraph that lays out what the sun is doing, and what this action signifies, comes one of the strangest paragraphs in the book. It begins with the narrator turning to the readers, addressing them directly. "Toean-toean pembatja boekan soedah

[9] I have chosen the masculine personal possessive pronoun in English – "his" – to denote the sun. This is a crucial problem in English. Indonesian's "personal possessive pronoun" is the suffix "-nya" and the "personal pronoun" is "dia" (keeping in mind, of course, that such categories as different types of pronouns are *themselves* English-language constructions, and therefore, in a more or less way, actually inapplicable to Indonesian-language words). In English, third person singular personal possessive pronouns are three: "his", "her", and "its". To use "its" is practically to say that the corresponding noun is not alive. To use "his" or "her" is practically to say that the corresponding noun is alive, and is either male or female. In English then, with these pronouns, we draw a very clear line between the alive and the not alive, and furthermore, claim that all alive things must fall on one or the other side of the line that divides male and female. As it seems very clear to me that the sun is alive in this passage, I will assign it an English pronoun for alive nouns. As to the sun's gender – which, in English, as an alive entity, it must have – I use my own judgment.

mengarti bagaimana keada'annja di doenia kalau sinar mata-hari bersemboenji gelap boekan ?" The narrator checks with the readers, asking the astounding question of whether or not they understand the condition of the world, what it's like in the world, when the rays of the sun hide and are hidden in the dark. The narrator – albeit rhetorically so – is seeking our confirmation that we do indeed understand what it's like when the world is dark. The reason he must seek this confirmation is that it would appear that these three sightseeing youths in fact *do not* understand. What they don't understand is that "kelinjapan mata-hari itoe bermaksoek menjoeroeh poelang kepadanja", that the disappearance of the sun's rays is meant to send them home.

Bermaksoek. I believe what is meant here is bermaksoed. Bermaksud. The best English equivalent of this word is "means", or "to mean", in particular as understood in two ways: to mean, as in, "to signify", and to mean, as in "to intend". In English, as I see it, to mean is rather more weighted toward denoting signification than intention. That is, when we use the verb "to mean" in English, we are more often talking about what a word (or something else) "means" or signifies or represents, than about what someone (or something else) "means" or intends or wants to do. In Indonesian, however, my understanding of the semantic field of "bermaksud" is much more evenly distributed between intention and signification. Compared to means, bermaksud shimmers between those two directions of maksudnya sendiri (of its own signification, its own intention) more evenly, more violently, more tantalizingly. In so doing, the Indonesian maksud suggests, perhaps, more strongly than the English means, a significant, meaningful truth or condition of language. Namely, bermaksud reveals the equivalence of signification and intention; denotation and desire; to represent and to want. Such is the power of

Indonesian that, considering the directions of maksud, one may wonder whether "want" is not in fact a linguistic construction.

The first vocal sound every human makes is a cry, an expression that something is not right, that something is missing: an expression of want. With time, that cry becomes quieter and more developed and complex; eventually, it becomes words. All subsequent language is perhaps merely a refinement of our first, new-born cries: our first rough expressions, now less rough, but still pure intention.

In the "Introduction" to *Beyond Translation*, A. L. Becker writes that "seriously meditating Buddhist monks in Burma (and in America) have told me that separating words from experience is the hardest thing for a meditator to do. Very few individuals ever achieve it, they say. I believe them" (14). If language is want, then to eliminate language is to eliminate want. Many people, Buddhists and others, believe that to eliminate want is to eliminate suffering. No wonder then, that for many people, one of the highest goals of meditation is the escape from language, the turning-off of the inner newsreel, that interior voice that narrates everything, replays the past, preplays the future. To signify is to intend. Thus signifying nothing may be to escape the suffering of intentions.

Once a non-linguistic entity, such as, for example, that very bright star that illuminates our daytime sky, is become a linguistic entity, it now *bermaksud*. It now *means*. It has signification and it has intention. This then introduces the problem of what is alive. In English, "it" is not alive, and if a noun is alive, the noun will be he or she, will have a sex. In Indonesian, male and female, inanimate and animate, are "dia". One then

wonders whether the ostensibly scientific category of the "living" might not depend largely on the language that (the non-English nearest-equivalent word of the English word) "living" is defined in, when deciding which entities, exactly, might be correctly termed "alive".

Our solar system was recently reduced from nine planets to eight. Not as the result of some cataclysmic cosmic event, but because of a shift in definitions, a realignment of languages. Perhaps, in light of how "planet" may be most satisfyingly defined in other languages spoken on this Earth, there are twelve planets in the solar system, or six, or ten thousand. Perhaps, were the arbiters of scientific truth on this planet languages other than the ones that currently enjoy that position, the field of biology would include the study of languages. Of the sun. Of fire.

The significant and the intentional play, in Mas Marco's maksud, can produce pleasure again and again throughout this text. Shortly after the three sightseers finally return home, on page 70, still in Fatsal IX, Soebriga has lost his head from desire for Poernama. When Poernama offers him some coffee, this is the response: "Adoeh ! ! hantjoer ! ! rasa hati *Soebriga* serta mendengarkan perkataän jang amat merdoe itoe keloear dari moeloet si tjantik *Retna Poernama*. „Ja ! adinda !'' Sahoet *Soebriga* dengan bermoeka merah, sebab darah naik keatas tanda kesoekaän. „Apa sadja jang adinda kasihkan kepadakoe, tentoe koetrima kedoea belah tangan disertai gedang hati dan tiada nanti kandamoe meloepakan oetjapan : „M e r c i !'''' (70 – 71).

This unbridled outpouring from Soebriga affects Poernama "sebagai peloeroe jang mengenainja, dan seloeroeh boeloe badannja berdiri bersama-sama keloearnja peloeh (kringat)" (71). Yet, though she is powerfully affected by these words, they

confuse her, too. And what is she confused about? Their maksud. "Apakah maksoednja perkata'an kekanda *Soebriga* itoe ? Baikkah ? Atau boesoekkah ?" (71). Retna Poernama is still young, still a beginner, and the narrator tells us that "soedah mestinja bila itoe *Retna Poernama* beloem mengarti perkata'an jang mengandoeng banjak maksoed, sebab boleh djadi beloem tahoe adjar atau . . . . . ? of . . . . . ?" (71)

Retna Poernama does not yet understand exactly the signification, or the intention – the maksud – contained in what Soebriga tells her. She does not even know whether that signification and intention is good or bad. Note that the narrator does not say either. Consistent with the tone of the rest of this novel, we see here one aspect of what makes this, in my opinion, Mas Marco's finest book. The narrator does not tell us whether Soebriga's maksud is good or bad. Unlike in *Student Hijo*, *Rasa Merdika*, and indeed probably most novels ever written, in *Mata Gelap*, good and bad are not so easily identifiable. In *Mata Gelap*, Mas Marco tries to break out of the textual world of his novel, into the non-linguistic world, what is often called the "real world", or "nature". In this world, sometimes good people sometimes do sometimes bad things (or rather, people do things), cute and harmless animals are killed and eaten by sleek and deadly ones, and good and bad are never simple and straightforward, and are sometimes unknowable.

Mata Gelap, then, is a thoroughly modern work, similar in priorities and tone to works being written at the same time by Mas Marco's contemporaries elsewhere in the world. If we heed Rudolf Mrázek's assertion in *Engineers of Happy Land*, that the avant-garde in the colonies is often ahead of the avant-garde in the metropoles, *Mata Gelap* begins to make even more sense. Published in 1914, it in some ways is existentialist (though, being playfully bouncy and rambunctious, it is rather *joyfully* so) in its struggle

to escape into a more non-linguistic (or newly-linguistic) world not as bound by the traditional morality of traditional linguistic texts. Insofar as it is existentialist, it is *decades* ahead of the global "avant-garde".

Retna Poernama does not know the meaning that Soebriga's words carry within them, the much meaning that his words "mengandoeng", an Indonesian term that itself carries within it connotations of pregnancy, and thereby also sex, fertility, and inner life. She does not know if the maksud of Soebriga's words be good or bad. And while the narrator does not tell us, the readers, whether Soebriga's maksud is busuk or baik, he does say that the maksud these words mengandung is banyak. That is, Soebriga's words are *full* of *meaning*.

Maksud appears again, both significant and intentional, near the end of the novel, in a hotel room in Semarang, between Soetjina and Retna Poernama. Soetjina very much wants Poernama to stay in Semarang, and not leave immediately for Soerabaja. Finally relenting before the strength of the woman's wishes – as the men so often do in this story – Soetjina asks her whether, if a man wanted to accompany her to Soerabaja, she would like to become that man's wife. She says that gladly she would, but adds coquettishly that such a thing would of course be impossible, for she is so ugly and poor that surely no man would ever want to come with her.

"„Hem !'' batoek *Soetjina* tanda kesoekaän hati, pahanja jang kanan ditoempangkan jang kiri, tangannja jang kanan ditoempangkan sandaran korsinja, laloe berkata : „O ! itoe tiada barang moestail toean, barangkali. . . . .'' Akan melandjoetkan perkataän „barangkali'' itoe, *Soetjina* diam sebentar memikirkan dan memoetar-moetar koemisnja jang beloem keloear. Itoelah semoea orang bisa mengerti bahwa teroesnja

perkataän „barangkali'' jang tiada dioelangkan, mengandoeng maksoed banjak" (115). Here, even barangkali – perhaps, maybe – contains within it tremendous maksud. Oh, that is not impossible, says Soetjina, maybe . . . just perhaps . . .

. . . Sex. Moving to Soerabaja. Getting married. Becoming a pimp to pay back a three hundred rupiah high-interest informal loan. Becoming a prostitute in order to be able to eat. Finding a rich Dutch tuan and becoming his nyai. Rape. What does this maybe intend? What does this perhaps signify? A lot: banyak.

Shortly thereafter in that same hotel room, Soetjina again evades meaningfully. Looking at the time, Poernama asks Soetjina whether he wants to go home. "Sampai lama *Soetjina* memikirkan betapa ia mesti menjahoet pertanjaännja *Retna Poernama*. „Soedah poekoel 11'' kata *Soetjina* mengandoeng banjak maksoed" (117). The nice thing about this passage is that Soetjina's words, "soedah poekoel 11" contain within them much meaning. At the same time, *Soetjina himself* can be understood to "mengandoeng banjak maksoed" here. In this paragraph, as they both carry within them much meaning, both Soetjina and his words widely represent; here also, both Soetjina and his words strongly intend.

The maksud of a person, as opposed to the maksud of words, is even more powerfully stressed two pages later when, having worked himself into a lustful frenzy over Retna Poernama, Soetjina decides that "kalau dia tiada soeka menoeroet apa jang koemaksoedkan, soedah tentoe *Retna Poernama* koepaksa" (119). Here, we see a significant semantic shift toward intention in the use of "maksoed": I understand Soetjina to be *mostly* saying that if Poernama doesn't follow what he intends, that he will force her to. At the same time, the denotation "to represent" may still have been very much

intended in this passage: if Poernama follows what Soetjina "represents" to her – a generous, helpful, nice guy, a handsome and intelligent young nobleman, a friend of Soebriga's – he will not have to force her. If she does not follow – understand, agree with, menurut – this representation, he will. Signifying and intending, words mean. Intending, signifying, so do people.

MODERN TECHNOLOGY

That our three "pemoeda pelantjong" do not understand the maksud of the disappearance of the sun, that they do not follow the sun's maksud and go home, is not entirely their fault, it would seem. For "Meski keada'an ini waktoe soedah gelap, tetapi mareka itoe misih dapat pertoeloengan sinarnja lentera-gasoliene jang berdjedjer oeroet djalan besar. Inilah seolah-olah obat jang menjemboehkan kesoesahan mareka itoe dari sebab kehabisan sinar mata-hari". They get help, these three naughty youths, assistance that allows them to ignore the well-meaning maksud of the matahari. This assistance is provided by the gasoline lanterns that line the street.

These lanterns do not have as much agency as the sun has, but they certainly have some, for they are a source of help, and not only that, but they are also a source of order. They "berdjedjer oeroet djalan besar", are lined up neatly in a row, keeping vigil along the street. They impose a systematic logic, straight and clear, on the formless and black, chaotic night. Like medicine, says the narrator, these lanterns "menjemboehkan kesoesahan mareka itoe dari sebab kehabisan sinar mata-hari". These lamps are like medicine, a medicine that heals the loss of the rays of the sun.

Obat, medicine, is something artificial, something man-made, that treats a

(usually in some way) natural affliction, be that affliction disease or nighttime darkness. Obat is something humans make to defeat – however temporarily or provisionally – nature. Obat is technology, is one of the most powerful tools that humans have, is perhaps the best (though again, still provisional) answer our species has yet encountered for the problem of death. The obat in this scene is the gasoline lanterns lined up in a row: another technological response to two other scary problems quite related to the problem of death: chaos and darkness.

In the works of Mas Marco, we see that this is a writer who is fascinated by technology, and by the novelty and power technology brings. The most striking and consistent manifestation of technology in Mas Marco's works is the train. The train brings Soebriga and Retna Permata from Semarang to Cheribon, brings Poernama from Cheribon to Semarang; the train carries Hijo from place to place in Holland, in *Student Hijo*; the train is what makes Soedjanmos's life-altering sojourns possible in *Rasa Merdika*; the train is a central vehicle of movement in Mas Marco's poem, "Dari negri Blanda". Indeed, travel is absolutely crucial to everything that happens in Mas Marco's narratives, and especially train travel. His characters must cross over from where they first were to some other physical place, must surpass the locations and conditions in which they were born or might expect to normally be. Technology is the obat that helps them surpass these conditions: technology allows them to overtake the slow nature of walking with the fast, the powerful, the glamorous train; technology allows them to stay out late, by shattering night's natural darkness with gasoline-lantern light.

But technology in *Mata Gelap* does not only lead to new ways of looking at the

world; it also allows old ways of being to continue, and even be expanded. It was not uncommon for members of the traditional Javanese nobility to make "tours" of their lands, on which tours they would often have sex with local village women. We can understand Soebriga to be doing something in many ways similar. Although we cannot be certain in the absence of the missing Volume I, it seems that our Soebriga is not a member of the aristocracy. Nevertheless, as is often the case for adult males in early twentieth-century Java, he is addressed as "lord": "toean". He travels from his home metropolis to the remote and rural, provincial small town, there to deflower a young virgin. And to get there, instead of a carriage or palanquin, he is carried by the train. Thus tuan Soebriga is truly a satria of his age.

Soebriga, Poernama, and Permata are repeatedly described as "pelantjong" in this novel. As pelancong, their principal activities are melancong, which is, by definition, what a pelancong does, and berplesir, from the Dutch for pleasure: to "pleasure", or walk for pleasure, or to go on pleasure-tours. The closest I can come in English to rendering pelancong is "sightseer", or "tourist", but these words are not quite right. A sightseer, for me, is someone who goes out to see sights, well-known places, like Borobudur near Magelang, or the Jiffy cake-mix factory in Chelsea. A tourist is somewhat similar. Maybe they're not going to see certain sights; maybe they're only relaxing. But a tourist is someone who is traveling somewhat far from home, probably with one or more suitcases, for a few days or a few weeks or maybe even a few months, and probably staying in some kind of hotel. Also, they are on vacation.

The pelancong in *Mata Gelap* are not really sightseers or tourists. When they go

out, be it in Semarang or in Poernama's neck of the woods, they are going out in regular towns that they already know, perhaps quite well. They are not going to see any particularly famous sights; they are going only to enjoy the beauty and keramaian of life as it is daily lived, and daily looks, in these places. They richly enjoy these simple pleasures, and do not want them to end just because the sun has set. Consequently, they are great friends of streetlights. It seems to me the non-Indonesian word that best conveys "pelancong" is the French word "flâneur". And of course, to recognize that Mas Marco's three main characters in this novel are flâneurs[10] is to associate Mas Marco with one of the preeminent biographers of flânerie, Walter Benjamin.

Based on their interest in flâneurs, and their sympathetic portrayal of them, I believe that both Mas Marco and Monsieur Benjamin were probably flâneurs themselves, to some extent. Like Mas Marco, who was only two years his senior, Mister Walter seems to have been fascinated with life as it is, as it exists. He was an observer, a stroller about, a deep drinker-in of his surroundings, as a flâneur. Yet, because he so loved the world, Marco, like Walter, also hated the world as it is, and wanted very much for the world to be different – more just, more beautiful, less cruel. This perhaps is one reason why both were also politically committed writers, men of conscience, which often meant, at that time, communists.

THE BAD COMMUNIST

We can see Benjamin's commitment to communism manifest itself in his belief that much that is positive may result with the withering of the aura that accompanies the

[10] Two of which, we will note, are women, supposedly rather an anomaly for flâneurs. (Could the possibility of Permata and Poernama being flâneurs (flâneuses?) have something to do with their pronominal designation as "dia", equivalent to that of Soebriga?)

mechanical reproducibility of art. It is perhaps ironic that Benjamin, who seems also to have been something of a mystic, was also something of a demystifier. As W. J. T. Mitchell shows however, to be an iconoclast is, by definition, to be an iconophile, merely an iconophile who worships different icons. We see Mas Marco's own demystification project in the episode of Amtje's visit to the dukun. For all his supposed power, Pak Troeno lives in a crappy old shack and makes his living as a fisherman. The narrator refers to Amtje as "si gila" (54) – the wacko – when Amtje is earnestly imbibing Pak Troeno's magic-spell instructions. Most damningly, Pak Troeno's services simply don't work. Amtje spreads out the flowers by Permata's house and spits betel juice there, too, just as Pak Troeno directed, but the only effect is for Permata's entire household to wonder who the heck left those flowers out there.

Yet, like Benjamin, Mas Marco is also vulnerable to criticism for being a very bourgeois communist. For while, from the perspective of communist orthodoxy, he is to be hailed for his progressiveness in smashing the dukun's aura to smithereens, *Mata Gelap* is a very un-communist book. In fact, we could almost call it anti-communist.

First of all, this is a novel of consumption. The characters in *Mata Gelap* seem to buy whatever they feel like, spending money as though it were water. On a trip to the market in Poernama's town, Soebriga, Permata and Poernama, "masoek ditempat orang-orang pendjoeal boeah-boeah. Disini *Retna Poernama* bertanja kepada toean *Soebriga*, boeah apa jang disoekainja nanti dia akan beli. Tetapi toean *Soebriga* tiada bisa pilih satoe-satoenja, lebih baik seoroehan beli sadja apa jang dikehendaki *Retna Poernama*. Dari itoe *Retna Poernama* laloe soeroehan boedaknja jang toeroet beli semoea boeah-boeahan jang didjoeal disitoe" (75). Can't decide on what kind of fruit to buy? Buy them

all! Materialist consumption and shopping are not just permissible in *Mata Gelap*; they are positive, fun, glamorous activities[11].

One of the most striking recurrent motifs of this book is its descriptions of clothing. Time and again, Mas Marco treats us to lavish, detailed accounts of exactly what his characters are wearing. And what they are wearing is almost always very fancy. The following is one description, in three paragraphs, of exactly what the three young pelancong wear the first time they go out in Poernama's town.

"Toean *Soebriga* berkain kepala batik pinggir tjara Solo, memakai kemedja Djepang disertai dasi jang melilit dilehernja, djas blau dari kain panas boekakan, berkain keloearan Djogja, bersepatoe hitam berkilat-kilat.

Retna Permata memakai selop jang blakangnja lebih tinggi dari pada jang moeka, saroeng hidjau berkembang-kembang, kebaja soetera hidjau moeda bergaris merah moeda, kondainja dibikin keatas sedikit dan bersoenting boenga-roos.

Retna Poernama bersepatoe koening berkilau-kilauan, kain latar poetih keloearan Solo, berkebaja koening potongan Bandoeng, memakai dames-horloge tergantoeng di kebajanja, berkaloeng mas 14 karat, sangkoelnja sebagai biasa dan bertoesoek-kondai mas bermata intan" (67).

And these three youths are not going out to the opera, or to a fancy and expensive restaurant, but instead, as the following paragraph tells us, "Ketiga pemoeda ini keloear dari roemah berdjalan bersama-sama sepandjang djalan raja melihatkan keadaän didalam kota pegoenoengan ini" (67). They're just going out to see what it's like in this mountain town. They will no doubt see and meet farmers and traders in this rural setting whose incomes over the course of their entire lives may not equal the value of the jewelry and

[11] And who helps with the shopping? Why, our loyal and funny servants, of course!

clothes worn on the bodies of these three lucky youths. And yet this ostentatious display is portrayed in all innocence, and is actually glorified. Conspicuous wealth is, in fact, valued as a good in itself. At this point in the narrative, Soebriga has just met Retna Poernama and is already somewhat interested. Correspondingly, it is she who is most fabulously decked-out, with a lady's pocket watch hanging from her kebaya, a fourteen-carat gold necklace, and a gold-and-diamond hair pin.

The next day, when they go out to the market, Poernama's clothing is described even more extensively, while of Permata we are told only that "maski dia berpakaian sebagai biasa, djoega misih manis tertampak dimata" (74). At this point, Soebriga is already very taken with Poernama. It is difficult to say whether she is described more impressively because of Soebriga's interest in her, or whether Soebriga is interested in her precisely because she dresses more brilliantly. Either way, we see here that the more fancily and expensively one dresses, the more sexual success and happiness one enjoys.

Besides these two passages, there are a number of other instances in *Mata Gelap* in which Mas Marco and his characters display extraordinary concern for fine, fine clothes and accessories. There is the one striking passage, however, in which a character pays no attention to fine clothes, but rather ignores them totally. On the penultimate page of the book, Soetjina and Poernama are in their hotel room with her suitcase full of expensive outfits. She has just returned from a refreshing bath, and Soetjina is carried away by lustful fantasizing about her. "Selamanja *Soetjina* memikirkan sebagai diatas, tiada engat lagi bahwa *Retna Poernama* itoe tempo baroe pakaian, dan apa jang dipaikainja *Soetjina* tiada memikirkan" (119). This short paragraph immediately follows Soetjina's declaration that he will force Poernama if she is not willing to have sex with

him. He is so crazed that he has now decided on rape, if necessary. He is so completely out of his mind, Marco shows us, that he can actually ignore fine clothes.

We can read this last scene another way, too though. Perhaps Soetjina, after being driven mad with lust, actually *can* be genuinely distracted by Poernama's outfit. Maybe when he says "Wach ! itoe badjoe krawangan baik sekali" (120), this is not a mere play to get closer to Poernama than he ever has before, and touch the silk clothing she is wearing. Perhaps it is genuine interest in her kebaya. If this is the case, then we have a powerful force to countervail Soetjina's fetishizing of Poernama's calves and the mata gelap that engenders. What we now have is a fetishizing of her clothing, that is, of a purchasable commodity, a commodity that Poernama apparently now wants to know if she can acquire here in Semarang. This reading raises for us further questions. If Mas Marco is portraying Soetjina and Poernama as engaging in Marxist commodity fetishism, can we understand this as a way out of lustful mata gelap, and all that mata gelap brings with it, or is this merely a new kind of greedy mata gelap? No longer crazy "to have" someone by having sex with them, instead one now may be crazy "to have" some thing by purchasing it. The body goes from craving to touch and thereby have other desirable bodies, to craving to have and touch other desirable things.

Not only do these youngsters put fine and expensive things on their bodies, they put their bodies in fine and expensive places. The most extravagant of these places are the baths. At the baths, there are two large buildings. One of these is for bathing, and is divided into twelve bathing rooms: four first-class, four second-class, and four third-class.

In the first-class bathrooms, "semoea djobinja dari marmer, didalamnja ada tersedia katja besar, satoe bangkoe jang boleh didoedoeki 4 orang, 4 sampiran kain dan djoega didapat satoe lemari ketjil jang berisi 6 tjelana mandi boeat orang lelaki, 6 boeat orang prampoean, 6 handdoek, satoe saboen Mouson, 6 sikat gigi dan gosoknja. Ini kamar lebarnja 5 meter pesagi, jang ⅔ dibikin koelam tempat mandi itoe, diatasnja ada tiga krank (pantjoeran) jang mengeloearkan air amat djernih dari boekit jang diatasnja" (89 – 90). Reading further, we find that second-class rooms are the same as first-class, but not quite as nice, and third-class rooms are also good, "tetapi oentoek marika itoe koerang patoet, sebab terlaloe merendahkan diri kalau menilik roepa moeka dan pakaiannja dia orang amat tjakap-tjakap itoe" (90). That is, the third-class rooms are okay, but not fit really for such attractive people, in such exquisite clothes, as our friends.

Above, we read a meticulously detailed, almost loving inventory of the contents and dimensions of these rooms. Of course Permata's aunt rents two of the *first-class* bathing rooms. Not only are these three youths and one aunt sufficiently wealthy to have free time and discretionary money (in 1914 Java!) to pay for these baths; what's more, nothing but first-class will do, for these, verily, are the beautiful people.

Mas Marco was surely very concerned with mountain bath retreats, for, like trains, these places appear in all three of his novels that I have read. It is perhaps not surprising that such an inherently elitist vacation-spot would be visited by characters in *Mata Gelap*, a novel which is in many ways radically un-communist. What is more surprising is that characters in the far more orthodox and earnestly communist *Student Hijo* would go to them, and that, what's more, even the most thoroughly political and communist of his books, *Rasa Merdika* presents its protagonists visiting them as well.

The situation of these well-off characters lounging about enjoying themselves in one of the most upper-class environments imaginable reminds one of characters created by another socially conscious writer, Leo Tolstoy, particularly those in his novel *Anna Karenina*. Characters in that book were themselves aristocrats, wore beautiful clothes, and seemed to spend a good portion of their time at spas around Europe. There they refreshed themselves, and enjoyed being beautiful and civilized people, just like Soebriga, Retna Permata, and Retna Poernama. Tolstoy[12] may have been a source of inspiration for Mas Marco, as he was for other socially-concerned thinkers of Marco's time, such as V. I. Lenin, and this is not only indicated by the conspicuous role of moving trains in the novels of both Marco and Leo. In *Student Hijo* and *Rasa Merdika*, people concerned with the plight of the worker often enjoyed expensive spas, too, and leftists often behaved (or in fact *were*) identical to members of the bourgeoisie, if not indeed the aristocracy.

Another possible reason for mountain bathing spots to be so common in Mas Marco's work may be not only Tolstoyan, but also traditionally Javanese – Yasadipuran, we might say. These spas up in the mountains, in which Mas Marco's protagonists recreate themselves, are a kind of modern retreat, a place for a new kind of pertapaan, or meditation. In these Javanese spaces, one removes oneself from the world, from the city, to a protected space, be it a cave or a bath-house. Within this space, one is sheltered by nature in its beautiful and friendly aspect (and not the wild and dangerous nature found in mata that are gelap with passion). Here, the young, modern satria of twentieth-century Java find a cool and relaxing nature that fosters love.

The characters in Mas Marco's novels – those in *Mata Gelap*, as well as those in

[12] Indeed, Mas Marco's poem, "Tabeat Apakah?!" is an exploration of Count Lev Tolstoy's ideas and writing, and also compares these ideas with those of Radèn Ngabéhi Ronggawarsita, in particular his *Serat Kala Tidha*.

his more consistently communistic books – are a kind of satria. Takashi Shiraishi claims that Mas Marco, being a warrior, himself was a satria, too. That Mas Marco, a some-time communist, would be a satria and spend so much time portraying them seems rather inconsistent. That Benjamin, a student and practitioner of word-magic, would devote so much time and effort to demystification of metaphysical ideas like aura seems inconsistent as well. Such was – and still is – the dilemma of the artist who seeks to change the world for the better: how to create comprehensible art in an unjust context that does not also reproduce that context and its injustice. It is a hard dilemma, maybe insoluble. Consistency here may be impossible to achieve. If, though, we follow Ralph Waldo Emerson that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds", then we will not, perhaps, be surprised – or even disappointed – at Mas Marco's inconsistency.

NATURE OF POWER

As his characters' visits to mountain bath retreats testify, Mas Marco, by being a technophile, is not therefore also averse to green nature. Perhaps due to the lack of a clear line between animate and inanimate pronouns in Indonesian, or perhaps for other reasons, Mas Marco portrays a world in *Mata Gelap* that is full of life. And while many of those living things work against people, the contest is a friendly one. After we learn that the three pelancong receive help from the medicinal, modern light of the gasoline lanterns, before long, "datang angin menempoeh mareka itoe seolah-olah gelombang besar soearanja. Ini poen boeat ketiga pelantjong tiada mengapa, sebab masing-masing soedah bawa mantol oentoek menahan kekoeatan angin jang terlaloe dingin itoe. Kedoea sehabat mata-hari dan angin itoe agaknja sia-sia sadja penggagoeannja, dari itoe kedoea sobat itoe

mentjari daja oepaja soepaja ketiga pemoeda itoe lekas poelang djangan terlaloe lama berketawa-ketawa'an sepandjang djalan. Dengan segera kedoea sahabat itoe minta pertoeloengan kepada hoedjan, soepaja soeka mentjoerahkan airnja didalam kota ini. Akan memenoehi perminta'an kedoea sehabatnja itoe, sekonjong-konjong datang air dari atas".

After the arrival of this water from above, Permata, Poernama and Soebriga are forced to take shelter under a banyan tree. Because it had already been raining for half an hour, "datang angin poela seakan-akan memberi nasehat kepada hoedjan soepaja berhenti, sebab ketiga pelantjong itoe roepa-roepanja terlaloe soesah. Apabila hoedjan dan angin soedah hampir linjap, dengan segera mareka itoe berdjalan setjepat-tjepatnja poelang keroemah. „Na ! tahoe rasa kau orang sekarang.'' Begitoe kata hoedjan, barangkali teroes melinjapkan airnja".

Mas Marco does not present a direct and acrimonious opposition between humans and nature. Humans and natural phenomena may have conflicting goals, and natural phenomena will try to bend humans to do what the natural phenomena feel is right. But humans also have certain tools of civilization at their disposal – gas lanterns, coats, and the like. Nature by no means wants to destroy humans, but merely wants them to do what is proper, which in this case means to go home when it's time. For this reason, when a half-hour of rain looks like it's making things terlalu susah, too difficult, for the three pelancong, the wind arrives and advises for the rain to stop. There is something parental, or perhaps more appropriately, something of the attitude of a benevolent older sibling in the actions of the rain and the wind. They act with a certain kakandaan. In this way, they are like benevolent, immanent gods, or spirits. They enforce traditional values, like that

you have to go home after dark. They do not annihilate their charges, but only nudge them, fairly gently, in the direction they ought to go. And we note that these elements *can* be defied, especially by satria, as they have been by Odysseus, for example, or Arjuna, or Soebriga, Permata, and Poernama.

In this passage, we may be seeing some of the abangan shining through in the writing of Mas Marco. Here, the "lion from Tjepu" presents the natural forces in his writing as neither dead, scientific phenomena, nor as the devastating punishments of an angry God. There is a give and take, as between adik and kakak, as between the respectful rice farmer and the generous Dewi Sri. In this give and take, natural phenomena have intentions[13]. By humans, these intentions can be frustrated. Natural phenomena, in turn, can counter, and have very human reactions, as when the rain is quoted as saying, "Na ! tahoe rasa kau orang sekarang", fully alive and fully intelligent. This may be simply poetic license on Mas Marco's part. Regardless, it *is also* a very old way to conceive of the rain, and is part of a particularly joyful and playful relationship to the world.

(PASSAGE TWO)

SHOCK OF ELECTRICITEIT

Following the strong suggestions of the wind and rain and sun, the three youths finally return home. At about eight o'clock, they are sitting in the front room, when Retna Permata offers Soebriga some brandy. "Heel graag" (69), says Soebriga.

After the first glass, Permata offers him another, and he downs that one, too. As soon as Soebriga has drained his second glass of brandy "badannja berasa sedikit panas,

[13] When natural phenomena are understood to have intentions, this can tend to make them gods.

lampoe gasoline tjabang doea jang tergantoeng diatasnja semangkin terang sinarnja, dinding-dinding jang tadinja tertampak blau sekarang djadi hidjau kepoetihan. Teroetama poela sinar moeka *Retna Permata* dan *Retna Poernama* masing-masing bereboet sorot menoedjoe ke toean *Soebriga* kekoeatan Electriciteit kedoea perempoean itoe *Retna Permata* dan *Retna Poernama* sama koeatnja. Oleh karena itoe kaboer kedoea mata toean *Soebriga* dan berdebar-debar rasa hatinja, begitoe poen kedoea telinganja ta'bisa mendengarkan soeara. Terpaksalah *Soebriga* memegang boekoe poela sambil menarik napas goena mengobati penjakitnja jang sekonjong-konjong datangnja itoe. Apabila ia memboeka boekoe indarlah keadaän jang tiada menjenangkan itoe, tetapi Electriciteit kedoea perempoean itoe bertambah lama semangkin keras. Begitoe poen *Soebriga* beroelang-oelang melihatkan sinar moeka kedoea si molek itoe, dan berkata dengan seorang diri.

„Kalau koe lihat ini *Retna Poernama* dan *Retna Permata* sebagai jang soedah koe katakan laksana pinang dibelah doea tetapi ini *Retna Poernama* ada poetih roepanja dari pada ajoedanja, lebih-lebih memang ia misih gadis dan terlaloe mengarti dari hal mempeliharakan toeboehnja, soedah tentoe itoe *Retna Poernama* lebih manis dan tjantik, betapakah . . . . . ? Selama *Soebriga* memikirkan sebagai diatas, ta'poetoes sinar dan kekoeatannja Electriciteit menarik-narik hati *Soebriga*, seakan-akan dirobek-robek rasa hatinja.

Ta'lama poela datang seorang boedak membawa koffie dan selangkapnja, *Retna Poernama* lekas menerima itoe koffie jang dibawak boedak ditaroekan dimedja. „Kekanda''. Tanja *Retna Poernama* kepada *Soebriga* „soekakah kiranja kekanda minoem koffie ?'' Adoeh ! ! hantjoer ! ! rasa hati *Soebriga* serta mendengarkan

perkataän jang amat merdoe itoe keloear dari moeloet si tjantik *Retna Poernama*. „Ja ! adinda !'' Sahoet *Soebriga* dengan bermoeka merah, sebab darah naik keatas tanda kesoekaän. „Apa sadja jang adinda kasihkan kepadakoe, tentoe koetrima kedoea belah tangan disertai gedang hati dan tiada nanti kandamoe meloepakan oetjapan : „M e r c - i !'''' (70 – 71).

That is to say, as soon as Soebriga finished his second glass of brandy, his body felt a little hot, the two-pronged gasoline light hanging above him burned ever brighter in its shining, the walls which earlier had looked blue now had turned a whitish-green. More than anything, though, the shining faces of Retna Permata and Retna Poernama fought to outshine one another, for tuan Soebriga, while the electrical force of those two women, Retna Permata and Retna Poernama, was equal in strength. And so tuan Soebriga's eyes became clouded over, he could feel his heart pounding, and even his ears could not hear a sound. Soebriga had to hold onto his book and take deep breaths to remedy this illness that had suddenly befallen him. He opened the book to avoid this unpleasantness, but the electricity of the two women only grew even more powerful. And so Soebriga, again and again, looked into the light shining from the faces of the two beauties and reflected to himself.

"Looking at Retna Poernama and Retna Permata, like I've already said, they're like two peas in a pod, but, this Retna Poernama seems a bit lighter than her sister, and what's more, she's still an innocent young girl, who understands very well how to take care of her body. It's plain to see that Retna Poernama is sweeter and prettier, but how . . .?" The whole time Soebriga was thinking this, the electric force and light did not stop pulling at his heart, until it felt as if his heart would rip apart.

Not long after, a servant came bringing coffee and settings; Retna Poernama quickly took the coffee that the servant had brought and set on the table. "Dear." Asked Retna Poernama to Soebriga, "do you think you would like to drink some coffee?" Damn!! destroyed!! was Soebriga's heart when he heard those honeyed words flowing from the lips of the beautiful Retna Poernama. "Yeah! dear!" answered Soebriga, red-faced because his blood had risen, a sign of his delight. "Anything that you might give me, of course I would take with both hands and a happy heart, and afterwards I would not forget to say (and here Soebriga uses the fancy, untranslated French word for "thank you"): "M e r c i!"

For Soebriga, after drinking two glasses of brandy, the light is brighter, walls that were blue have become light green, and it even feels hotter. And that's not even counting the disturbing and funny effects that Retna Permata and Retna Poernama create for him.

We read here that "lampoe gasoline tjabang doea jang tergantoeng diatasnja semangkin terang sinarnja" and that "poela sinar moeka *Retna Permata* dan *Retna Poernama* masing-masing bereboet sorot menoedjoe ke toean *Soebriga* kekoeatan Electriciteit kedoea perempoean itoe *Retna Permata* dan *Retna Poernama* sama koeatnja". Mas Marco draws a comparison here between the two shining lights of the gasoline lamps and the two shining lights of the girls' faces. Whereas just a short time earlier, in the dark street, the artificial lights of modernity were as obat for the difficulties of natural darkness, here they seem to be the penyakit, the sickness that suddenly befalls Soebriga and forces him to hang on to his book and breathe deeply as he tries to regain mental stability, health and control. "Apabila ia memboeka boekoe indarlah keadaän jang tiada

menjenangkan itoe, tetapi Electriciteit kedoea perempoean itoe bertambah lama semangkin keras."

One thing we note here is that it is not the power or the magic or the beauty of these women that becomes ever more intense and unbearable; it is their electricity. Mas Marco is speaking here in a wholly modern idiom; he is writing romantic fiction of the future. These girls are like robots, like the robot, for example, that kisses Bugs Bunny and jolts him with an electric shock, a shock which is understood as the shock of desire or of love. Here, it is desire which is understood as the shock of electricity. This now is twentieth century Java.

Anyone who's ever felt an electric shock will confirm that they are not fun. So would Soebriga agree. He is on vacation, with a couple of glasses of brandy in his blood, in a comfortable house in the company of two ravishing young women. Nevertheless, this is definitely a "keadaän jang tiada menjenangkan". This is a jarring shock, a grievous loss of control.

We might trace this discomfiting loss of control to the liquor Soebriga's drunk. But two glasses of brandy are hardly enough to make anyone freak out, especially someone like Soebriga, who, as a man of the world, has surely had brandy before. While the liquor may be part of his problem, it would seem that the most important source of Soebriga's penyakit is not the two glasses of brandy, or even the two shining lights of the gasoline lamp, but rather, the two girls themselves. And indeed, the most disturbing aspect of these two young women – both for Soebriga and for the readers – is that there are two of them.

DOUBLE SHOCK

Doubleness is a motif crucial to the structure of *Mata Gelap*, and it is a disturbing one. The central doubleness in the novel is, of course, the doubleness of Retna Permata and Retna Poernama, two sisters who look so much alike that someone who doesn't know them well enough might easily mistake one for the other. But tuan Soebriga himself is by no means irreplaceable. Near the end of the novel, in the hotel room as Poernama is listening to Soetjina speak about going to Soerabaja, the object of her love is gradually shifting, from old Soebriga to Soetjina there before her. Poernama thinks to herself, "Kalau saja lihat, roepanja poen sepadan dengan *Soebriga* djoega setara kepandaiannja" (116). They are just the same. So, just as Soebriga could find Permata sufficiently replaceable with Poernama, Poernama too can find Soebriga sufficiently replaceable with Soetjina.

So powerful is doubleness in *Mata Gelap*, that even when Poernama is in Semarang, hundreds of kilometers away from her sister, she continues to be doubled. In the closing moments of the novel, again in that same hotel room, Poernama asks Soetjina what time it is. Soetjina answers that it's eleven thirty and, laughing, then asks Poernama if she's planning now to go out. "„Ach tida ! tjoema tanjak sadja,'' sahoet ia bermoeka manis dan mengangkat katja doedoek jang habis dipakainja diletakkan diatas koffer" (119 – 120). By her mirrored reflection, even alone in her room with Soetjina, Poernama is doubled. Even far removed from her sister, there remains something in her presence – this mirror – that represents Poernama, some thing that is not Poernama, but that signifies her.

It is clear from Mas Marco's writing that he was a master of language (insofar as

such a thing is possible). As such, he was apparently keen to explore such linguistic issues as, among others, interchangeability, idealism, and representation. It is not too difficult to see the potentially representational in Mas Marco's narratives. This is most obvious in the names Mas Marco gives his main characters. The protagonist of *Student Hijo* is Hijo. His two most serious love interests are Wungu and Biru. Similarly, the two main female love interests in *Mata Gelap* are Retna Permata and Retna Poernama, while the two main male love interests are the similarly-named Soebriga and Soetjina. By giving them these noticeably artificial signs, Mas Marco highlights the artificiality and textuality of these characters. Yet, at the same time, these characters' actions in *Mata Gelap* do not seem to advance any teleological narrative line. Despite their markedly linguistic and unrealistic names, in being so unstructured, so chaotic, these characters' acts closely resemble those of the "real", non-linguistic world.

What advances this narrative, then – what turns the pages, what makes it so readable – is, to a great extent, sex, especially the sexual curiosity, the prurient interest, some would say, of the esteemed readers, the "toean-toean pembatja" that are addressed, perhaps ironically, again and again throughout the narrative. It is largely sex that advances this narrative: brainless passion, addlepated lust, or, to put it another way, mata gelap. As Mas Marco makes clear, mata gelap is a condition of disorder, is the absence of clear thinking, the absence of thought that is properly structured. In so far as the anarchic condition of mata gelap forms this book into any kind of narrative structure, we may say that what orders *Mata Gelap* is mata gelap, is disorder, is chaos itself.

Student Hijo is clearly a book about Hijo. His name is in the title, first of all, but also, he is the one character who knows, and therefore connects, all the other main

characters. Too, he is present in the narrative from beginning to end. Notwithstanding the fact that Hijo seems to carry on the tradition of remarkable passivity as displayed by Soebriga in *Mata Gelap*, we can confidently say that Hijo is his book's protagonist. Likewise, Soedjanmo is obviously the protagonist in *Rasa Merdika*. Just as in *Student Hijo*, he too is present in the beginning of the book as the object of his parents' concerned conversation, and at the end we are relieved to see, just as in *Student Hijo*, that he is with the right woman. We watch Soedjanmo develop, from a socially-concerned but apolitical youth to a committed socialist. There is no question that he is *Rasa Merdika*'s protagonist. But just who is the protagonist of *Mata Gelap*?

It may be Retna Permata, who is certainly a central character. Except that she doesn't seem to develop hardly at all, and she does not appear in the last fourteen pages, except inasmuch as Poernama looks like her.

Soebriga may be the protagonist. He has a sexual relationship with both Permata and Poernama. He does develop some, but this development is mostly just going from being Permata's lover to Poernama's, and back to being Permata's again. Also, he is remarkably passive to be a protagonist, although this is true of Hijo as well.

Retna Poernama may be the protagonist. She develops from innocence to experience, the paradigmatic – perhaps the only – path of development that a character in a narrative can take. The novel ends with her. But she doesn't even appear until page 65, over half way through (the original and complete version of) the book.

In a way, a strong case may even be made for Soetjina as the protagonist, for he is a consistently active character, his speech at the end seems to encapsulate the ethos of the book, and he too is radically transformed, perhaps as much as, or even more than,

Poernama. Yet he appears so infrequently that he could almost be a minor character in the narrative.

Mata Gelap, then, we might say, has no clear protagonist, no central character around whom the narrative revolves. Or rather, it has multiple protagonists, who comprise a variety of interests and wants, who attempt to fulfill those wants using various methods, and with varying degrees of success. And if these four – Permata, Soebriga, Poernama, and Soetjina – are each, in a way, protagonists, with no one character being the central and definitive one, that then opens up the narrative to all the rest of the characters being greater or lesser protagonists, too. Amtje, Pak Troeno, Kiprah, they all have their interests, and their interests are not necessarily subordinate to, or supportive of, or extant for a narrative teleology. The avoidance of a central, definitive protagonist avoids also a central, coherent narrative line, avoiding thereby the possibility of fulfillment, resolution, telos. Thus does this linguistic text, *Mata Gelap*, with uncanny accuracy, mirror the non-teleological non-linguistic world.

Mirrors and texts reflect, represent, refract the world. What we see when we look into a text or a mirror is not the thing that is represented, but rather the representation of a thing. There is something phantasmagoric about this. In *Siete Noches*, Jorge Luis Borges says that, "Realmente es terrible que haya espejos: siempre he sentido el terror de los espejos. Creo que Poe lo sintió también" (114). And later, "Nos hemos acostumbrado a los espejos, pero hay algo de temible in esa duplicación visual de la realidad" (114). There is something fearful in mirrors' visual duplication of reality, Borges feels. I would extend this to say that there is something fearful not only in visual duplication of reality,

but in linguistic duplication of reality as well. To duplicate reality is to deign to create a Derridean chain of infinitely regressing references to reality, which will never and can never arrive at full, non-linguistic reality themselves. Like other ghostly entities, representations may well outlive us. Many of the photographs in which we appear will continue to exist and be seen by people we know, even long after we are gone. To see our image is to acknowledge our inevitable death. To see our depiction is to understand that in some important ways we are replicable. This, perhaps, is part of the Borgesian terror of reflected representation.

Many representations of us will outlive us. We live our lives from birth up to the moment a photograph (or painting, or linguistic text) is created that represents us somehow. At that instant, the photograph portrays us as we in that instant are. That photograph then continues in its own life, perhaps to other places far away from where we are, perhaps to other times, long after we are dead, and it continues to live there. At that instant in history where we and the photograph meet – where the thing represented and the representation are one – is formed a bridge. On one side of this bridge are we and our previous lives. On the other side is the photograph and its future. Over this bridge will cross our images, from the time of our own life to the time after. Over such bridges, words and things move between the representing world and the world it represents (alias, the real), and back again.

An effective bridge must meet in the middle, must, at some point at least, be symmetrical. Over this symmetry, we may cross. This crossing is what the doubles in *Mata Gelap* – and indeed, all doubles, all representations – allow to happen.

Poernama reminds Soebriga of Permata. She is as though Permata's signifier, or

representation. As sometimes will happen, Soebriga finds he likes the representation more than the original, the signifier more than the signified. Soebriga moves from Permata to Poernama, and for a time seriously considers taking up with Poernama instead: in the past, before going to Permata's parents' house, Soebriga was seeing Permata; in the future, he would be seeing her representation, Poernama. And the moment of exchange, the bridge over which Soebriga crossed from Permata to Poernama, the photographic moment, during which they were equivalent – this flash – was there in the front room of the house, after they'd come back from strolling about and being caught in the rain. At this moment of doubleness and symmetry, after two glasses of brandy, under two gasoline lights, in the company of two beautiful young women, Soebriga experiences a profound dislocation, an utterly disorienting and terrifying confusion, and at this point of doubleness and rupture of reality, he crosses from Permata to Poernama, courtesy of mata gelap.

FLASH! LIGHT. HEAT:

This scene of mata gelap is reflected in another scene at the end of the book, in the hotel room in Semarang. Being a reflection, it is, in many ways, reversed. Whereas in the "Soebriga drunk" scene, his extreme disorientation causes him to switch his attentions from Permata to Poernama, in the Semarang hotel, Poernama's switching of her attentions from Soebriga to Soetjina leads to extreme disorientation on the part of Soetjina. Interestingly, whereas with Soebriga we have a male switching from girl to girl, and with Poernama we have a female switching from boy to boy, in both cases it is the boy who is powerfully affected and disoriented by discombobulating passion. Perhaps

Mas Marco does this to maintain the pretense of male agency in matters sexual – as males should be the instigators, it should be they who are portrayed as losing control, and then acting. Or perhaps he suggests that males are more prone to lustogenic loss of control for some other reason. For instance, maybe he thinks it's realistic and true.

Temperature is important and mirrored in both these scenes, too. Soebriga is cold from being out in the rain, drinks brandy, and feels hot. Poernama is hot, having come down from the highlands to the coast, so she bathes and feels cooled. And while the cold and heat in these scenes is effectively palpable, the use of light in them is both illuminating and brilliant. In Permata's parents' house, the double gas lamps and the "Electriciteit" emanating from the girls' faces causes Soebriga to lose control. In Semarang, "Semangkin besar napsoenja *Soetjina* melihatkan onderrok jang tiada menoetoep lengan dan betisnja (kempol) *Retna Poernama.*

Betis poetih jang tertampak dimana *Soetjina* seakan-akan sinar mata hari waktoe tengah hari jang amat panas, dan bisa mengaboerkan mata siapa jang melihatnja" (118).

These are the two most uncontrolled moments in *Mata Gelap.* In these two scenes, Soebriga and Soetjina respectively are completely lost, wholly under the sway of lust, of nafsu. With Soebriga it is the "sinar moeka" of the two girls, like two streams of electricity of equal strength. "Oleh karena itoe kaboer kedoea mata toean *Soebriga* dan berdebar-debar rasa hatinja, begitoe poen kedoea telinganja ta'bisa mendengarkan soeara". Later, in Semarang, the two exposed white calves of Retna Poernama "mengaboerkan mata siapa jang melihatnja", to the point that Soetjina, "matanja terboeka, tetapi tiada bisa melihat ; koepingnja terpasang, tetapi tiada bisa mendengar" (119).

Mirrors reverse what they represent; texts can too. In this text, whose name, whose signifier, is *Mata Gelap*, we find that what clouds the eyes, the mata, until they are gelap, dark, cannot see, is, in fact, light. Why did Mas Marco do this? Why is *light* precisely the thing that mengaburkan, menafsukan, menggelapkan mata? We are reminded of Benedict Anderson's thoughts in "A Time of Darkness and a Time of Light" on the trope of light in Indonesian nationalist discourse of exactly Mas Marco's time. Indeed, this is a trope that Mas Marco helped create, as is illustrated so neatly in the names of some of the many newspapers Mas Marco himself wrote for and ran, names like *Sinar Djawa*, *Sinar Hindia*, and *Api*.

More provocatively still, the remarkable power of light, of all things, to darken and cloud reason, and to arouse, reminds us of one myth that tells a story of how all enlightenment first began. Adam and Eve, in a narrative that, in many people's reading, allegorizes yielding to lust and sexual temptation, eat of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Thus does the human race fall; thus is the human race enlightened. Even, we might say, finally made human. Light becomes mata gelap: this is an irony: illumination, gelap, knowledge, and nafsu are one, and are a nexus of transcendent and revolutionizing power.

HEAVENLY BODIES

Having discussed the name of *Mata Gelap*, let us now discuss names in it. This narrative space orbits around two heavenly bodies, Retna Permata and Retna Poernama. In the third edition of the Balai Pustaka Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, "ratna" (or, in

the Javanese version used by Mas Marco, "retna") is defined as a precious stone, or "permata", and also denotes a pretty woman. Permata, again, is a precious stone, a gem. Poernama is "full", as in the full moon. Thus this younger sister strongly connotes, that is, in many ways, means, moon. This is interesting. The matahari, or sun, is a recurrent character in this narrative. Might the moon be manifest, too? If the sun is the mata hari, the eye of the day, then might not the moon be the eye of the dark, the mata gelap? If so, then perhaps this book is partly named for that younger sister, for Retna Poernama, for the moon and what she means.

Conscious, now, of Poernama and her lunar connotations, we go back and reexamine the signifier of her older sister. Permata means gem or precious stone, synonymous with ratna. But the sounds, letters, and words within her signifier also bring to mind another source of light and sparkling, especially when opposed to Poernama – namely, the sun. Permata: matahari.

With the moon being Poernama and Permata matahari, Mas Marco creates for his esteemed readers a playful, dancing galaxy of loose and lovely orbiting binaries and oppositions. Their light and brilliant clothes and jewelry, their bright faces, shining to outdo each other, before the drunk Soebriga.

Permata, the first we see, is the original, the asli and asal, the source of light. Her two names, Retna and Permata, are the same, are pretty synonymous. There is no progression, or opposition, or advancement to another meaning. The source, she is the signified.

Poernama, the moon, reminds Soebriga (and Soetjina) of her sister the sun. (The moòn here is like the sun, only whiter.) A reminder of another, she is a reflective surface.

To see her is to see the reflected light of the elsewhere original source, the asal and asli. Unlike Permata, Poernama does not mean Retna; it is a progression to a different meaning, a facing or opposed meaning; it connotes the moon, an advance to a different kind of meaning. A reflection, of an other, of a source, she is the signifier.

By the light of the sun, the mata hari, we work in earnest, for money and needs. By the light of the moon, the mata gelap, we indulge in passion and art, for wants and pleasure, and play.

Permata is rich. She can support Soebriga. She brings him to Soenda. But Poernama he finds more seductive. Drunk under the light of the gasoline lamps, the two shining girls competing, Soebriga's interest falls on Poernama. The moon rises, the sun sets. Soebriga delights in Poernama's light. But then, at the awkward lunch table, Permata is angry. Repentant, Soebriga returns to Permata, kisses her. Poernama runs off. As the moon sets, the sun rises.

Permata is the source, the straightforward, the signified. Poernama is the reflection, the opposing, the signifier. Not only in their names as sun and moon, but in their names elsewise, as well. Permata, the mata, the eye, that sees straight, the physical, bodily organ that, before the mind, interacts directly with the world, represents the world before the mind, just before the mind applies to the world its particular language. The mata, the source, as eye is the vessel of the signified and non-linguistic. Poernama, the nama – the moon, art; culture – the name, the language that is applied onto the world, the reflection of the world in nama, in name, in words. As word, name, nama signifies the signifier.

(PASSAGE THREE)

WORLDS SIGNS WORDS

In this essay, I use the words "signified", "signifier" and "sign". For me, these words are used most provocatively and productively by Roland Barthes. However, I use these words in perhaps different ways than Barthes used them, not to mention Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida.

By signifier, I usually mean word or group of words. I use signifier as the ground. Signifier is the ground because that which I am examining in this essay is a novel: a linguistic text: a group of words. The signified is that which the signifier "means" – connotes, denotes, intends, points to, represents, signifies. At the functional junction of signified and signifier, we may find the sign.

Signifier and signified are generally used in this text you are reading to denote items from the linguistic and the non-linguistic world, respectively. In this way I draw a certain line between the linguistic and the non-linguistic, a line that I find to be extremely helpful and clarifying.

However. We must remember what A. L. Becker tells us about language: that it is not just language per se. It is not only words that we "speak" to convey meaning. Tone of voice, accentuation, distance between interlocutors, facial expressions (which are partly necessary products of the ways we use our bones, muscles, teeth, et cetera, to form the distinct sounds and sound combinations of different languages, and are therefore grounded in the very words themselves), all these factors and more contribute to language, and all these factors and more will be adjusted from language to language if one is going to speak them with any true fluency.

This is to say that language is more than just words, and is perhaps better understood in the way that the Malay word that now commonly translates the English word "language" – "bahasa" – used to be more commonly understood, as something that denotes both language and its surrounding customs. Thus, it is in many ways foolish to draw a dividing line between the linguistic and the not so.

However. This essay concerns *Mata Gelap*. *Mata Gelap* is not speech. *Mata Gelap* is writing. Among other things, writing is a reduction of speech. Reduction and simplification give writing special powers. But the word, when written, loses much too. Written language does not include such crucial factors as facial expressions, physical distance, and tone of voice. It can, in a way, include these other factors, by using, for example, words that a person uses when angry, or by explicitly saying that someone said or did something "angrily", but even so, these factors must first be translated into written words, and can only enter the text thus. Like many books, *Mata Gelap* has no pictures. This is therefore a text of words only. Writing about it then, we can perhaps usefully draw a line between that which is words – or, to be more specific, *written* words[14] – and that other, which is not.

Mata Gelap, besides being about Retna Permata's younger sister, and trains, is also about signifieds and signifiers, the linguistic and the not so, the text itself, and the other. Often it seems, this text, this *Mata Gelap*, an attempt to question, confuse and

[14] Perhaps because speech and writing are both considered manifestations of one thing, we often forget how radically different they are from each other, and confuse them as both being language. They are so unalike as to be different *orders* of activities, as fundamentally distinct from one another as are jogging and sailing. Roland Barthes, and many, many others, have long reflected on what it means to write. "I will become a writer", one can decide, and this is generally considered a kind of vocation. "I will become a speaker" sounds a little silly. It is a statement that cannot be uttered unless one is a speaker already. Also, it seems to mean, roughly, that I will become a human.

commingle such false and true binaries, as though it too were a drunk Soebriga.

What follows is a passage from the morning after Poernama's first sexual experience, which she had with Soebriga. In this short paragraph, we again meet our old friends, the moon and the sun, and many other worlds, besides.

"Selamanja *Retna Poernama* memikirkan sebagai diatas, dan dia orang sama berkata-kata satoe antara lain. Mata hari semangkin terang menjinarkan tjahjanja, inilah satoe boekti, bahwa nama „pagi'' minta diganti nama „siang''" (88).

In English, we might say that, all the while Retna Poernama thought these things, and the others talked with each other. The sun ever brighter shined its light, and this was proof, that the name "morning" was asking to be switched out for the name "mid-day".

Where to begin? This is a vertiginous passage. It seems infinitely deep, infinitely capacious. It is. For it is exactly as deep and capacious as the flat page on which it is written. It is so because we don't even know where we are. On what linguistic level is this?

In the (linguistic) narrative called *Mata Gelap*, a natural phenomenon – the shining of the sun – is described as being caused by a *linguistic* phenomenon: a name, a word, nothing else. This treatment *flattens* the event, making it less "real", with no pretense of taking place anywhere except entirely within language. It does not even attempt to render the event of the shining sun as a full, three-dimensional, non-linguistic phenomenon. Instead, the text rather calls attention to the linguisticness, the textuality, of what in other narratives would be presented as an ostensibly "real event".

- The shining sun here is explicitly, proudly – almost aggressively – entirely

linguistic. In the narrative, pagi, morning, becomes the *sign*, the *nama* "pagi". Described as such, pagi is something that does not (organically) inevitably "become" siang (And does, actually, morning *ever* "become" mid-day? Except for in a purely linguistic world? If so, *when*[15], exactly?), but as something, some sign, some nama, for language users – like the narrator – to switch out, like replacing a card, or a ratna, or a wayang puppet – as Wrekudara for Brataséna – at the appropriate point[16] in the narrative.

"Mata hari semangkin terang menjinarkan tjahjanja, inilah satoe boekti, bahwa nama „pagi'' minta diganti nama „siang''."

A bukti is a tanda. This novel is absolutely replete with "tanda", with signs. It is one of Mas Marco's favorite words. So, a bukti is a tanda, but it is a special kind of tanda. A bukti is (or at least claims to be) an irrefutable tanda. A bukti is not like the tanda of Soebriga one page before this passage, in which he asks Poernama what's wrong, why she looks sad, and not like she usually does. He does this to mislead the others, make them think he doesn't know why she's uncomfortable. It exists to mislead and therefore it is a fake bukti, it is fake proof, false evidence. If the others believe Soebriga's words membuktikan that Soebriga does not know the source of Poernama's discomfort, they are wrong.

The function of bukti, of a proof, as, for instance, in a legal proceeding, is as a tanda, a sign, that symbolizes unequivocally a true and extant condition in the non-

[15] The impossibility of morning just becoming mid-day on its own is due to the fact that these signifiers – morning, mid-day – in truth have no actually extant signifieds. Part of the reason morning and mid-day do not exist (except linguistically) is the fact that time does not exist. As the historian Philip Ethington points out, we use spatial metaphors to talk about time, but we cannot use temporal metaphors to talk about space. This is because there is no time, as such. What we call "time" is but movement through space.

[16] And, somehow, that naming gives agency (here).

linguistic world. In this passage, the condition that the "penjinaran", the shining of the sun, *proves* is that the *name* pagi is asking to be switched out with the *name* siang. Therefore, what this proof proves is that a name is asking[17] to be exchanged for another name. In this sentence, the shining of the sun is a three-dimensionality, a fullness, a deepness, a *Signified*, a non-linguistic event (within, we must always remember, the context of the linguistic event that is this story). This *Signified*, this non-linguistic event, is then found to be caused by a *Signifier*, a linguistic name. *Signified* here is found to be representing, signifying, is found to be shallow, indeed flat, is found to be outside, surface, and relatively two-dimensional, compared to the *Signifier*, a supposedly flat linguistic event, a "nama", which nama is "pagi".

In this disorienting passage, the flat *Signifier*, the "nama „pagi'"" is *proven*. It is signified, it is shown to be true *by* the *Signified*, the non-linguistic event of the penyinaran of the matahari. The long-proven progression of *Signifier* signifies *Signified* – *Word* means *Thing* – the shallow two-dimensional linguistic world representing the deep three-dimensional non-linguistic world – has here become reordered, reversed. Now, *Signified* signifies *Signifier*. *Thing* means *Word*. It defies logic, somehow. The two-dimensional is deeper than the three-dimensional. The shallow is deeper than the deep. Lahir has become batin. Batin lahir. Outside in and inside out.

This text flattens what it represents. Pagi and siang are but names, words, "„pagi'"" and "„siang'"", and the shining of the sun is only an effect produced by these words. The shining sun, as a bukti, represents something, but what it represents is the condition of a name. What it represents is a condition of a representation. The language

[17] Asking, of course, is a linguistic operation. And so here a name, a piece of language, is a language-user.

here does not point to a place outside of language. It points to a place inside of language. It is as though it is describing a play on a stage, and not something "real". What does this do? One thing that happens is that, rather magically, the language of Mas Marco achieves something that very, very few other words have ever done: Mas Marco's words are absolutely true.

To write is to represent[18]. When we write, when we represent some thing, we are able – necessarily and always – only to represent some relatively tiny part of whatever things (both real and imaginary) we are representing. To represent a city, for instance, with a narrative line, is like running a straight line of string across that city. Everything that touches that string, or is visible from that string, I will describe. In this case, as in all narratives, the vast, vast majority of non-textual reality will escape representation. Also, I will, necessarily, give *meaning* to what I represent; there is no sentence without prejudices. These two facts of writing – its excision of nearly all of non-linguistic reality, and its necessary conferral of meaning – are of course intimately linked with one another, and are, one might say, almost violent acts committed on the non-linguistic world, when we try to represent the world in writing.

In this small paragraph by Mas Marco, we have writing that escapes committing that violence. In this passage, the shining of the sun membuktikan, proves, represents, not the non-linguistic world, but the simply linguistic, nama, language. It represents a representation. Because it is representing a nama, representing a representation, it can represent it perfectly. This is how a bukti, a sign, is here a three-dimensional event. It is the signifier become signified; the signifying signified; the "signifier signified". By representing representation, by staying completely within language, Mas Marco has –

[18] It is also to record; writing is one of the oldest recording technologies.

perhaps ironically, perhaps perfectly not – created language that crosses into the non-linguistic. Signifier is signified. Word and thing are one.

In this passage, the name "morning" asks to be switched out with the name "mid-day". Who, we may wonder, is the name "morning" asking? The possibilities here seem to be two. (That number again.)

The name "morning" could be asking the characters in the story to switch her out. It is they who can experience the ever-brighter shining of the sun as morning becomes mid-day. It is they who can go out in that sun and feel it and see it and it is they who can use the words "pagi" and "siang" to describe their environment.

The other possibility is that this name may be asking the *readers* of this novel to switch it out for a different name. Mas Marco highlights the linguistic nature of this agent, the name "„pagi'"", by setting off in quotes both it and that which it wants to be switched out for, the name "„siang'"". These are *words*, the quotation marks unmistakably say. Within this story, for the characters that live and move there, "pagi" is not the "nama „pagi'"", but is the extant non-linguistic thing, pagi. They do not hear (or read) the name asking to be changed. We readers do, however.

We read the nama pagi, asking to be switched out. By foregrounding this linguistic entity and agent, the nama pagi, Mas Marco shows us directly the machinations of his linguistic narrative. As with a cut-away view of an aircraft carrier or an anthill or an internal combustion engine, we can now see beyond the relatively smooth skin (which skin, on a (linguistic) representation, might be called "suspension of disbelief") to the inside component parts – the nama, the names, the individual words that this skin covers

and obscures – that make the whole thing go. Like a building whose girders and trusses are intentionally left visible by its architect, *Mata Gelap* gives us pleasure in the (potentially discrete) fragments that make it up. By showing us those fragments, by sticking them out to us, the text allows us to grab on to these protruding words and turn them, like handles. By turning them, from "pagi" to "siang" for instance, it is we who advance the narrative, and what's more, we can watch ourselves, be aware of ourselves doing it. There is a pleasure in that, too.

A third and outside possibility for the object of pagi's request is the writer of this story, Mas Marco himself. All the while, Poernama thought these things, while the others spoke to one another. The sun ever brighter shined its light – and this was proof that the name "morning" was asking to be switched out with the name "mid-day".

This is a living narrative, of course. As such, it wants to progress, it must progress. It may be reminding its writer here of that fact by this asking. It seems that the name pagi, which had been adequate to describe the time of day in this scene, no longer feels itself to be so. It asks then to be switched out for a different word, siang. The proof of this asking is there for Mas Marco, us readers, and the characters within *Mata Gelap* to plainly see, in the ever-brighter shining of the sun. At this point we may ask: is the existence of this request in this narrative (automatically) simultaneously the existence of this request's fulfillment? It may be.

NAMING OF AGENCY

To achieve agency, you must, to some extent, insert yourself – or as is most always the case, be inserted – in language. You must be an individual: this means you

must have a signifier, a name. Just as our friend pagi does. Her name is pagi. Her name is pagi, and this, at least in part, is what allows her to minta.

In *Signs of Recognition*, Webb Keane notes that, among the Anakalang, certain things have dewa. Dewa is impossible to accurately translate into English, but it is something like a particular spiritual power. Places or things that have dewa are those that stand out, certain large trees, for example, or oddly-shaped rocks. One reason these objects have dewa may be that they escape classification as merely trees or rocks like other trees and rocks. By their uniqueness, these things achieve individuality, and can have, one imagines, names.

Among the Michiganders, we see similar customs. Things with signifiers, things that participate in language, are more likely to have agency. If we were to identify a tree on the campus of the University of Michigan that would have agency, that would have dewa, that would "do something", we might choose the Tappan Oak before we would identify some unnamed generic tree. The Tappan Oak has a name. It is the Tappan Oak. It has had claimed for it specifically as its name, as its signifier, to do its bidding, some bits of language. While every tree, in many ways, has agency, in the Tappan Oak that agency is manifest. It is a locatable individuality. It has a name. Nameless trees, rocks, houses, places, people, have no agency, it would seem. Named rocks, trees, houses, places, people, do.

To have a name is to have a voice, and to have a voice is to want something. To want something is to have a kind of agency, even if it's not enough agency to achieve exactly what is wanted. Even prisoners, even political prisoners like Mas Marco Kartodikromo or Bung Joesoef Isak, even though they were locked behind prison walls,

still had some agency. They maintained their names, their claim to language, and their voices. They exerted an influence in prison. It was not equivalent to the influence they exerted outside of prison, but they unmistakably had agency, even there inside. What gave them agency, and what made them exert it, among other things, was their claim on those specific parcels of language that gave them individuality; namely, their signifiers, their good names.

Conversely, many free people do not have individuality and so do not have agency. This is the massa. According to James Siegel, this is why the rakyat calls for a leader and the massa does not. In a leader, a group obtains an individual. As an individual, the leader therefore has agency and responsibility. He will direct and fulfill the wishes of the rakyat and he may be punished by those who oppose the rakyat. He, a named individual, bestows legitimacy, and true agency. The massa, a grouping of the unnamed, has no legitimacy, no responsibility, and its component parts, as they are *not* named individuals, have no actual agency. They are members of a mob, and the "mob mentality" is the absence of individuality, the absence of distinct, specific, individual names, is the absence, properly speaking, of agency.

AGENCY OF NAMES

But wait. Going back to look at that passage, we will remember that it is not the named morning that asks to be switched out. It is the *name* morning, the nama pagi, the nama itself. We have learned from Mas Marco and elsewhere that to have a name, to have an individual signifier, to claim some small part of language and tame it and make it work for you as your representative in the linguistic world, is to have agency. But Mas

Marco also goes further. Mas Marco writes that the *nama* pagi minta diganti. It is not a named thing that asks, but a name as thing. Language itself asks. Language itself has agency. Normally, words are voiced; they are said. Here, words are voiced; they are given a voice.

Mas Marco was working in the sparkling new medium of Indonesian. Compared to Javanese or Dutch or Arabic it was a language relatively untried, untested, unexperimented, inexperienced in literature. Perhaps this helps explain why it is that he could so interrogate this language, bend it, stretch it, throw it, heat it, bury it, turn it inside-out. In conducting his wild and daring experiments with the Indonesian language, Mas Marco shows us some remarkable things about it, which can often be applied to other languages, too.

In that vertiginous passage, in which we see reality signify writing, a word (pagi) asks to be exchanged for another word (siang). Is this absurd? Can words really talk? Can words really ask for things? Perhaps we might better ask, can anything besides words want or ask for things? For example, can the human body that is located right here ask for things? "Shawn" can want things. Unnamed, though, can a homo sapiens have agency? Does the non-linguistic body ever ask? Does it ever even want? Can it? Maybe it cannot. This may be mainly a semantic issue – I don't know. But it may be that just as language is made from want, so agency is made from language. Not only because the want that creates language, creates through language, agency. But also because, through language, through claiming bits of language for ourselves – our signifiers, our names – we become individual homo sapiens and claim for ourselves our dewa. We claim for ourselves, we create for ourselves, our individuality.

Without names, we are the mass, we are the mob, we are chaos. We want only what the group wants. That is to say, only the group wants; we, but followers, want nothing[19].

To want is impossible without individuality. Individuality is impossible without a name. Therefore, in some important senses, want, and the ability to fulfill that want, agency, are located entirely within language. It is our words which want things. It is our words which ask for things, including, sometimes, to be switched out for another word, like siang.

It is delightful that in *Mata Gelap*, not only do the sun and rain and wind have wants and words and activities, but so does the language itself, the language that makes up the very story. The language that is representing this narrative's conditions on the page and thence, in the readers' minds, is moving, speaking, living – the word of Marco, alive and active. Mas Marco, man of energy, portrays for us an energetic world. The words, to be perfectly truthful, do not literally jump off the page. The words do, however, to be perfectly truthful, literally make requests. The name "pagi" asks for something. It asks to be diganti nama "siang". This is not a poor representation. It is not representation at all. It is performative language. What's more, it is performative language that seems to originate in itself, in words. It is want manifest. Like a flower that pushes itself up from a green meadow, it is agency sprouting out of the flat and fecund field of language.

PROOF AND LIES

[19] And of course, escape from want and will is a terribly beautiful and seductive thing. We may call it a common version of the annihilation of the self, a mob nirvana. For a powerful evocation of just how terribly beautiful and seductive, see "The Hosting of the Sidhe" by William Butler Yeats, first published in *The Wind Among the Reeds* in 1899, when Mas Marco was about nine years old.

We will note too the context of the matahari's bright and brighter shining. Poernama has just been wondering if the others at the breakfast table know what she and Soebriga did the night before. She decides that they don't, for if they did, there would surely be some signs of their displeasure. And, at any rate, "apa boleh boeat, biarpoen dia orang mengatahoei, asal kita orang soedah sama toedjoeannja, toch tida bisa bikin apa-apa" (87 – 88). Poernama and Soebriga are at the breakfast table. They are circulating signs there that they hope will be taken as meaning that they did not have sex the night before. Poernama believes these signs have been effective, for she is seeing no signs to indicate that the others know the truth. The others have been taken in by the false bukti of Soebriga and Poernama. But the reason Poernama believes this is merely other bukti, other signs that claim to be true.

Meanwhile, outside, in the shining sun, we have a different kind of sign, an inside-out kind, a natural phenomenon that signifies and is a sign of the linguistic. This sign is indubitable. It is regular as clockwork (it is, in fact, the reason for clockwork's regularity) and it is natural, and of a higher power: the sun. Signs in the human, civilized world can be arbitrary, can be untrue, can be lies. Signs outside of that world are not, can not.

This seems to problematize the phenomenon of mata gelap. If mata gelap is unrestrained passion, heedless of societal norms and consequences, it is also natural and unlinguistic, necessarily true. Mata gelap is dangerous, can be hurtful, but it is also what brings people to go beyond what they "normally" would. As such, it brings them to cross the boundaries of themselves. As such, it is a force of progress.

Being mata gelap, Poernama has just crossed the boundary of herself (or had that boundary crossed), having, in the darkness of the night, crossed from her status as virgin, as non-sexual person, as child, the day before, to her status this day, as no longer a virgin, as a sexual being, an adult. This is a shock – it is literally, physically painful for her – and is no doubt a day to remember. Echoing this shock of crossing, even, in an indirect way, *representing* that shock and that crossing is Mas Marco's language. This language too crosses the boundaries of the linguistic itself. This language too, in this passage as throughout the book, is rather crazy, full of productive, daring energy, eager to cross borders. That is, these words are mata gelap.

And who darkens the eyes of this language, who makes these words mata gelap? Light, again. The sun. The primary source of light on Earth, the great dispeller of gelap from the mata of all women and men. The shining of the sun, "semangkin terang". As before, in the light of the gasoline lamps, and after, in the glow of Poernama's white calves, the sun here maddens the words, turning them inside out: its incendiary shining incites language. Words then penetrate out, into the (non-linguistic) world, from what had seemed a flat and harmless text.

(PASSAGE FOUR)

LUST AND DEATH IN WORDS

Soetjina is driven crazy by Poernama's beauty when he is with her in the hotel room. His mata go gelap. He can neither see nor hear. He is aware only of those irresistible, indomitable "angen-angen" (119) – thoughts, imaginings, images: pikiran; wants: maksud – that flood his mind. He gets up to lock the door. His heart is pounding

as he locks the door and sits back down in his chair.

"Considering the violence of my feelings", he says to himself, "if she doesn't want to follow my meaning, I'll have to force her.

Even if I be banished far away, or hanged from the very heights of the sky, as long as I get what I mean to have, it will not matter. But, if I do not achieve my end, even though she be locked in an iron room, or guarded by a company of soldiers, there is only one possibility. Certain, I must attack." Not only is Soetjina's mind now darkened, as indeed his eyes have already become, but the feeling in his heart rises even to his face, making his blood boil.

That is to say, "Dengan sigra *Soetjina* berbangkit dari kōrsinja dan menoetoep pintoe teroes dikoentjikan. Berdebar-debar rasa hati *Soetjina* apabila habis mengoentji pintoe dan doedoek dikorsi poela.

„Menilik kekerasan hatikoe,'' kata ia dengan seorang diri, „kalau dia tiada soeka menoeroet apa jang koemaksoedkan, soedah tentoe *Retna Poernama* koepaksa.

Biar akoe diboeang djaoeh, digantoeng setinggi langit, asal maksoedkoe soedah kesampaian, itoe tiada mengapa. Tetapi kalau toedjoeankoe beloem sampai, maski dia dimasoekkan didalam gedong besi, atau didjaga satoe compagnie soldadoe, tiada boleh tida tentoe koeserang.'' Tida sadja itoe waktoe pikiran *Soetjina* djadi gelap, maski matanja poen begitoe, sampai perasaän hatinja naik keaer moeka mendjadi mendidih darahnja" (119).

At this point, please be so kind as to go back and read the above cited passage again, out loud. Silahkan . . .

What makes this passage so remarkable is its beautiful, poetic, elevated language, and its passion, its fire. Soetjina has so committed himself to his objective that even death itself will not deter him. He could be talking about sacrificing his life for his country or his ideals; what makes this passage more remarkable still is that Soetjina is talking about rape.

This is a kind of elevation of lust. Sexual desire is stated in poetic and noble terms. Blind passion is textualized, made a linguistic and highly rhetorical phenomenon. This has a similar effect as the sentence, "Mata hari semangkin terang menjinarkan tjahjanja, inilah satoe boekti, bahwa nama „pagi'' minta diganti nama „siang''". Soetjina's speech makes the linguistic three-dimensional, makes it, through rhetorical flourish, richer and deeper than the non-linguistic phenomenon of actual blind lust.

Curiously, even though Soetjina has just decided that he will rape Poernama if she doesn't go along with his maksud, Mas Marco has not developed this character as a rapist or otherwise violent criminal. Soetjina seems to be a regular guy, neither especially good nor especially bad, who is overcome by sexual desire, and whose lust, whose sickness, is then linguistically elevated through the fancy rhetorical devices that he uses. The exaltation of lust and potential rape in this passage reminds one of the curious rehabilitation of violence and of actualized murder in Albert Camus's *The Stranger*. There, as in *Mata Gelap*, actions are separated somewhat from their customary moral implications and milieu. Thus divorced, a kind of goodness in these actions redeems them, at least partially. The actions are good simply by being bold, large, good art, emotionally satisfying. Similarly, Soetjina's speech contains a certain nobility. It is, like the nobility of Rahwana, an amoral nobility, yet nobility nonetheless. As such, it is a "modern",

problematized nobility. As such, it is also an ancient one.

Part of what makes this passage so powerful is that Soetjina states that death itself cannot deter him. A sentiment such as this is usually associated with far more admirable causes. One may state one's willingness to die for one's country or one's principles. Such a complete commitment to a cause is often found admirable, even to people of other nations or other principles. Here though, the thing our speaker would die for is not a principle or a homeland, but sex with a certain girl. This passage is reminiscent of something Soebriga says earlier to this same Retna Poernama. The two of them are out in the garden. It's gotten dark, the gasoline lamps have been lit, and people in the house cannot see outside. Soebriga and Poernama are talking, flirting, getting closer. At one point Soebriga, referring to their imminent first sexual encounter, asks Poernama if she knows what's going to happen later that night. She answers evasively that if he knows, then surely she knows too. A few moments later, "Sekoenjoeng-koenjoeng *Soebriga* merangkoel leher *Retna Poernama* teroes ditjioemnja „tjroep'', dan disertai perkataän lemah-lemboet: „Adoeh ! adinda ! soenggoeh poen tiada sedikit ketjintaänkoe kepadamoe, biar poen adinda djadi perdjalannankoe jang membawak dirikoe keliang koeboer, itoelah tiada sekali-kali takoet bagai kandamoe, asalkan maksoed kita bisa kesampaian'"" (80).

Like Soebriga, Soetjina is also made mata gelap by the girl of the moon, Retna Poernama. Like Soebriga, Soetjina's madness for her is so extreme that death means nothing, provided that his makud kesampaian, provided meaning is fulfilled, thoughts and words, representations and signifiers, are made reality.

The passage in which we read Soetjina's soliloquy is a difficult passage to

approach. It seems that it needs be spoken aloud. As I read it, that second paragraph is rather low in intensity; it feels rather considered, rather controlled. It begins, "Menilik". Menilik can be translated as "looking at with great care". It suggests an investigation, or a very careful consideration. There are also strong connotations of seeing something, of a clear and mindful watching, of vision. And so, "Menilik kekerasan hatikoe" is a strangely calm and considered thing to say. "Kekerasan" is a word that is often translated into English as "violence". It is not a light word. Soetjina sees the violence in his own heart. Also, his hati is keras, hard. It is powerfully energized, powerfully charged, rigid. There is no bending or giving way and no going back; yet Soetjina is also conscious of this violent passion. He can step back and menilik kekerasan hatinya. This is partly what makes this paragraph so unnerving. Soetjina can remove himself enough to coolly consider the passion that has made him crazy for Poernama. He can apparently calmly formulate into a sentence the fact that, if she doesn't go along, he will rape her.

I see this paragraph to be laying the groundwork for the paragraph that follows. There, Soetjina's striking use of metaphor and prosody ennoble his passion. In this first paragraph, we read the base – the very base base – from which his passionate rhetoric (in at least two senses of the word) *arises*.

In this second paragraph, then, the tone is subdued, considered; it is menacing, yet calm. If anything, the control in Soetjina's voice makes his words all the more threat-laden.

EVERYTHING COMES TO NOTHING, DAN SEBALIKNYA

The third paragraph can be divided into two halves. The first half is still

Soetjina's thoughts and words. It is in the first person. It begins, "Biar akoe diboeang djaoeh . . ." and ends ". . . tentoe koeserang". The second half is in the third person. It begins "Tida sadja . . ." and ends ". . . mendidih darahnja". In this second half, the narrator's words tell us about Soetjina.

Each of these halves display a similar movement in tone and intensity: they crescendo, starting low and ending with great power. We read aloud the first sentence of the first half of this paragraph: "Biar akoe diboeang djaoeh, digantoeng setinggi langit, asal maksoedkoe soedah kesampaian, itoe tiada mengapa". This sentence is dramatic, devastating even, but it is not yet the climax of the crescendo.

Soetjina begins this sentence with his own nullification: "Biar akoe diboeang djaoeh" (a fate that eerily prefigures Mas Marco's own). Out in exile, Soetjina is removed. He continues, "digantoeng setinggi langit". Soetjina's nullification stated here is not only exile, or being discarded, but is hyperbolically punitive, seems to be an execution, a hanging, perhaps at the hands of men; perhaps by God. Soetjina is imagining, is depicting for us, his own exaggerated erasure, his own oblivion. And of that oblivion, he tells us "itoe tiada mengapa", it does not matter, "asal maksoedkoe soedah kesampaian", just so long as he gets what he wants, provided his meaning is fulfilled.

If Soetjina obtains his objective, if his want is fulfilled and thereby erased, he can be erased as well, no problem. This sentence imagines erasure of want and erasure of self. It is a picture (in so much as such a thing is possible) of absolute nullification. It must be stated evenly, with the radical, even disdainful indifference of a man who stands at the gallows and just does not, can not, care.

"Tetapi kalau toedjoeankoe beloem sampai, maski dia dimasoekkan didalam

gedong besi, atau didjaga satoe compagnie soldadoe, tiada boleh tida tentoe koeserang": in this sentence, Soetjina imagines what will happen if his desires are not fulfilled, if his goal is not reached, if his tujuan belum sampai. He imagines Poernama unreachable, surrounded by walls, either of iron or of armed men. This is not the erasure of want and of self, but the intensification of both to their greatest extremes. Soetjina does not feel that "itoe tiada mengapa", being unproblematically passive, whether dibuang or digantung. He is uncompromisingly active: "tentoe koeserang".

The second half of the paragraph, which comprises only one sentence, echoes the two sentences of the first half. "Tida sadja waktoe itoe pikiran *Soetjina* djadi gelap, maski matanja poen begitoe, sampai perasaän hatinja naik keaer moeka mendjadi mendidih darahnja." It begins with the nullity of darkness: "Tida sadja waktoe itoe pikiran *Soetjina* djadi gelap, maski matanja poen begitoe". With great economy it then proceeds to the intensity and totality of boiling, the point at which liquids – including such "liquids" as air muka – can get no hotter.

When read aloud, the pinnacle of both halves is their respective penultimate words: "tentoe" and "mendidih". It is here the voice's greatest stress falls. Both these words indicate absolute fullness – the greatest possible probability: certainty, "tentoe"; and the highest possible liquid temperature: "mendidih", boiling.

Both certainty and boiling are signifiers of totality. They mark the limit. One can go no further. We recall now that these two halves each started with nullity: with erasure in the first half, and with darkness in the second. Thus, we go from nullity to totality. Nothing to everything: precisely this is what's contained in both of the two halves of this paragraph.

In this paragraph, we will notice motifs from elsewhere in *Mata Gelap*. We have the doubling in the double crescendo. We have the non-linguistic (of the third-person description of the state of Soetjina) echoing the linguistic (of Soetjina's first-person words) rather than the other way around. And we have an opposition: in this case, of nullity and totality.

It is the last motif, opposition, specifically the opposition of nothingness and everythingness, to which we now turn. In both halves of the paragraph in question, we have an intensification, a build-up, from the emptiness of absolute erasure to the absolute presence of attack, and then from darkness to boiling. The relationship between nullity and totality can take a number of forms.

We can see totality rising out of nullity, as it does in the second half, with the word "naik". This is truly a crescendo, rising along a scale.

We can see totality as an alternative to nullity, as in the two words that begin the second sentence of the first half of this paragraph – "Tetapi kalau": but if. I will happily come to nothing if I get what I want. *But if* I don't, nothing will stop me from attaining it. It is a switch, one to the other.

The third relation between nullity and totality is that both exist simultaneously, each within the other; both are the same. This is perhaps most obviously clear in the second half. The boiling of the blood is a direct result of the darkness. Yet the darkness has descended precisely because of the boiling of passion. In the first half of the paragraph, this effect is more subtle, but perhaps for subtlety more powerful. "Biar akoe diboeang djaoeh, digantoeng setinggi langit" – even though I be thrown/exiled far away, hung from the heights of the sky. Erasure is generally conceived as silent; this however is

not. This is a hyperbolic erasure, a strangely bold and palpable, totalizing oblivion. But if tujuannya belum sampai, he will give himself totally to achieving it. That is, if he fails, he will be erased: he will die trying. If he succeeds, he can, as he's just stated, then be erased, and "itoe tiada mengapa". In both halves of this paragraph, two oppositions converge. While opposing one another, despite opposing one another, because opposing one another, they are one.

AN ASIDE: *A Reconsideration*

Am I reading too much into this passage, and perhaps others, too? This is an important question. One thing I *do not* want to do is to simply use Mas Marco and his writing for my own ends, be they academic (obtaining my master's degree through this thesis that I'm writing) or otherwise (seeing in his writing the motifs, themes, techniques, et cetera that *I want* to see there, that I want him to be using).

Regarding this first compunction, there seems little to be done; his writing *is* helping me obtain my degree. For this I sincerely thank him. As far as this "otherwise", it's a complicated question. I don't want to ride roughshod over Mas Marco's work. I don't want to twist it or reshape it to fit into my agenda – and I *do* have one. However it also seems clear to me that no writer, and no student of writing, can avoid being sensitive to certain forms or contents, certain themes or techniques, that they may find particularly pleasing, or at least notable. So it is with me. I can say that I like Mas Marco's writing tremendously, especially *Mata Gelap*, and that is a good place to start, a good base to work from in order to give proper respect to a writer's work.

Additionally, with regard to whether I am twisting Mas Marco's texts, or seeing

things in them that aren't there, I will note what Jacques Derrida and others have written about intention. Intention is very often difficult or impossible to identify. Intention *may* be (almost) fully conscious[20], but it very often is not; it very often is but part-conscious; it very often is almost fully unconscious and imbedded in the very words and grammar of whatever particular language an author is writing in.

As Roland Barthes has told us, the ultimate site for the meaning of a text is not the writer but the reader. This may give me, the reader of *Mata Gelap*, undue agency over it. But I think you'll agree, tuan-tuan pembaca, that this is not an altogether bad deal. For it gives you that same agency, and, what's more, it also gives you tremendous agency over this poor text that you read right now, that I, alas, am merely writing.

This, then, is my explanation (some might say "cop-out", and they would not be totally wrong) of why I feel I can read what I read in the writing of Mas Marco. I tend to think that Mas Marco, brilliant and daring, intended, quite consciously, all of it. Even if he didn't though, it turns out not to be too important. For even if he didn't fully intend it, he may have partially intended it. Or else some other did. (That's why it's there.) For, as we've already seen, as Mas Marco's already written, as *Mata Gelap* has already shown us, language can mean to do all kinds of things, in all kinds of ways.

SMOOTH TALKERS

But going back to this passage, I am putting a lot of pressure on it, seeing a lot in it. One other reason I think this is plausible, why I see this passage as particularly full of meaning, is that it does seem to be rhetorically marked. It is noble, powerful, dynamic. It

[20] "Consciousness", it seems, is just another word for the linguistic, for that which can exist in language, but that is another essay.

is what a hero says. In its commitment and its hyperbole, it seems rather distinct from the other words in a narrative that tells of three beautiful young people traipsing around Java, making love, and buying things, and having a delightful but decidedly unheroic little adventure. What is this passage doing here? Is it a visitor, a quotation from some other work of Malay-language, or perhaps Javanese-language, or even Dutch-language literature? Or is it a reminder, not precisely quoting, but referring to some other text or kind of text, reminding us of some other world?

If the language of this passage, and particularly the language of its powerful last paragraph, is particularly marked, it may be because this paragraph heroically enunciates the ethos of this book. We may understand Soetjina as a representative of the author of this work, Mas Marco. We may also understand Poernama as a representative of the esteemed readers of this novel, its tuan-tuan pembaca. This shows the way to another interpretation of this story's signifier. The mata gelap of its name may be the darkened – because unseen, unknown – eyes of the readers. Mas Marco, sitting at his desk in Solo, tea getting cold, perhaps with the shouts and laughter of neighborhood children outside, was writing words that would be read by unseen eyes. Not the bright eyes of presence, but the dark eyes that, while absent, will read, nonetheless, this writing.

Poernama – the moon, the mata gelap, the dark mata: her sister's shady double; the dark mata: the unseen eye – is the reader. As Soetjina touches her, so Marco touches us. As she then touches and knows her own reflected self, and might for this see her self anew, so too might we.

Mas Marco needs the readers to go along with him, as Soetjina needs Poernama to. As Poernama with Soetjina, we with Mas Marco, because of clever words and delightful

language, go along, too. We do not want, or need, to be forced, it turns out. Violence is not necessary. Maksud Mas Marco kesampaian. His significations and intentions – his meanings – arrive, through us, into reality.

(PASSAGE FIVE)

MEANS, ENDS, BEGINNINGS

We come now to the book's final moments. Soetjina, as we have seen, has decided that if Retna Poernama will not go along with his maksud, he will force her to. He does not force her, though. He answers her question when she asks the time, telling her that it is eleven thirty. Laughing, he inquires of Poernama, why does she ask, is she planning on going out?

"„Ach tida ! tjoema tanjak sadja,'' sahoet ia bermoeka manis dan mengangkat katja doedoek jang habis dipakainja diletakkan diatas koffer.

„Wach ! itoe badjoe krawangan baik sekali'', berkata *Soetjina* dan melihatkan kebajak jang dipakai *Retna Poernama.*

„Ini mamah jang beli dari Bandoeng'', sahoet dia melihatkan kebajaknja dan dipegangnja.

„Tjoba lihat'', kata poela *Soetjina* akan memegang kebajak *Retna Poernama.*

Dengan soeka hati *Soetjina* memegang kebajak *Retna Poernama* dibawahnja peniti rante dari emas Belanda bermata smaraga (tjemeroet). Djoega *Retna Poernama* toeroet memegang megang melihatkan boenga kebajaknja.

„Apakah ditoko Semarang sini ada soetra seroepa ini ?'' tanja *Retna Poernama* kepada toean *Soetjina.*

„Barangkali djoega ada'', sahoet *Soetjina* dan melepaskan kebajak jang dipegangnja teroes bersandar dikorsinja, „tetapi saja beloem pernah lihat sendiri.''

Bertambah lama *Soetjina* bertjakap-tjakapan dengan *Retna Poernama*, semangkin dekat waktoe jang baik oentoek memenoehi kehendaknja.

Poekoel doea belas malam kedoeanja molai melakoekan apa jang dimaksoedkan toean *Soetjina*" (119 – 120).

Now we see this scene through English language. Laughing, Soetjina inquired of Poernama why did she ask, was she planning to go out?

"Oh, no! Just asking, that's all", she answered with a sweet expression, and picked up the table mirror she'd been using, placing it on top of the suitcase.

"Wow! That's a great lace blouse", said Soetjina, looking at the kebaya that Retna Poernama was wearing.

"My mom bought this, in Bandoeng" she responded, looking at the kebaya, and then handling it.

"Let me see", said Soetjina, and then touched Retna Poernama's kebaya.

Happily, Soetjina felt Retna Poernama's kebaya, and beneath, the Dutch gold chain with jeweled (gemstone) settings. Retna Poernama touched and felt it too, looking at the flowers of the kebaya.

"In the stores here in Semarang is there silk like this?" asked Retna Poernama to tuan Soetjina.

"There might just be", answered Soetjina, and let go of the kebaya he had been feeling, then leaned against the chair, "but I've never seen, myself".

As time went by, Soetjina chatted with Retna Poernama, and closer and closer the

time approached for him to be able to fulfill his desire.

At twelve o'clock midnight, the two began doing what tuan Soetjina had been meaning to do.

What to say here? It seems as though there is nothing to say. The novel ends. It is also a beginning.

The last paragraph, which is also the last sentence, is: "Poekoel doea belas malam kedoeanja molai melakoekan apa jang dimaksoedkan toean *Soetjina*". We would call it marvelous and astounding, but these adjectives would draw too much attention to this paragraph, and attention it seems trying to avoid. What I find beautiful about it is its uncanny resemblance to the modes of non-linguistic reality. It is not a summing-up, or a moralizing, or a placing of the preceding narrative into a greater ethical or social or political context, as we see at the end of *Student Hijo* and *Rasa Merdika*. At least it is not explicitly so. This passage reminds me of the work of Raymond Carver, one of the very few other writers who, to my mind, manages so to capture reality in words.

AN ASIDE: *A Political Education*

Throughout *Mata Gelap*, and again, especially, here, at this ending, I ask myself, how is it possible that, in the intervening years since its publication in 1914, decades of scholars missed this book? How is it possible that it has been ignored to such an extent? *Student Hijo* is a fine novel. *Rasa Merdika*, in my opinion, is even more interesting. But *Mata Gelap* – the least political of the three – seems to me, far and away, the most ground-breaking, the most revolutionary.

One reason for this novel's neglect may well be political. The interests on the right would surely not want Mas Marco to be read, as he was and is commonly perceived[21] to be a communist. On the other hand, when leftists try to recuperate Mas Marco and bring him to public attention, they seem to be most drawn to his more political productions, namely *Student Hijo* and *Rasa Merdika*. And so, between the right that would ban all of Mas Marco's work, and the left that is interested largely in his more identifiably leftist efforts, *Mata Gelap* falls through the cracks.

THE CLOCK STRIKES TWELVE: ENDS AND BEGINS

But back now to this last paragraph. "Poekoel doea belas malam", it begins. This is not the first time action in *Mata Gelap* has taken place at this hour. In this novel, twelve o'clock midnight is marked as significant. It is the hour that Pak Troeno makes Amtje wait until before he will help him. It is the hour at which Soebriga is reminded, by the clock chiming twelve times, that "ini waktoe baik oentoek menjampaikan niatnja", which niat is to have sex with the virgin Poernama. And now, in the last sentence, long anticipated, as we have meticulously followed the advancing clock in the closing pages of *Mata Gelap*, jam dua belas malam is again the time for dangerous things.

At twelve o'clock, Soetjina and Poernama cross from one day to another. From one life to another. It is again the meeting of doubles, this time temporal doubles. One day meeting another, like one gongan of a gending meeting the next, at the gong of midnight. As in the scene of drunk Soebriga suffering from "kegandaan", this plague of doubles is a sign of, or a result of, or a cause of, a world in chaos. We are reminded of the gara-gara of a wayang, taking place at roughly midnight, forming a powerful bridge or

[21] Largely mistakenly, it turns out, according to Henri Chambert-Loir, Koesalah Soebagyo Toer and others.

crossing in the dalang's story, inhabited as it is by humorous and unrestrained clowns, which is to say, by humans.

The condition of midnight also reminds us that it is tengah malam, the most gelap gelap, farthest from noon[22], the darkest darkness. At twelve o'clock, maksud get dilakukan. Intention and signification cross over and become reality. The linguistic, the wanted, becomes the non-linguistic, the realized and real, that which is happening, at dua belas malam. It is not unlike jam dua belas malam tanggal 31 Oktober di Eropa animis. One year becomes another. A crossing. A juncture. A bridge. Over which inhabitants of other worlds arrive. Spirits fly the air. Ghosts are seen.

Jam dua belas malam: reality becoming. As Mas Marco himself tried to do with his writing. And did. A stretching outside of the text. A fulfilling of maksud, a fulfilling of meaning, a becoming real.

Unlike Pak Troeno, who stays always within the realm of maksud, Soetjina fulfills his maksud. As do Poernama, Soebriga, and Permata before him. They all melahirkan maksud into kenyataan. Soetjina, as their hero and spokesperson, is a Marco-like character. Mas Marco was an activist journalist. What he wrote was so powerful, so effective at fulfilling maksud, at bringing meaning to bear on reality and thus changing it, that he was sent to prison for his dangerous language, many times.

Mas Marco worked to bring things into reality via his language, for example, a nation of Indonesian-speakers. We might well ask now, what is it to fulfill a meaning? One answer might be that to fulfill a meaning is to bring into reality a non-linguistic entity, alias, a "thing" (and not a word). We might say then that every meaning asks to be

[22] For further reflections on "Noon" see, among other of her poems, "A Bird came down the Walk" by Emily Dickinson.

fulfilled. Every word points, is pulled and pulls, toward an absence, an absent thing that it means, that it bermaksud. Thus, the material fabric of which language is made – and the tension, the matter, the energy that makes language work – is want. To create language – to speak, and even more so, to write – is, *by definition*, to create a thing unfulfilled, is to create an absence, a hole, a blustery, howling emptiness.

CROSSING OVER TO ONE'S SELF

But let us look more closely at the crossings that take place in that hotel room, even before jam dua belas, and the nature of them.

Poernama puts her mirror on her suitcase.

"„Wach ! itoe badjoe krawangan baik sekali'', berkata *Soetjina* dan melihatkan kebajak jang dipakai *Retna Poernama.*

„Ini mamah jang beli dari Bandoeng'', sahoet dia melihatkan kebajaknja dan dipegangnja.

„Tjoba lihat'', kata poela *Soetjina* akan memegang kebajak *Retna Poernama.*

Dengan soeka hati *Soetjina* memegang kebajak *Retna Poernama* dibawahnja peniti rante dari emas Belanda bermata smaraga (tjemeroet). Djoega *Retna Poernama* toeroet memegang megang melihatkan boenga kebajaknja."

There are two crossings here. Two people cross to Poernama. One is Soetjina. "Tjoba lihat", he says, and touches her kebaya, and by this kebaya, this extension of Poernama, this representation, touches Poernama, too. This is impolite, maybe. He crosses a line. His body bears upon hers.

The other person to cross to Poernama is Poernama herself. Following Soetjina's

example, she "toeroet memegang megang melihatkan boenga kebajaknja". She sees her kebaya, her clothes, herself, through the eyes of another. She achieves self-consciousness, self-awareness, sees her self. Poernama, the moon, is indeed reflective.

Poernama, the moon, is indeed reflective. On the train from Cheribon to Semarang, she sees people of many nations, speaking many languages, and reflects on what the future holds for her.

"*Retna Poernama* soenggoeh heran melihatkan orang-orang jang naik toeroen disitoe bertjampoeran omongannja. Ada ang berkata dengan bahasa Soenda, Djawa dan Melajoe. Dia beloem mengerti sama sekali bahasa Djawa. „Bagai manakah akoe nanti kalau sampai di Samarang ?'' tanjak ia dengan diri sendiri, „apakah saja mesti bitjara memakai bahasa Melajoe atau Soenda ?'''' (108)

Already, on the train, she is considering her self. How will I be in Semarang? Must I speak in Malay or Sundanese? What will she speak? Who will she be?

People who are conscious of their image will choose their words carefully. For the characters in *Mata Gelap*, not only the words one speaks, but even the language one speaks in, also appears to contribute mightily to one's self-representation.

Mata Gelap is written in Malay. It is made out of Malay. Malay is therefore clearly the most important language in this narrative. The second most important language in *Mata Gelap*, the other, the figure, against its Malay ground and self, is Dutch. Dutch in *Mata Gelap* is deeply meaningful.

One thing Dutch can be seen as a sign of is the condition of mata gelap itself. Participating in a world where Dutch is spoken may allow these characters to play by different rules, may make the sexual freedom of this book possible. We can see the

relative chaos made possible by the Dutch language in the one scene in which that language is spoken by Retna Poernama. Soetjina is trying to get Poernama to stay in Semarang just three or four more days, and then he'll take her to Soerabaja. Poernama smiles and looks down at her lap as she listens to what Soetjina has to say.

"„Ja toean Raden !'' sahoet dia dengan rendah. „Hamba djoega terlaloe soeka kalau toean hendak mengantarkan ke Soerabaja, tetapi boeat hamba tinggal disini sampai 3 atau 4 hari, „verdom ! ik sehaam mij dood !'"" (115). "Yes, lord", she answered softly, "I would actually be much obliged if you would take me to Soerabaja, but for me to stay here three or four more days (and now she switches from Malay to Dutch – the only Dutch sentence she utters in the entire novel), goddammit! I'd die of shame!"

"Berdebar-debar rasa hati *Soetjina* apabila ia mendengar perkataän bahasa Belanda : „verdom ! ik schaam mij dood !'' jang keloear dari moeloetnja *Retna Poernama* „E ! hla doedoe Boeto holo-holo,'' memikirkan *Soetjina* didalam hati. „Dat is een meisje van Europeesche opvoeding !'"" (115). Soetjina felt his heart pounding when he heard those Dutch words: "goddammit! I'd die of shame" (and here he repeats the exact Dutch words "verdom! ik schaam mij dood!") coming from the lips of Retna Poernama. (And now, after Poernama's only Dutch sentence, we read the only Javanese sentence spoken by anybody in the book.) "Whoa! You're not an ugly ogre" (and then back to Malay), thought Soetjina (and now Soetjina switches to Dutch), "That's a girl with a European education!"

Verdom! Ik schaam mij dood! What a shocking thing for Poernama to say. It is shocking both for its Dutch form, and for its vulgar content. Poernama, an innocent and naive girl from the country, should not say such things. So astounded is Soetjina by

Poernama's words that he is knocked back from the Malay in which he lives into Javanese and then Dutch. The remarkable paragraph that begins "Berdebar-debar rasa hati . . ." contains no less than three languages. Of the three – Malay, Dutch, and Javanese – the Malay is entirely the narrator's exposition. Soetjina only thinks Javanese and Dutch, in immediate succession. If we take out the intervening, narrating Malay, we get, after Poernama's unbelievable "verdom ! ik schaam mij dood !", "E ! hla doedoe Boeto holo-holo . . . Dat is een meisje van Europeesche opvoeding !" Or, to render it all in English, we get, after Poernama's shockingly unladylike "Goddammit! I'd die of shame!", "Wha'?! This isn't an ugly ogre! That's a girl with a European education!"

Now, what are we to make of this multilingual paragraph? How are we to read it? One possibility is that Dutch allows Poernama to speak ugly words. It is very exciting. It may be a big reason why mata gelap, and *Mata Gelap*, exist at this place and time.

But what of this Javanese, then? It's the only Javanese sentence in the story. Javanese is the first language of the author, and probably, of the character who says this. In speaking Javanese, Soetjina goes "down" from the proto-national (or pan-colonial, or Archipelagic) level of Malay, or Indonesian, to the more local level, of his regional native tongue, Javanese. This is then immediately followed by rising "above" the proto-national of Malay to the international language of Dutch. Being at least trilingual (like Mas Marco), Soetjina controls all these levels (not to mention the intricate strata within Javanese), and therefore can produce in them any of the there available and wildly various ways to mean that may suit him.

How does he use these languages? Dutch in this story tends to be used by people to connote nonchalance and sophistication and modernity and ease. Is Javanese perhaps

then the opposite of these things? Is Javanese, first language of the author, perhaps meant to connote the hard, old Truth? Javanese may be a language for talking about truth in *Mata Gelap*, but if so, what a complicated truth it is.

Retna Poernama "doedoe Boeto holo-holo". She is *not* a nasty, ugly ogre. And yet, if Soetjina's so sure, why ever would he have to say it? As it turns out, the reason he has to explicitly and absurdly state that she's *not* an ogre is precisely because she *does* speak like one. So, in avowing that Poernama is not an ogre, Soetjina shows that in some ways – namely, in the words she uses, the way she represents herself, the way she signifies – she *is* an ogre[23]. Soetjina immediately follows this with "Dat is een meisje van Europeesche opvoeding". As we've seen, Mas Marco likes to show us his signified by more than one signifier, through more than one word. Here we see another example of his stereoscopic writing, but an instance that is both more complex and more deviously simple than the other cases of stereoscopic writing sprinkled throughout this text.

Usually Mas Marco presents his stereoscopically-viewed signifieds as he does in the first line of the preceding paragraph. Poernama "melihatkan ribanja (pangkon)" (115), that is, she looks at her lap, with one signifier, and then an alternative, near-equivalent signifier following it in parentheses, both describing one thing, in this case, Poernama's lap. With Soetjina, though, it is not the narrator stereoscopically and calmly describing the described, but a character, uttering not just two different words, but two different incredulous and taken-aback sentences, each one in a different language, each

[23] The word Mas Marco (through Soetjina) uses to not describe / describe Poernama is "Boeto". A buta is not just an ogre, but an ogre from a wayang world. By (not) describing Poernama as a buta, as a specifically wayang monster, Mas Marco introduces a whole new world of connotations, that is to say, a whole new context. We might then ask what connections there might be between the nocturnal shadows and light, flatness, and stylized representation of wayang, and the nocturnal shadows and light, flatness, and stylized representation of this novel. We might ask if there is a dalang in *Mata Gelap*, and if so, how does he work, and who.

approaching the described – in this case Poernama, a living person, another character, perhaps the *main* character – from a different linguistic place, a different mental context, each with their own respective histories and implications. To put it in terms familiar from many other places in the novel, we might understand Soetjina to be saying that "she is a girl of European education (an ogre / not an ogre)".

Here we have something quite radical. Elsewhere in *Mata Gelap*, stereoscopy paints depth and three-dimensionality. Here it does too, but, as this is describing a living person, and as it is both more subtle (this girl is certainly *not* an ogre) and more overt (she is not an ogre; she is a European-educated girl, with each statement said in a distinct language), this doubled way of viewing is all the more powerful. There is depth, and there is also shimmering, as this seemingly European-educated girl (and it turns out she's not!) flickers between being someone whose European language has made her an ogre, and someone whose European language has made her not an ogre. We see now Poernama's inner curves and contradictions, her inner depth. We see now a living human. Stereoscopy perceives depth. Life, flickering.

Much more can be said on the foreign languages (that is, not Malay) in *Mata Gelap*, primarily Dutch, but also Sundanese and Javanese. We will only note that, unlike much of the foreign (that is, not English) language in this present essay, the foreign in *Mata Gelap* is never translated. The Dutch, the Sundanese, the Javanese just exists there. This says, or appears to say, certain things about *Mata Gelap*'s readers. One thing it says is that this novel's readers will know Malay, Dutch, Sundanese, and Javanese, will be polyglots, and will not need translations. I am sure that many, very possibly most, and maybe almost all of this book's readers could be described this way. However, even if

one did not know Dutch, one could still buy and read and enjoy this book, and one could feel oneself to be part of a relatively exclusive and well-educated multilingual, worldly demographic. To create such an effect in a reader would be a reasonably clever marketing strategy, in addition to being a compelling portrayal of cosmopolitan, twentieth-century Java. Speaking for myself, I can say that just buying or reading this book puts me in with a class of people among whom I would want to be included: those that know Dutch. What am I? How will I represent myself? It appears now that these two questions have already become one.

IS THIS A QUEST?

Poernama gives birth to her self, attains self-consciousness. This comes after she experiences sex for the first time[24]. She runs away from home. She begins a new life, certainly a more hazardous one, though we can never say for sure whether it works out good or bad for her.

Poernama's entry into a more self-conscious state makes her a fuller and more complex person. But it may be a mistake to consider it a noble development. It may just as likely be seen as a movement into a more cheap and debased way of life. Either way, whether it be a debasement or an elevation, it is a move from innocence into experience, from childhood into adulthood. This is a move that, in almost all cases, makes the mover both nobler, and more compromised.

Considering the development of her character, and considering the fact that Permata and Soebriga do not appear at all in the last fifteen pages of the novel, Retna

[24] In experiencing sex for the first time, Poernama experiences, very closely, what she is not. Is there any way to know what you are, to know the self, without first knowing what you are not?

Poernama may well be the protagonist of *Mata Gelap*. Yet, she doesn't even appear until page 65, over half-way through this one hundred twenty-page novel. This story is divided into three volumes, though. And it has three main characters. So maybe, in light of her development and influence there, Poernama is the protagonist of Volume III. Soebriga, the pivot between Permata and Poernama, could well be seen as the center of Volume II. And, if we may blindly speculate, Permata, as the other main character, and as someone who clearly received extensive exposition in the first third, may be the protagonist of that missing Volume I.

Poernama connotes the moon, culture, representation, play, nama: language; Poernama develops, comes to see and feel her self; Poernama rides the train to some place new. For these reasons, and for the empty, or pointing-to, or referential, or gravitational nature of language also, we wonder, is the nature of language not a quest? Is the nature of language not *to* quest? A quest, to quest, for the signifier to unite with the signified and become (that maybe impossible thing,) a sign? A quest for the fulfillment of meaning? Is this perhaps why the quest motif is so central to so many narratives? Why some people say that *all* narratives are quest narratives?

In his course *Stories Across Faiths: Transreligious Translation, Adaptation, and Interpretation of Narrative*, Bernard Arps notes that the quest, a motif often assumed to be of universal significance, seems to be differently emphasized in discourses found on the Archipelago. If, as Professor Arps notes, the quest motif often takes a rather different form on Indonesian islands, could this then indicate a different kind of relation between signifier and signified in Indonesian languages, like, for example, Indonesian or Javanese?

Relationships between signifier and signified are indeed different in some, if not

all, Indonesian languages, as compared to the language in which this essay was written. One example is Mas Marco's mother tongue, Javanese. "Omah", "griya", and "dalem" are (in a way) clearer synonyms than any English synonyms could ever be. Expounding on English grammar in the Tom Robbins novel *Jitterbug Perfume*, Wiggs Dannyboy explains that there are no such things as synonyms: "Deluge is not the same as flood" (206). "Flood" and "deluge" are similar, but diverge much further in denotation and connotation than the triad of Javanese words for "house" mentioned above. We see a similarly wide divergence between the roughly synonymous "house" and "building" and perhaps even more so for "house" and "home". "Omah", "griya", and "dalem" are theoretically totally interchangeable, depending on the status of the speaker, spoken-to, and spoken-about. Yet, omah, griya, and dalem are *not* exact synonyms either. As deluge is not the same as flood, so too, but in a radically different way, omah is not the same as griya.

Whether one uses omah or griya or dalem (or some other word) will depend on the context and position of the speaker, spoken-to, and spoken-about. Context then is a weighty factor in one's choice of words, and therefore in the production of meaning. This context factor was apparently not taken much into consideration when Pak Ferdinand formulated his marvelous and useful signified-signifier-sign. One wonders if he could have formulated his fairly universal linguistic ideas the same if he had been a native speaker of Javanese rather than French.

How, and even *if* the way that Javanese words attach to what they attach to affects narratives in that language, be they quest narratives or any other, I do not know. It does seem, though, that Javanese (and all languages) can present a certain (probably largely

unconscious) model of how words can mean things. How this model might bear upon narratives' characters' searches for meaning of this or that, or how this model of meaning might influence the meaning of "narrative" per se may be a topic for further delightful exploration, elsewhere.

Moving on, we will simply note that, as we all represent something, many things, to every person that sees us, and, as we all create language, we are *all* signifiers. Poernama, "nama", as the moon, as explicitly signifier, as named as such, takes a journey of self-discovery. Poernama's awakening into (debased, noble) self-consciousness is the signifier becoming aware of its self, the signifier becoming thus alive and signified. The signifier reflects itself. The signifier then sees itself. The signifier thus is seen – knows first-hand that it is seen, for it itself is the one seeing. Self-seen, first-hand and directly, the signifier is signified. That is to say, self seen, first-hand and directly, the signifier now *knows* that it is also the signified. Joined up, plugged in, like a light, signified and signifier are thus turned on: magic and electricity: the sign is alive.

Poernama is not the only one making an important journey. Soetjina, it seems, has just decided to leave everything he knows and move to Soerabaja so he can be with Poernama. What's more, although we are not told explicitly one way or another, this night in the hotel room in Semarang may be Soetjina's first sexual experience, too. Like Poernama a few days earlier, Soetjina may now be entering into sexuality and whatever adulthood that may entail. This is especially powerful since Soetjina – the only character whom we hear speak Malay, Dutch, and Javanese – seems to represent the voice of the author. If this is true, then, it is through Soetjina that Mas Marco enters this narrative. It is,

after all, Soetjina who so ardently advocates the crossing of lines, however taboo the lines, and however violent the crossing, yet who, ultimately, crosses those lines with cleverness, with seduction, and through the smart use of words.

Other writers have commented on the refreshing equality between the sexes in *Mata Gelap*, that in this book both women and men change partners without much guilt or trouble. Note too that while Soetjina is threatening in his thoughts, in his actions he is not at all. We would be wise to not necessarily take him at his word, and believe that he actually would force himself on Poernama. Maybe he only feels that he would do this, maybe it's just idiomatic hyperbole, maybe he's all talk. In fact, Soetjina can easily be seen as merely the most junior and recent and naive initiate into the Permata-Soebriga-Poernama sex parade.

ENDS

This paper does not treat Mas Marco's historical context very extensively. In some ways, this is certainly a weakness. An ideal work might combine close reading with complex contextualization, contextualizing with extreme care the writer and the work, while reading with extreme care that writer's work itself. I have not had the courage to attempt to write at such an ambitious level.

Yet, I believe that paying much attention to this work itself, to the language that makes it up, also serves a purpose. Mas Marco is often treated as a historical, political figure, a man of action, a man active in his environs, and whose environs were active in him. Of the most informative writings about Mas Marco, there are more that are books or articles about history than about literature. Mas Marco has been treated, and will be

treated, as a journalist and activist. This is fitting. He did heroic and important things. However, whatever Mas Marco's context, whatever his other activities, his writing itself is also extraordinary, and for this reason deserves greater recognition, more careful study, and further reading.

This may require a readjustment and reassessment by students of Indonesian writing. It may even necessitate for some people the learning of Indonesian, in order to read and appreciate this untranslatable literature. As we set out on this project, we will remember Mas Marco's words of encouragement, inviting us to cross over lines, enter into newness, newness that may seem scary or hard at first. But though it may not be easy, do not get discouraged, tuan-tuan pembaca. For every end is always also a beginning, and if they are difficult that's simply because, as you no doubt know by now, "alle begin is moeilijk".

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[25] In this bibliography are names of English, Javanese, Japanese, and other origins. For this reason, I do not feel it is possible to list names alphabetically by last or family name. In some languages, last and family name are not the same. In some other languages, family names are often not given. So, rather than arrange these names according to differing criteria (by family name for some, by given name for others), I've arranged them all by alphabetical order according to how the name is written (in Latin characters) "normally", as, for instance, when a person is signing or saying their name. An added benefit of this method of listing is that writers listed in this way may seem a little more knowable and human, and a little less like faceless ciphers. I apologize for any inconvenience this unorthodox ordering may cause.

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