

*Title:*

**‘melaka’s voices’**

Major Work

*School Number: 2001*

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**‘melaka’s voices’**

Reflection Statement

My journey in crafting ‘melaka’s voices’ was kindled by my fascination with my grandmother’s reminiscence of her life in Melaka. Subsequently, I reflected on the loss of early cultural postmodern narratives<sup>1</sup>, solidifying my purpose to revive the vitality of memories that forge an individual’s identity. In my narrative, the young Australian Charlotte and her Popo, ‘grandmother’, embark on a walking tour of Melaka that illuminates so much more than expected.

So, my task became weaving untold family legends with literary appreciation, and suppressed female creativity<sup>2</sup>, despite post-war Malaysian independence. I interweave prose and poetic fictional and non-fictional narratives, led by Phillip Holden’s<sup>3</sup> analysis of diasporic identity. Influenced by Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm in Extension 1, whereby all meaningful “human communication...is imbued with *mythos*”<sup>4</sup>, my Major adopts the short story form to effectively convey my purpose in a single reading, reviving cultural memories, while voicing a post-colonial subversion of Western assumptions, like Salman Rushdie’s short stories.<sup>5</sup>

My grandmother’s memories of Malaysia during and post-WWII triggered my initial investigation into Edward Said’s post-colonial voices in *Orientalism*<sup>6</sup> and romanticised

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<sup>1</sup> de Brito, S. (2014). *The new cultural narratives*. [online] The Sydney Morning Herald. Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/the-new-cultural-narratives-20141030-11ees4.html> [Accessed Jun. 2018].

<sup>2</sup> Healey, L., 2000. Gender, "Aliens", and the National Imaginary in Contemporary Malaysia. *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, October, 15(2), pp. 222-254.

<sup>3</sup> Holden, P. (2002). Interrogating Diaspora: Wang Gungwu's *Pulse*. *ARIEL: a review of international english literature*, [online] 33(3-4), pp.105-129. Available at: <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/view/34837> [Accessed Aug. 2018].

<sup>4</sup> Fisher, W. (1985). The Narrative Paradigm: In the Beginning. *Journal of Communication*, 35(4), pp.74-89.

<sup>5</sup> Rushdie, S. (1994). *Good Advice Is Rarer Than Rubies*. New York: Pantheon.

<sup>6</sup> Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

Eastern alterity<sup>7</sup>. I symbolise the lingering effects of Western colonisation on indigenous lives through the characterisation of Malaysians that Charlotte observes, with “men in trishaws wait[ing]” around Dutch Square. This metonymically spans the gap between multiple worlds via Wang Gungwu’s 1950s literary innovation, *Engmalchin*<sup>8</sup>, a hybrid of colonial English, Malaysian and Cantonese Chinese poetry featured in, *Pulse*.<sup>9</sup> I mirror the linguistic hybridity of Wang’s “*baju biru* full of tailings,”<sup>10</sup> with the addition of subtly bolded and italicised parallel translations, “*selamat tingall*, farewell.”

Originally, I envisaged a personal family biography, however, as my research into form and language deepened, so too did my understanding of the complex linguistic and current Malaysian “atmosphere rife with...ethnic tensions”<sup>11</sup> which Carstens explores, reflecting Nagy’s “ever-evolving cultural fabric of society”<sup>12</sup> and multi-ethnic identity. My poetry, triggered by Wang Gungwu’s *Pulse*<sup>13</sup>, engulfs Charlotte as she is “ensnared by the... ink in print,” coalescing a hybrid entity between Wang’s revered work, my poetry and *Engmalchin*, fictionally attributed to Popo. By representing Popo’s typewritten poetry in **Corona 3 Typewriter** font, I feature her poems as a linguistic cultural comingling. I speculatively create an emerging feminine voice previously, an ‘inferior alien’ victim of male hegemony

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<sup>7</sup> Quinn, R. (n.d.). *Orientalism and Representations of Alterity*. [online] Academia.edu. Available at: [http://www.academia.edu/7447326/Orientalism\\_and\\_Representations\\_of\\_Alterity](http://www.academia.edu/7447326/Orientalism_and_Representations_of_Alterity) [Accessed Aug. 2018].

<sup>8</sup> Lee, G. (2016). *The Pulse of Malayan Literature*. [online] BiblioAsia. Available at: <http://www.nlb.gov.sg/biblioasia/2016/01/26/the-pulse-of-malayan-literature/-sthash.OS6tKRK6.s9hvzNEL.dpbs> [Accessed May 2018].

<sup>9</sup> Gungwu, W. 1950. *Pulse*. Beda Lim: Singapore.

<sup>10</sup> Gungwu, W. 1950. “Three Faces of Night” in *Pulse*. Beda Lim: Singapore.

<sup>11</sup> Carstens, S. 1999. DANCING LIONS AND DISAPPEARING HISTORY: The National Culture Debates and Chinese Malaysian Culture. *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 13(1). pp. 11-63.

<sup>12</sup> Nagy, S. R., 2014. Politics of multiculturalism in East Asia: Reinterpreting multiculturalism. *Ethnicities*, February, 14(1), pp. 160-176.

<sup>13</sup> Gungwu, W. 1950. *Pulse*. Beda Lim: Singapore.

across cultures, as Healey<sup>14</sup> suggests, ironically symbolised as Popo's voice resounds through what is, essentially, her narrative. I was also fascinated by the restrictions faced by creative women in recent history, absorbing Virginia Woolf's<sup>15</sup> first-wave feminist voice, then later Malaysian female writers<sup>16 17</sup>. I also embed authentic newspaper articles from *The Straits Times*<sup>18 19</sup>, enhancing my textual integrity and historical verisimilitude. My title 'melaka's voices,' metaphorically encapsulates these conflicting hybrid narratives that define both Malaysia and today's multicultural Australian identities.

My hope is that 'melaka's voices' impacts post-modern Australians today of multi-cultural heritage, voicing a chorus of memories for them, as it did for me. Channelling the inclusive Australian life-writing genre, a "key element in... understanding cultural identity"<sup>20</sup>, I forge new avenues for female expression, as Susan Green<sup>21</sup> argues, with Charlotte's nomenclature, homage to "feminist trailblazer"<sup>22</sup> Charlotte Brontë, fortified by poetry and prose, intertextual allusions and auditory techniques such as assonance, "history unbound in a wuthering howl", and sibilance "sloops on a stormy sea."

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<sup>14</sup> Healey, L., 2000. Gender, "Aliens", and the National Imaginary in Contemporary Malaysia. *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, October, 15(2), pp. 222-254.

<sup>15</sup> Woolf, V. (1929). *A Room of One's Own*. 1st ed. [ebook] Project Gutenberg Australia. Available at: <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200791.txt> [Accessed Aug. 2018].

<sup>16</sup> Tan, T. (2013). *The Garden of Evening Mists*. Edinburgh: Canongate.

<sup>17</sup> Alkaf, H. (2017). *Unapologetically Malaysian: Hanna Alkaf*. [online] WAMN. Available at: <https://www.waitaminutenow.com/single-post/2018/03/22/Hanna-Alkaf> [Accessed Jun. 2018].

<sup>18</sup> The Straits Times (1940). "Treasure-Hunt" Through Scrap Heaps Of Great Britain. [online] Available at: <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19400205-1.2.102> [Accessed Jul. 2018].

<sup>19</sup> Lee, V. (2015). *Singapore Writers Festival: Women Can Say No*. [online] The Straits Times. Available at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/women-can-say-no> [Accessed Aug. 2018].

<sup>20</sup> Marcus, L. (1994). *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, criticism, practice*. p.293.

<sup>21</sup> Green, S. (2008). *Genre: Life Writing*. mETaphor, 2. p.52.

<sup>22</sup> Harman, C. (2015). *Author Charlotte Brontë was an uncompromising feminist trailblazer*. [online] Independent.co.uk. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/author-charlotte-bront-was-an-uncompromising-feminist-trailblazer-a6704921.html> [Accessed Jun. 2018].

Initially, my personal voice was inspired by Rudyard Kipling's<sup>23</sup> sympathetic but alien, Asian colonial perspectives. However, my work was later enriched by Confucius and Taoist values underpinning Chinese society for over two thousand years where patriarchal duty<sup>24</sup>, which Charlotte contemplates in the anaphoric "duty upon duty" echoes Wang's stoic, "then I lose my mirth to duty"<sup>25</sup>. By choosing first person present tense narration, including a foreword, epilogue and flashback vignettes by the inscrutable Popo, Charlotte's narrative, with her personal postmodern conversational voice, resembles Valenzuela's post-colonial magic realist tone.<sup>26</sup> This ensures an engaging accessibility, for women and men, to contemplate the broader fabric of meaningful multicultural connections, triggering the sharing of their own narratives with their own audiences. I also encourage intergenerational discussion, like the metonymical anthology that Popo "passes... down to [Charlotte]." I envision my Major published on websites like *Anak Sastra Literary Journal*<sup>27</sup>, an online publication point for writers of Southeast Asian background.

Popo's secret literary life was kindled by my Extension 1 related text, 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In'<sup>28</sup>, by James Tiptree Jr, amazingly later revealed as Alice Sheldon, intimidated by the patriarchal misogyny of the science fiction genre. This disturbing trend of women writing under male sponsorships or pen names is all too common, even today<sup>29</sup>. Charlotte's

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<sup>23</sup> Cody, D. (n.d.). *Kipling's Imperialism*. [online] Victorianweb.org. Available at: <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/kipling/rkimperialism.html> [Accessed Jun. 2018].

<sup>24</sup> Lau, D. (1979). *Confucius: The Analects, English Translation*. Middlesex: Penguins Books Ltd.

<sup>25</sup> Gungwu, W. 1950. "My Ruins" in *Pulse*. Beda Lim: Singapore.

<sup>26</sup> Valenzuela, L. (2003). Up Among the Eagles. In: C. de Zapata, ed., *Short Stories by Latin American Women: The Magic and the Real*. New York: The Modern Library.

<sup>27</sup> Anak Sastra. (n.d.). *Anak Sastra*. [online] Available at: <http://anaksastra.com/index.html> [Accessed Jun. 2018].

<sup>28</sup> Tiptree Jr., J. (1974). *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*. New York City: Double Day.

<sup>29</sup> Armitage, H. (2018). *12 Women Writers Who Wrote Under Male Pseudonyms*. [online] Culture Trip. Available at: <https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/articles/12-female-writers-who-wrote-under-male-pseudonyms/> [Accessed Aug. 2018].

travelogue subverts conventional male ‘road trips’<sup>30</sup>, by developing the comfortable familiarity of female intergenerational relationships in her reflections “my Popo, ...my maternal line, my travel buddy to be”, whose concealed, but unfounded “scandalous whispers” were influenced by reflections in Che Guevara’s memoir<sup>31</sup>, from my Area of Study. Hence, as Charlotte’s light-hearted travels progress, she uncovers secret layers of Melaka, “expos[ing] ...too much of what lies beneath”, and new flavours in Popo’s life: Popo’s surprising poetic past encapsulated in a “treasure trove... an old Peranakan box,” where gender discrimination and multicultural comingling revive diasporic voices, as Carstens<sup>32</sup> observes. This is enhanced via dramatic irony, since readers discover more than Charlotte, the ambiguous open-ending epilogue leaving responders wondering how Popo will share her story with Charlotte.

Structurally influenced by Kipling’s<sup>33</sup> short story style, I fuse the textual forms of prose, poetry and epigraphs, echoing the multivalent structure of a typical *tripsavvy* tour of Historical Melaka,<sup>34</sup> enhancing the credibility of Charlotte’s journey, with numbered subtitles mimicking the tour itinerary. Such a formative physical journey is juxtaposed against Charlotte’s internal metaphysical odyssey to uncover her heritage, symbolised via intertextual references to the Tao Te Ching<sup>35</sup>, adding layers of mise-en-abyme, “***stop 3: hidden but ever present***”. As landmarks of the tour are metaphorical landmarks in Charlotte and Popo’s

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<sup>30</sup> Mandrell, J. (1987). Questions of Genre and Gender: Contemporary American Versions of the Feminine Picaresque. *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 20(2), 149-170. doi:10.2307/1345875

<sup>31</sup> Guevara, C. and Guevara, A. (2003). *The Motorcycle Diaries*. New York: Ocean Press.

<sup>32</sup> Carstens, S. 1999. DANCING LIONS AND DISAPPEARING HISTORY: The National Culture Debates and Chinese Malaysian Culture. *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 13(1). pp. 11-63.

<sup>33</sup> Kipling, R. (1894). *The Miracle of Purun Bhagat*. New York: Pall Mall Budget.

<sup>34</sup> tripsavvy. (n.d.). *Walking Tour Through Historic Melaka, Malaysia*. [online] Available at: <https://www.tripsavvy.com/walking-tour-through-historical-melaka-1629562> [Accessed Feb. 2018].

<sup>35</sup> Dale, R. and Tzu, L. (2002). *Tao Te Ching: A New Translation and Commentary*. London: Watkins Publishing.

relationship, they begin to understand one another more, bridging their generational gap at *Jambatan Tan Kim Seng*. Popo's perspective is signified by the inclusion of dates, "1950", to retrieve the long creative journey that she has endured over time.

I chose the "natural" short story form as my primary medium, since William Boyd believes short prose "answer[s] something ... deep in our nature"<sup>36</sup>, enlightened by Fisher's notion of the universality of storytelling<sup>37</sup>, mimetically represented through the literary motif, "chapters of bounty and resignation", punctuated by poetry. Rosario Ferre's postmodern construction of run-on multiple perspectives in "A Poisoned Tale,"<sup>38</sup> inspired my inclusion of Popo's perspective, deepening the layers of uncovered mysteries, with Ferre's metanarrative sparking my interest in meta-textually constructing Popo's poetic struggles as a mimesis of my own creative journey. I refined my Major using Elizabeth Lyon's *Manuscript Makeover*<sup>39</sup>, building awareness of audience engagement.

Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*<sup>40</sup> in Advanced also guided me into the enigmatic realm of epigraphs as an intertextual literary chain, slotting my work into the wider literary canon. This diversity created the polyphonic voices necessary to enhance post-colonial Malaysian-style hybridity. Tan Twan Eng's<sup>41</sup> epigraph creates iterative imagery of wind, light and life, illustrating post-

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<sup>36</sup> Boyd, W. (2006). *A short history of the short story*. [online] Prospectmagazine.co.uk. Available at: <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/.../william-boyd-short-history-of-the-short-story> [Accessed Jun. 2018].

<sup>37</sup> Fisher, W. (1985). The Narrative Paradigm: In the Beginning. *Journal of Communication*, 35(4), pp.74-89.

<sup>38</sup> Ferre, R. (2003). The Poisoned Tale. In: C. de Zapata, ed., *Short Stories by Latin American Women: The Magic and the Real*. New York: The Modern Library.

<sup>39</sup> Lyon, E. (2008). *Manuscript Makeover*. TarcherPerigee.

<sup>40</sup> *Metropolis*. (1927). [film] Directed by F. Lang. Germany: Ufa.

<sup>41</sup> Tan, T. (2013). *The Garden of Evening Mists*. Edinburgh: Canongate.

colonial memories. Hanna Alkaf's<sup>42</sup> epigraph is a postmodern aphorism, representing my own and my characters' convictions about the importance of female narratives. Essential, also, was my interweaving of landmarks and hand-drawn sketches of rainbows and river reeds from Wang's anthology as I lay a trail of breadcrumbs sequencing between vignettes, also subtly foregrounding poetic allusions in Popo's life. The epigraph by Tash Aw<sup>43</sup> symbolises layers of silenced stories of women, honouring them in a way that history and Popo's post-WWII world has not, reinforced by traditional feminine motifs of fabric and food, "embroidering a fabric of words stitching me in" and "stark Dutch flavour." I also feature iterative imagery, either foreshadowing or echoing my protagonist's voices, such as the bridge, local birds and bound lotus feet.

Keen to broaden Popo and Wang's literary style, I discovered the liberated language conventions of E.E. Cummings and Omar Musa, seasoning my own English poetry with Cantonese and Malaysian flavour, unencumbered by traditional rules of capitalisation, establishing a hybrid template for my original compositions. Omar Musa's<sup>44</sup> daring formatting freedom, prompted me to counterintuitively align my compositions to the right, symbolising Popo's uniqueness as a 1950s female poet, with Wang Gungwu's original poetry aligned to the culturally dominant 'but vanilla' left. This echoes the yin and yang of the Tao<sup>45</sup>, adopted from Ursula LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*<sup>46</sup> in Extension 1, the dominant right of her heart representing Popo's poems too personal for publication. E.E.

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<sup>42</sup> Alkaf, H. (2017). *Unapologetically Malaysian: Hanna Alkaf*. [online] WAMN. Available at: <https://www.waitaminutenow.com/single-post/2018/03/22/Hanna-Alkaf> [Accessed Jun. 2018].

<sup>43</sup> Aw, T. (2006). *The Harmony Silk Factory*. New York: Riverhead Books.

<sup>44</sup> Musa, O. (2014). *Parang*. 2nd ed. Salisbury: Penguin Random House Australia.

<sup>45</sup> Dale, R. and Tzu, L. (2002). *Tao Te Ching: A New Translation and Commentary*. London: Watkins Publishing.

<sup>46</sup> LeGuin, U. (1992). *The Left Hand of Darkness*. London: Orbit.

Cummings' poetry, particularly "these children singing in stone"<sup>47</sup>, inspired my lower-case letters, mirroring the simplicity of the Taoist 'One'<sup>48</sup> and Popo's metaphysical self-actualisation.

I aspire for 'melaka's voices' to be remembered as an engaging patchwork of comingled voices: fiction and non-fiction, historical and contemporary, male and female, multiple cultures, generations and text types, illuminating curiosity within others. My journaling of my process and my journey into literary forms, particularly the power of memoir prose and lyrical polyphonous poetry, has enriched my experience in English Extension 2.

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<sup>47</sup> Cummings, E. E. 1939. "these children singing in stone" in *A Magazine of Verse*. London.

<sup>48</sup> Dale, R. and Tzu, L. (2002). *Tao Te Ching: A New Translation and Commentary*. London: Watkins Publishing.