CHAPTER VI

DISCOVERING THE GAME-MASTER IN THE TEXT
A Zen-based reading of Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion orchid*

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Zen-based Reading Procedure described in the previous chapter is used in this chapter for a reading of Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion orchid* (henceforth *Scorpion*). The reading has a dual purpose: to demonstrate the practical application of the Procedure; and to assess the Procedure's heuristic value, which is measured by whether the reading enables more insights into the novels' discourses when compared with past readings by critics using other approaches. In this Introduction, I shall first summarise the methodology of the Zen-based Reading Procedure (6.1.1) and then explain the critical importance of the novel for this reading demonstration (6.1.2). The demonstration that follows is set out in three readings. Section 6.2 demonstrates the First Reading, Section 6.3 the Second Reading, and Section 6.4 the Third Reading. Section 6.5 demonstrates the procedure for discovering new and hidden discourses from the outcome of the Third Reading. Section 6.6 presents a review of past readings of *Scorpion* by other critics for comparison with the outcome of the Zen-based Reading. Section 6.7 summarises the chapter.

6.1.1 Summary of Methodology

The Procedure is based on a 3-Reading Strategy, which uses the reader's key conflict with the novel as the starting point for engagement with the text. The rationale is that when the reader experiences the discomfort of having his worldview or value system destabilised by the text's presentation of conflicting viewpoints, the resultant quest for an explanation of the discomfort opens a window of opportunity for intersubjective (i.e. reader-text) dialogue. The aim of the Procedure is to intervene at these moments of opportunity to facilitate a change in the reader-text relationship: from one of confrontation to one of insightful comprehension.[1] This implies a radical change in the reader's reading habits: from an instinct-driven desire

for meaning and closure, to a desire to investigate the causes of the conflict. The theory is that close and careful investigation of the conflict-causing parts of the text will lead to the focal shift vital to the gaining of fresh insights into the novel's discourses (i.e. the issues being problematised by the text).

To achieve this focal shift, the Reading Procedure uses three sets of hermeneutic aids. The first set consists of the Reading Guidelines: (1) Prioritise the primary text (i.e. the novel being analysed; (2) Prioritise the text's discourse; (3) Prioritise the unambiguous; and (4) Prioritise logical analysis. The second set is the 3-Reading Strategy, which is being demonstrated here. Each Reading has a specific set of objectives to be achieved through defined tasks using purpose-designed critical tools. The third set of hermeneutic aids consists of five critical tools. Two of them are "created" by the reader through the First and Second Readings. These are the Break-in Tool (Key Conflict or KC) and the Diagnostic Tool (KC Discourse Hypothesis). The other three are Forensic Tools: the 3-Perceptions (3P), the Principals and Satellites (P&S) and the 10-Timeframes (10T).

6.1.2 Critical importance of *Scorpion* for the Zen-base reading demonstration

Scorpion was first published in 1976. It is of critical importance for this reading demonstration because of its content, techniques of narration, and the history of its reception. As the first Malaysian novel in English to address the dynamics of interethnic relations in contemporary Malaysia from a historical perspective, it provides the opportunity to test whether the Zen-based Reading Procedure can bring new insights into its discourses. The narrative style is dominated by techniques of indirection; among them, seemingly unconnected fragments of historical texts, narrative discontinuities, and a stream-of-consciousness monologue. This style presents a challenge for the Zen-based Procedure because while the narrative gaps and indeterminacies provoke a high degree of concretisation on the part of the reader, the Procedure's third Reading Guideline ("prioritise the unambiguous") and the fourth Guideline ("prioritise logical analysis") discourage interpretations based on free thought association and overuse of the imagination. The novel has been the subject of a number of articles and essays, spanning the three decades since its first publication in 1976. Of significance is that these critiques approach the text from different perspectives, providing a range of reading outcomes for comparison with the outcome of this reading.

In order to avoid giving the impression that I am presenting the "definitive" interpretation of the novel, I shall use the first person singular to indicate that this is my personal response to the text. The text used in this reading is the 1992 edition, which has two small but significant revisions made to the 1976 edition. The revisions will be discussed in the context of the analysis (6.3.2). Page references are in brackets.

6.2 FIRST READING

My objectives in the First Reading are (1) to synthesise textual data and (2) to define the Key Conflict (KC), which is the Break-in Tool I require for entry into the Second Reading. No special critical tool is used during the reading; my aim is to define my conflict and create my own Break-in Tool.

6.2.1 Synthesising textual data

To synthesise textual data, I read the novel through normally to establish the setting, the cast of characters, the storyline, and outstanding narrative devices. With the second objective (defining the KC) in mind, I take note of aspects of the novel that evoke in me feelings of conflict or strong critical urges.

The story is set in Singapore in the early 1950s, historically a period of political unrest as the multi-ethnic British colony tried to obtain the political independence that the neighbouring Federation of Malaya had successfully negotiated and was looking forward to. Against this background of social unrest, the characters, who are of different ethnic origins, examine their positions, roles, and relevance in the new political system being conceptualised in anticipation of the end of British rule. As the social unrest erupts into violence, the characters become overcome by doubt, mistrust, and despair. With a growing consciousness of their ethnic differences, they grapple with issues relating to their historical connections, emotional attachment, and sense of belonging to the country. Interpersonal relationships break down as one by one they retreat to what they perceive to be their ethnic home ground.

The main story examines how the bond of friendship among four English-educated university undergraduates begins to weaken under the pressure of events that force them to be inordinately aware of their ethnic differences. The four friends are Sabran (Malay), Peter

D'Almeida (Eurasian), Santinathan (Indian), and Guan Kheng (Chinese). They have known one another as pre-university students (i.e. Sixth Formers today) and at the beginning of the narrative are shown to be such close friends that they share a prostitute, Sally, whom they all assume to be Chinese but later find out is Malay, her given name being Salmah. Note: the men would be older than most undergraduates are today because the Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore from 1942 to 1945 would have interrupted their school education.

Their story begins at the coffee shop where Sally works. A night of revelry for the four is brought to an abrupt end by the sudden and threatening appearance of a group of unknown men. An undefined period of time passes, during which Santinathan manages to get himself expelled from university and then finds work as a dockyard labourer. One evening, as Peter, Guan Kheng, and Sally are walking about in a seaside village, Peter is assaulted by a group of men. Peter believes the attack is racially motivated. Doubting that he has a place in post-Independence Malaya or Singapore, he speaks of emigrating to Britain or Australia. Driving back to the city the following day, Guan Kheng and Sally are caught in an anti-British, trade union demonstration that has gone out of control. Forced to abandon the car, they try to make their way to safety on foot. Sally stops out of exhaustion. Guan Kheng goes on—to get help, he later says. Left on her own, Sally is beaten and gang-raped by unknown assailants. Meanwhile, Sabran asks Santinathan to help him persuade the trade union leaders to restore calm; but Santinathan refuses and walks away. After the riots, Sabran and Guan Kheng search for Sally, and find her in hospital. She, however, will have nothing more to do with either of them. Sabran, disappointed in his friends, loses faith in his vision of the country's future and plans to return to his rural home in Malaya. We hear no more of Guan Kheng; but later learn that Sally has returned to her village in Malaya, and Santinathan is teaching in a rubber estate school in Labis. Peter has tried to make a new home first in England and then in Australia, but confesses in a letter to Sabran that he is unhappy and wants to return to the place he knows and loves, Malaya-Singapore.

The story is told mainly through the thoughts, words, and actions of these five characters. But there are other characters, voices, and stories. There is Rasu, Santinathan's uncle, whose story opens the narrative. After having lived and worked in Singapore for twenty-five years, he is returning to his native India with his wife and Santinathan's younger sister. He is anxious that Santinathan should follow suit after graduation, and bring his other sister, Neela, with him. There is Roger Ellman, the young men's English lecturer, who has been having an affair with Neela, has made her pregnant, and has to confront the racism

implicit in his reluctance to marry her. There is Ethel Turner, the Philosophy lecturer who is cynical about the country's chances of peaceful development after the British leave, and who has a casual sexual relationship with Ellman. There is Arokiam, a dockyard labourer who takes Santinathan under his wing. There is another Arokiam, a homeless vagrant who tries without success to fight off Sally/Salmah's assailants, and for his pains is put in custody as a suspect. There is Inspector Adnan Hamid, the police officer in charge of investigating the rape incident. There is also the voice of one who has died, Peter D'Almeida's uncle, tortured by the secret police and their local collaborators during the Japanese Occupation. The strangest character is Tok Said, whom we never see or hear directly; whose words come to us through the characters who think they have met him. But everyone who has met him has seen and heard a different person in a different location. The one thing all these different personages have in common is that they make dire predictions about the future. These predictions exert a strong influence on Sabran, Santinathan, and Sally—and to a lesser extent, Guan Kheng. The only character who does not see or hear him is Peter, who accepts the view of the British authorities, which is that Tok Said is "the work of the communists", a fiction created to cause public fear and social unrest.

There is of course the voice of the author-storyteller; but he is not the only storyteller in the novel. Popping up throughout the novel—without any explanation, consistent pattern, or immediately perceivable connection—are excerpts from folk legends, semi-historical chronicles, and the personal memoirs of historical figures: the *Sejarah Melayu*, *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, *Hikayat Abdullah, Pelayaran Abdullah*, *Memoirs of a Malayan Family*, and *Syonan-My Story*. The final chapter is a coda of accounts of colonisation, immigration, and voluntary exile—all part of the history of Malaya and Singapore. Among them is Peter D'Almeida's homesick letter to Sabran, as if to say: this, too, is part of our history. The novel closes on an excerpt from Abdullah Munshi's report of an expedition upriver into the hinterland. The last voice we hear is that of a local, warning him: "All along the river as you go upstream there are homesteads, and in the river there are fierce crocodiles."

6.2.2 Noting the conflict areas

Reading *Scorpion* causes me discomfort because it raises the issues of language, citizenship, and culture that had contributed to the outbreak of interethnic violence in May 1969 and that continue to crop up in contemporary national discourse. I am disturbed by the fact that the characters seem to have been created in accordance with the stereotype Malaysian

demography described by Ethel Turner: “The Malays are in their *kampungs*, the Chinese own all the business, and the Indians are in the rubber estates. And the Eurasians … sit in their cricket club and imitate us….” (89). Sabran and Sally share a background of rural poverty; Peter D’Almeida is comfortably off; Guan Kheng and Patricia Chen (also a university student, who later gets engaged to Peter) come from wealthy urban families; while Santinathan becomes a labourer and ends up a rubber estate school teacher. Santinathan is particularly problematic.

6.2.3 Defining first Key Conflict (KC1): Santinathan

I am puzzled as to why Santinathan has to work as a labourer after his expulsion from university. Realistically speaking, in the Singapore of the 1950s a person with some years at university would have no difficulty finding a good position in a commercial firm, especially since Santinathan “could have got a first class without even trying” (126). He could also have gone straight to a rubber estate school to teach as he finally does, or worked as a clerk in the dockyard.

For the purpose of this demonstration, I shall make the text’s depiction of Santinathan my first Key Conflict (KC1). My question to the text is: Is there anything in the plot or Santinathan’s character to explain his becoming a labourer? I label this question my KC1, and use it as my Break-in Tool for the Second Reading.

6.3 SECOND READING

My first objective in the Second Reading is to determine whether my KC1 (i.e. my conflict with the text’s depiction of Santinathan’s character) is the result of misunderstandings and oversight on my part during the First Reading. To achieve this objective I have to give the text a chance to correct and modify my misperceptions. I shall therefore conduct a one-pointed investigation of the segments of the text relating to Santinathan’s character, using the three Forensic Tools: 3-Perceptions (3P), Principals and Satellites (P&S) and 10-Timeframes (10T).

My second objective is to formulate a KC1 Discourse Hypothesis based on the result of my Second Reading. The Discourse Hypothesis is the Diagnostic Tool I need for the Third Reading. Therefore the one-pointed investigation of the KC1-related segments of the

text is important because the diagnostic value of the KC1 Discourse Hypothesis will be enhanced if my hypothesis is based on what the text actually says rather than on my mistakes.

To give the text a chance to correct my mistakes, I use the 3-Perceptions (3P) Forensic Tool. The three perceptions are (1) the Imagined Perception, which refers to my perception or assumptions about Santinathan based on the First Reading; (2) the Narrated Perception, which refers to Santinathan as he is presented in the text, which will be revealed through the one-pointed investigation of the Santinathan segments during the Second Reading; and (3) the Modified Perception, which is my revised perception of Santinathan's character after comparing (1) and (2); that is, after my Imagined Perception has been corrected by the Narrated Perception. The Modified Perception is not exactly the same as the Narrated Perception, because during the one-pointed investigation, I shall have gained new insights into the "true nature" of Santinathan's role and function in the novel, and how he relates to the other characters and aspects of the text.

In focusing only on Santinathan, I am using the Principal and Satellite (P&S) tool. This means I do not read the whole novel again, but concentrate only on the episodes in which Santinathan appears or is mentioned. I am also using the 10-Timeframes (10T) tool by following his development carefully chapter by chapter, episode by episode, paying attention to the chronology of events: Are there flashbacks and flash-forwards? Are sequences out of chronological order? In other words, I am building up both a historical and a historicist understanding of the events by placing them in their own past, present and future. I take note of (a) data that I have overlooked; (b) how the additional data change my perception of Santinathan and his relation to the other characters; and (c) any ideas or insights that may occur to me in the process. These insights are noted and set aside for reflection after the reading. From the reflection, I shall formulate the KC1 Discourse Hypothesis, which is a hypothesis of the issues the novel is problematising through its depiction of Santinathan's character. The KC1 Discourse Hypothesis will be validated in the Third Reading.

Due to the predominance of indeterminacies in the text, it is inevitable that I shall have to concretise and draw inferences. In doing so, I shall follow the Procedure's third Reading Guideline, which is to prioritise the unambiguous or what is determinately stated in the text, and avoid making assumptions unsubstantiated by the text. Taking two examples

from Chapter 1: I may not assume that Vasantha's description of Santinathan's box of personal belongings being shipped off to India as a "coffin" (7) is indicative of how Santinathan feels about it; and I may not conclude from Santinathan's throwing a shoe at the lizard heading for where the Nataraja's altar once stood (15-16) as meaning either that he has broken with his cultural past, or that he is angry. All that can be said about this incident is that he threw a shoe at a lizard, and the matter has to be left at that until there is sufficient evidence gleaned from other incidents to infer the act's significance. Inferences have to be validated by textual evidence, logic or empirical reality, depending on the nature of the inference.

The Second Reading is done in 4 basic steps. In the first three steps, the 3-Perceptions (3P) is the main operative Forensic Tool. To use it I must describe first, my Imagined Perception of Santinathan's character based on the First Reading; second, the Narrated Perception based on the one-pointed investigation of the segments relating directly to Santinathan's character, using the Forensic Tools P&S and 10T; and third, the Modified Perception based on a comparison of my Imagined Perception and the Narrated Perception. My fourth step is to formulate the KC1 Discourse Hypothesis based on the Modified Perception.

6.3.1 Imagined Perception of Santinathan

My Imagined Perception of Santinathan is based on the impressions formed during the First Reading. Santinathan strikes me as an irresponsible man who has made poor use of his native intelligence, his family's moral and financial support, and Sabran's friendship. He despises his uncle Rasu for wanting to return to India, ignoring the fact that the "old man" had been looking after him and his sisters since his father's death, and is now "bust" after paying for their passages home and Santinathan's university fees. Instead, he thinks of his uncle's return to India as a "running away" (9). His behaviour toward his sister Neela is callous. He is unappreciative of the fact that his educational prospects have been given priority over Neela's simply because "he's a man" (93). He offers her no help although she is carrying Ellman's child. He is more concerned with the way Ellman makes the locals feel inferior than he is about her situation (49-50). Born in India, he had come to Singapore as a teenager, and has come to think of it as his home: "You belong here same as we do," (69) he says to Peter, when the latter talks about emigrating. But his claim of belonging is not supported by his actions. He consistently refuses to join Sabran in his activities with the

trade unions because he is afraid that it will get him into trouble with the authorities (20) and because he thinks it a waste of time (73).

6.3.2 Narrated Perception of Santinathan

For the Narrated Perception of Santinathan, which is what the text actually says about the character, I re-read only the narrative segments in which Santinathan appears or is mentioned. Due to space constraint, a summary of the Santinathan segments in the narrative is given in a chart (Figure 7.1). The chart analyses Santinathan's story in terms of present events; past events; and behaviour pattern. In terms of character traits, my first impression of him as a self-centred, mercenary and opportunistic person is confirmed (for discussion of textual evidence, see *Endnote*[2]). However, the chart brings into focus the fact that Santinathan's story is a series of moves away from his social circles—family, fellow-students, university, and Sabran's loyal friendship—towards isolation. In Chapter 10 he is alone, ill and delirious. In Chapters 13 and 14 the text tells us that he has recovered and is a schoolteacher in a rubber estate, but does not say if he does marry Zaleha.

	PRESENT EVENTS	PAST EVENTS	BEHAVIOUR PATTERN
CHAPTER 1	Family leaves for India and Santinathan (S) is left to fend for himself in Singapore	-	S's outsider status vis-à-vis family circle Protective toward younger sister Resentful (secretly) toward uncle Fearful when alone in city Aggressive toward lizard
CHAPTER 2	Social evening with friends & Sally	S has just returned from prolonged stay in Federation	S's outsider status vis-à-vis friendship circle Attitude toward friendship, money, religion, politics, women: self-centred, driven by physical appetite, parasitic, cynical
CHAPTER 3	Intimate moment with Sally Sabran interrupts them to warn S of the arrival of dangerous-looking strangers & to guide him to safety.	S confides to Sally that while in Federation, he has met Tok Said to ask about his future with a certain woman. T. Said has predicted he will die that year.	Dependence on Sally for emotional security Dependence on Sabran for physical safety
CHAPTER 4	At university: S misbehaves, disappears, and is subsequently expelled	-	Character traits established in Ch. 2 extended to intellectual sphere Intellectual show-off & bully Cynical about religion Expulsion reinforces his outsider status vis-à-vis the Establishment.
CHAPTER 5	S now a dockyard labourer Scene with colleague Arokiam	-	Arokiam's thoughts reveal S's insider status in all-Indian environment.
	S's rented room: scene with pregnant sister Neela	S and Neela spent their childhood in India; are relatively new immigrants to Singapore-Malaya	S's insider status vis-à-vis Neela contrasted to outsider status vis-à-vis the state; issues of belonging
CHAPTER 6	S's workplace: Sabran arrives to take S to Guan Kheng's seaside bungalow. They discuss the upcoming trade union demonstration & Tok Said.	S has spent a pre-University vacation in Sabran's home village. S begins to talk about a woman cake-seller he met in Rompin, but is too agitated to continue.	Sabran cares about S but there is no evidence that his feeling is reciprocated. S's dependence on Sabran for emotional support is reinforced. Also, for a recent immigrant, S has more experience of Malay rural realities than Guan Kheng and Peter.
CHAPTER 7	Guan Kheng's bungalow: Peter has been attacked. He calls S a "foreigner". Back in the city, a riot is in progress. S refuses to help Sabran talk to trade union leaders. Sabran calls him a foreigner. Alone, S sees a Eurasian burned alive by the mob.	-	This chapter marks the narrative's climax. We do not see the four friends together again. It also marks S's final break with Sabran and the group.
CHAPTER 10	S's "stream-of-consciousness" First mention of Zaleha by name	Verbal clues enable insight into his affair with Zaleha in Rompin.	This chapter marks the critical turning point in S's psyche
CHAPTER S 13 & 14	S has been ill, and is now a schoolteacher in a rubber estate in Endau.	-	S's story ends with his return to society, presumably psychically and socially rehabilitated.

Figure 6.1 *Scorpion orchid*: Narrated Perception of Santinathan's story

- Solving a critical crux through the Zen-based conflict-to-insight procedure

During the one-pointed investigation, Chapter 10 strikes me as a particularly problematic chapter[3]. It is the shortest chapter in the novel. It is also the only one which makes use of the stream-of-consciousness style, does not directly identify the character whose voice I hear,

and is set entirely in italics. These peculiarities suggest to me that the chapter is a critical crux. (A "critical crux" is my translation of the Latin, *crux criticorum*, which means "a puzzle for critics"). The only way to solve it is to "concretise", but based on the Zen-based third Reading Guideline ("prioritise the unambiguous") and the fourth Guideline ("prioritise logical analysis"), my concretisation has to be achieved through careful analysis of the text, and whatever I infer from the concretisation has to be supported by textual evidence, logic and/or empirical truth. I also must be able to recount how I arrive at the sudden insight that enables me to solve the critical problem. The following is my conflict-to-insight problem-solving procedure.

First I try to identify the "owner" of the stream-of-consciousness based on textual evidence. The line identifying this passage as Santinathan's stream-of-consciousness is "he poured the fresh water on my head and said I was going to die this year" (104), which echoes what he told Sally in Chapter 3 (32). The information given later that Santinathan had "some kind of nervous breakdown" after the riots (140) explains the delirium-like stream of consciousness. I had a flash of insight at this point, when I suddenly remembered that Santinathan had earlier referred to his files as the "Dead Sea Scrolls" (38). I had assumed it was an indication of his pomposity, but now am inclined to think it may be an authorial pointing forward to this particular passage, and a clue to how to approach its indeterminacies: I must reconstruct it in the same way that historians tease flowing narratives out of time-damaged parchments.

Second, taking this authorial cue, I piece together a "narrative", which I must then validate with textual and/or extra-textual evidence based on my knowledge of local customs. The data in the passage are fragmentary but there is sufficient to connect them to the story that Santinathan had begun telling Sabran in Chapter 6 but did not finish. The narrative I construct is this: While in Rompin, Santinathan had met a Malay cake seller named Zaleha, widow of a man killed by Japanese soldiers, and she had invited him to her home on learning he had nowhere to spend the night. They had had an affair, which they conducted in a furtive manner—"we hid from the boy leading home his buffalo" (103)—suggesting that Santinathan was aware that in a Muslim community the affair is a serious breach of moral law. I infer from "when we made love there were four in the still evening they watched…" that Santinathan and Zaleha had been caught *in flagrante delicto*. To me, the "four" would be the four men of good reputation, whose eye-witness testimony is required, according to *Syari'ah* law, for a charge of adultery or fornication to stand. Santinathan must subsequently

have come under pressure to convert to Islam and marry Zaleha, which he has not done. Since his return to Singapore, he has lived in fear of reprisal; and he believes that Peter's attackers had in fact been looking for him ("they left Peter bruised in anger at not finding me"). The last few lines suggest that he will return to Rompin and marry Zaleha—out of fatigue from being a fugitive: "they pursuing without rest I am tired now fearing death by burning too … I will go with them and be at peace with the four who said" (104).

The key word in this passage is "bamboo", which Santinathan associates with the reprisal. It is used in the context of such dread that death by fire seems preferable (104). The death by fire is probably a reference to his earlier witnessing of the mob setting a Eurasian on fire (73-4). I had begun by associating the bamboo with a form of torture (e.g. excerpt from the *Hikayat Abdullah* on page 16), but my construction of Santinathan's affair with Zaleha leads me (suddenly) to the *prajna*-insight that it refers to the circumcision, which he must undergo to convert to Islam before he can marry Zaleha. In the past, especially in rural areas, the operation was performed with a bamboo knife. The line, "I ran through a forest of night noises they pursuing without rest", suggests to me that he ran away before the operation could be performed.

I was able subsequently to validate my interpretation of Chapter 10 by reading the passage in the 1976 edition of the novel. There are two differences[4] worth noting. First, the stream-of-consciousness passage is not italicised in the earlier edition, which suggests that the change in the later edition is intended to draw the reader's attention to the crucial hermeneutic function of the chapter. Second, in the 1976 edition, it is not "four" men but "two", which suggests to me that the author may have intended this passage in the later edition to be interpreted as I have done.

Going back to the story of Santinathan and my KC, Santinathan's fear of reprisal explains his behaviour throughout the novel: his paranoia (15), his gaunt appearance (19), and his subsequent, provocative behaviour at the university, which can be rationalised as a tactic to get expelled so that he has a legitimate reason to go into hiding. His work as a dockyard labourer can also be rationalised in terms of this tactic. To avoid being found by his pursuers, he would have to "disappear". Since in the Singapore of the 1950s most labourers were Indians, the dockyards would have served his purpose because it is an environment where he can disappear like a chameleon—however only if he disguised

himself as a labourer. The Narrated Perception has thus satisfied me that Santinathan's working as a labourer is required by both the plot and his character.

6.3.3 Modified Perception of Santinathan

My Modified Perception of Santinathan is arrived at after comparing my Imagined Perception with the Narrated Perception. The pivotal role of the circumcision in determining Santinathan's actions and behaviour suggests to me that the story and the novel as a whole are based on the themes and structures of mythic journeys related to initiatory and other rites of passage. Rites of passage (e.g. circumcision, baptism and marriage) mark the transition of the individual from social and emotional immaturity to a mature relationship of identity with and responsibility to the larger community or, in the case of marriage, to the chosen partner (Jung et al. 1968: 124 & 263-4; Campbell 1982: 90-2). The underlying theme of initiatory rites is submission to the community in return for the privilege of membership. The motif associated with submission is death and rebirth, symbolising the renunciation of the old identity and the assumption of a new one. These motifs dominate the novel; many of the excerpts from traditional literature and historical writings are about diasporic journeys, migrations, and transitions. The main story is set in Singapore and Malaya during a period of transition from colonial rule to political independence. Santinathan's nervous breakdown and recovery as well as the riots and subsequent restoration of order are based on the motif of death and rebirth; a clue in the novel is Guan Kheng's thinking of the social disorder in terms of "a soundless fury which confused birth and dying" (75).

Initiatory rites are social covenants (Campbell, *ibid*). Their basic framework is the insider-outsider (or belonging-not belonging) dichotomy. And the requirements for insider status are social commitment, responsible social relations, and conformity. Through his anti-social behaviour, his interethnic relationship with Zaleha, and his immigrant status, Santinathan represents the initiate-novice, the outsider-suitor, and the wanderer in search of a new homeland. Required of him is a successful transition from psychological immaturity to psychic wholeness through mature and reciprocal relationships with others, and from social and political alienation to assimilation and acceptance. The circumcision and marriage represent the sacrifice and commitment necessary for community acceptance on both personal and political levels. But Santinathan's story is of his flight from commitment and union. He is presented to us only up to his nervous breakdown, and we are not told whether he finally marries Zaleha. The focus is on the psychological consequences of his

failure to conform. These new insights require that I modify my perception of Santinathan and either refine or redefine my KC1.

Santinathan's fear of circumcision raises an issue that forces me to redefine my Key Conflict. Although I am satisfied that Santinathan's stint as a labourer is explained by the plot and his character, it still seems implausible to me that someone would permanently abandon a promising future, the woman he claims he loves, his moral obligations, and perhaps even his life, merely to avoid temporary physical pain. It is especially strange that Santinathan, who has struck me as unscrupulous, opportunistic, and anxious to belong, should pass up an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone: do the morally right thing and achieve his socio-political aim of "belonging".

Since the circumcision symbolises the giving up of one's ego or old identity, I have to consider the possibility that he fears losing his Hindu-Indian identity; although his jokes about the *kavadi* (22) suggest that he is not a pious Hindu. Also, one of the more notable aspects of his character is his openness to intimate relationships with people of other ethnicities (e.g. Zaleha, Sally & Sabran). On the other hand, when he is shown alone with Neela (Chapter 5), I see a Santinathan who is nostalgic about India and ambivalent about his late father's decision to leave India (52). I could infer that this nostalgia and ambivalence are the reasons for his lack of commitment to Malaya-Singapore's political aspirations; but the real reason may simply be what he says it is, that he wants to avoid getting into "trouble" with the British authorities (20). In his treatment of Neela, however, I see signs of the traditionalist tyrant. He does not wish to see Neela again (11); his first reaction on finding her in his rented room is to drive her out (49); and he finds her cigarette smoking "incongruous" with "the way they had lived in India." (52). It is possible that he sees himself as a guardian of Indian tradition although his own behaviour does not conform strictly to traditional ideals. But this must be weighed against the reason he gives for being angry with her, which is his personal aversion to Ellman's assumption of civilisational superiority (49).

My search for a reason for Santinathan's fear of circumcision yields many possibilities but nothing conclusive. The only certainty is that I cannot rely on Santinathan to show me the truth because I cannot rule out the possibility that throughout the novel his perception of reality has been distorted by fear. The novel's refusal to give a clear and unambiguous explanation for Santinathan's fear after drawing my attention to it by making

me solve a puzzle to find out about the circumcision is conflict-causing. Either there is a literary game afoot, which means there is a "secondary level of meaning"[5] to look for, or Santinathan's story is simply a traditionalist moral tale about the consequences of failing to conform.

6.3.4 The KC1 Discourse Hypothesis based on Modified Perception

For the purpose of this demonstration, I shall hypothesise that the Santinathan story is a traditionalist discourse on social conformity, stated as follows:

> Failure to conform to society leads to marginalisation and psychological disorientation.

This KC1 Discourse Hypothesis is my Diagnostic Tool in the Third Reading.

6.4 THIRD READING: VALIDATING KC1 DISCOURSE HYPOTHESIS

My objectives in the Third Reading are (1) to validate the KC Discourse Hypothesis and (2) to discover new KCs and discourses. I am not particularly concerned whether my Discourse Hypothesis is validated; my main concern is use the process of hypothesis validation to discover discourses (see Ch. V, 5.5.3).

Due to the complexity of the novel, and my desire to reach a point of non-conflict by uncovering hidden discourses, my Third Reading involves many cycles of investigation and validation. However, the basic steps are that I identify and re-read segments resembling the KC1, conduct a one-pointed investigation of the identified segments, and compare these segments with the KC1 Discourse Hypothesis. If they match, the KC1 Discourse Hypothesis is validated, and the segments can be filtered out as the KC1 Discourse. If they do not match, I have to formulate new Discourse Hypotheses based on the problems revealed by the one-pointed investigation, and use them to discover new discourses by repeating the steps just outlined.

The process of validation involves the use of the 3-Perceptions Forensic Tool, where the Imagined Perception is my KC1 Discourse Hypothesis; the Narrated Perception is what the text has to say about the segments of the text under investigation; and the Modified

Perception is the result of the comparison between the Imagined and the Narrated. Just as I had to change my view about Santinathan in the Second Reading, so here, too, if the one-pointed investigation invalidates my Discourse Hypothesis I shall have to either abandon my hypothesis or revise it. Note that additional data learned in the Third Reading may change my perception of Santinathan, and the new perception may have an impact on the formulation of new KCs.

6.4.1 Identifying in-text stories resembling Santinathan's story

The narrative segments most closely resembling the Santinathan-Zaleha story are those of the Guan Kheng-Sally and Ellman-Neela relationships. Like Santinathan, Guan Kheng and Ellman are attracted to women they consider their ethnic "other" and feel that they cannot or do not want to marry. Like him, too, they later express remorse and make overtures toward union. But there are two differences. One is that in Santinathan's case, I am made aware mainly of his outsider[6] status, and have little insight into his thoughts. In the case of Guan Kheng and Ellman, both men regard themselves as insiders of their social and cultural traditions, and through their free indirect discourse, I am given their insider perspectives. At the same time, Sally and Neela perceive themselves as outsiders, and from their thoughts I am given their outsider perspectives. The second difference is that while the Santinathan story has an open ending, the Guan Kheng and Ellman stories close with Sally and Neela rejecting them. Through these four stories, new dimensions are introduced into the discourse on social conformity, marginalisation and psychological disorientation. To know how these dimensions affect the dynamics of the discourse, I conduct one-pointed investigations of these four characters one at a time, using the Forensic Tools. In effect, I am taking the Guan Kheng-Sally and Ellman-Neela segments through the steps of the Second Reading.

The purpose of my one-pointed investigation is to find out how the issues in the discourse on social conformity, marginalisation and psychological disorientation are problematised through the stories of the two additional pairs of interethnic lovers (the first pair being Santinathan and Zaleha). In conducting these one-pointed investigations of the characters individually, I am using the Principals and Satellites (P&S) Forensic Tool. The principle of the P&S is that the character being investigated is always the Principal, even if he or she has apparently only a peripheral role in the novel's plot (e.g. Neela and Ellman), and the other characters are Satellites. This non-discriminating approach enables a clearer

picture of how these characters function in relation to the other characters, and in relation to my Discourse Hypothesis. I shall use the 10-Timeframes (10T) when relevant.

6.4.2 One-pointed investigation of Guan Kheng and Ellman

As an anchor point, so that I keep in mind what exactly I am trying to do here, I shall set down the Discourse Hypothesis as the Imagined Perception being validated:

> Imagined Perception: (my hypothesis) of the KC1 Discourse
>
> Failure to conform to society leads to marginalisation and psychological disorientation.

Although I have investigated Guan Kheng and Ellman individually, I shall discuss them together here because of their similarities and to save space. To keep the discussion focused on the validation of the Discourse Hypothesis, I shall summarise the findings in terms of where Guan Kheng and Ellman stand in relation to the discourse on social conformity, marginalisation, and psychological disorientation.

Guan Kheng and Ellman are portraits of insiders. For both men, social conformity is closely linked to the "ownership" of a self-identity defined by ethnicity, tradition, culture, and a privileged insider status in their community. Guan Kheng explicitly defines identity: it has to do with "racial origin"; "a certain way of life, with habits, attitudes and beliefs"; and an "admixture of past customs and ideals" (78-9). For them, "loss of identity" is not simply a matter of becoming identity-less; it has to do with the fear of being identified with the outsider. Before Guan Kheng knew Sally's ethnicity, he judged her on the basis of her social status and feared the loss of his insider status through association with her. Ellman fears being absorbed by the culture of the outsider because he is both "fascinated" and "appalled" by the country (88, 96). The two men cope with their fears by depersonalising the women and setting them apart. Guan Kheng plans to keep Sally as his mistress, maintaining a relationship of intimacy kept separate and hidden from his public life. Ellman constructs a psychological barrier between himself and Neela, classifying her as the "Mysterious East", which he cannot know except through a metaphorical trial by fire (99-100).

The result of the men's "apartheid" coping strategy is psychological dissociation. There is a noticeable disconnection between what they think and say about their feelings and the way they consciously or unconsciously act. This is manifested in their devaluation of the word "love". Guan Kheng romanticises his feelings for Sally and calls it love (80), but all his actions suggest he sees her as an object. He pays for Santinathan's sessions with her and leaves her to her fate at the first sign of danger. Once he knows Sally's true ethnic identity, he is reluctant to use the word "love". At the hospital, he switches "in desperation to Malay reiterating his explanations, his remorse, and *at last* his love" (128; italics mine). Ellman explains his feelings for Neela as an obsession and a fixation. He uses the word "love" only with Ethel Turner, a fellow-insider for whom he feels no tenderness. The different parts of his being are so disconnected that he is unaware that he has been crying while thinking of Neela: "Ellman's cheeks itched slightly until he realised it was the hot night drying their wetness" (100). This psychological state parallels Santinathan's shattered stream-of-consciousness.

This investigation of Guan Kheng's and Ellman's stories shows that the proposition in my Discourse Hypothesis is being problematised by the text. It is not non-conformity that causes marginalisation and psychological disorientation. It is conformity and fear of marginalisation that cause psychological disorientation. I conclude:

> Narrated Perception of KC1 Discourse based on one-pointed investigation of Guan Kheng and Ellman
>
> Social conformity and fear of marginalisation lead to psychological disorientation.

Before I attempt a Modified Perception (revised Discourse Hypothesis), I want to take a closer look at how Sally and Neela feature in this discourse. From the perspectives of their communities, Sally and Neela are marginals who are treated as outsiders, by the men who make use of them, by their families and communities, and by society at large (represented by Sally's multi-racial rapists). Since they are different in every other way, I shall discuss them separately.

6.4.3 One-pointed investigation of Sally

Sally is an outsider by force of circumstance. A key element of her character portrayal is that she is Malay but assumes the identity of a Chinese. Critics have interpreted this identity switch as a symbol of ethnic ambiguity (see 6.7). But there is no textual evidence to support the view that Sally's racially double life is the result of ethnic-identity confusion. Although the other characters (and the reader) are unaware of her ethnicity until after she has been hospitalised, she herself is in no doubt of it. This is apparent in the episode where Sabran, on discovering her true identity, offers to take her home to her village. Turning down his offer, she accuses him of being a Malay-Muslim-male chauvinist and a hypocrite, and in her diatribe reveals that she judges him by higher (i.e. Malay-Muslim) standards because he is a fellow Malay-Muslim (130): "If you didn't like—what they were doing—why didn't you leave them? I wondered about this for a long time…."[7] One could argue that it is because she is acutely conscious of her ethnicity and the religious and cultural values associated with it that she deems it necessary to assume the identity of an ethnic "other" when doing something she knows is morally questionable by the standards of her ethnic group. The position I take in this reading is that Sally defines herself primarily in terms of her race and religion.

In terms of social status within her own community, Sally is a marginal person. In the larger contexts of Malay and Malayan-Singaporean social structures, she is marginal because her background is one of Malay rural poverty[8]. Within her own community, she is marginalised in three ways, because of her poverty, because she is a woman, and because she has left her husband (30-1). It is a moot point whether Sally could have chosen to sell cakes for a living, like Zaleha, although Zaleha's presence in the novel reminds me of that option open to her. But Sally chooses a profession that makes her an outsider by her own religious standards.

The result is a loss of psychological integrity and spiritual mooring. To cope with this loss she seeks assurance from an Indian holy man, whom she takes to be Tok Said. Tok Said tells her there are "too many men" in her life (31) and that she is "forced to love" those who come to her. Like most oracles, his words can be interpreted as an admonishment for past and present deeds, a recommendation for immediate perspectival and behavioural change, or a prediction of future events. She interprets them as an endorsement of her life of prostitution, understands "love" in purely physical terms, and later interprets the totality of

his “message” as a prediction of her rape. And she rationalises her career choice as an economic expedience, seeing herself as a dutiful daughter who sacrifices herself for her father’s sake as well as a generous provider of love and comfort to men, often without charge (120).

Sally’s self-image as the generous prostitute has to be problematised. In her dialogue with Sabran, Sally expresses bitterness about the way she has been exploited by men. But her thoughts at the point of her rape reveal that in fact she has been looking for a man to look after her: “I thought I had the patience to wait even until I die to find someone who would love me” (86). The image evoked by these words is that of a hunter lying in wait for his prey. The thought that comes to my mind is that in regarding men as potential providers of emotional and material security, Sally is herself guilty of depersonalising them and of being in her own way predatory. Her self-perceived generosity may be considered duplicitous, like her identity switch, and comparable with Guan Kheng’s intention to keep her as a mistress while maintaining the appearance of respectability. This may explain why, up to the time of her rape, she understands and even approves Guan Kheng’s treatment of her: “He is so practical about everything, he’s so right” (87). The crucial difference between Sally and Guan Kheng is that in her case, she is the “insider” judging herself as the “outsider”. Psychologically this is a difficult if not impossible position to be in and she intuits it at the point of her rape: “She had been fleeing from something or someone, and now she realised for the first time that she had moved not an inch. … To know what I have been running away from, I have to begin all over again” (86). I interpret this “something or someone” as the “self” that has been shaped and defined by the values of her upbringing, and which she has suppressed in order to cope with the antinomy of her career choice.

In this reading, the character of Sally overturns the idea that marginalisation is a consequence of non-conformity. In her story, it is rather the social ostracism she suffers on account of her gender and poverty that forces her into non-conformity, to the point of assuming the ethnic identity of an ethnic other in order to survive. Further, her spiritual and psychological disorientation is caused by the tension between her desire and her inability to live up to the values of her upbringing. My conclusion of the Narrated Perception is:

Narrated Perception of the KCA1 Discourse based on one-pointed investigation of Sally

Marginalisation leads to enforced non-conformity and psychological disorientation.

6.4.4 One-pointed investigation of Neela

In Neela the idea that one's concept of identity is determined by the values of one's upbringing takes a surprising turn; she is an outsider by education and choice. The text does not tell us a great deal about Neela. All that can be established is that she is a western-educated woman who feels trapped in 1950s traditional Indian attitudes toward women. Like Sally, she is marginalised because of her gender. She does not receive a university education because she is a woman and her uncle expects her to return to India (93). But unlike Sally, who is a conservative at heart, Neela is a non-conformist. From her memories of her childhood and from her conversations with Ellman, we know that in her mind, her cultural home is neither the Indian tradition nor the tradition of Britons like Ellman: "I didn't want to go to India, why should I go to London?" (100).

There is a suggestion that Neela views her pregnancy as a blessing in disguise because it allows her to remain in Malaya-Singapore (100): "…Everyone knows [about her pregnancy]. I had no further trouble about being forced to go to India. They left cursing me." The description of her unborn child hints of the pioneering, brave-new-world nature of her action (55): "Neela's child shifted its position within her, casting about for a new orientation." She stands in contrast to Santinathan, Guan Kheng and Ellman in having the courage to break with convention, becoming a social outcast to be where she wants to be, in spite of her fears (50). And she stands in contrast to Sally in that her decision to become an outsider is that of a self-empowered person and not that of a victim. She absolves Ellman of responsibility and refuses both his money and his proposals of help and marriage (99-100).

It seems clear to me that the reader is not meant to see Neela as Ellman wants to see her, a personification of the mysterious East. But are we supposed to see her as an avant-garde Existentialist heroine exercising her free will and acting out the courage of her conviction?[9] Historically speaking, in the Malaya-Singapore of the 1950s, for a middle-class Indian woman disowned by her family to choose to have a child out of wedlock would be unrealistic to the point of being delusional. Is Neela's action that of a truly emancipated

person or that of a colonial subject "programmed" by her reading of Wordsworth in her youth (52) to act out the liberal-Humanistic ideals of the European Romantic Movement? Are we meant to see her as someone out of touch with reality because of her western education? If so, we could compare her to Guan Kheng, who is aware that he and his friends were "living in a kind of capsule" (78); and to Sabran, who is told by Tok Said that he has "played at believing" (111). We are not told enough about Neela for me to be able to answer these questions. I can only be certain that if Neela's story confirms the view that the values and ideals of one's upbringing determine one's identity, it also undermines the notion that those ideals and values must inevitably be those of one's race or religion. Neela's story also problematises my Discourse Hypothesis by showing that conformity can cause such psychological disorientation that social ostracism is desired. I conclude:

> Narrated Perception of the KCA1 Discourse based on one-pointed investigation of Neela
>
> Enforced conformity causes psychological disorientation, which leads to voluntary self-marginalisation.

6.4.5 KC1 Discourse based on revised Discourse Hypothesis

From the above analyses, the only conclusion I can reach about my KC1 Discourse Hypothesis is that it has been thoroughly problematised by the stories of Guan Kheng, Ellman, Sally, and Neela. Based on my findings, I formulate my KC1 Discourse.

> KC1 Discourse based on revised Discourse Hypothesis
>
> The KC1 Discourse is a problematisation of the traditionalist view that non-conformity leads to marginalisation and psychological disorientation.

I shall now use the problematics I have uncovered in my attempt to validate the KC1 Discourse Hypothesis to discover new discourses.

6.5 DISCOVERING NEW AND HIDDEN DISCOURSES

To find out why the traditionalist view is being problematised, I shall convert the above three Narrated Perceptions I have—one based on Guan Kheng and Ellman, one based on Sally, and one based on Neela—into three new KC Discourse Hypotheses and use them as Diagnostic Tools for the discovery of new discourses. Figure 6.2 below is a visual summary of how it is done. In the diagram, I have rearranged the order according to the complexity of the issues raised in the depiction of their characters; therefore, Neela first, then Guan Kheng and Ellman, and finally Sally.

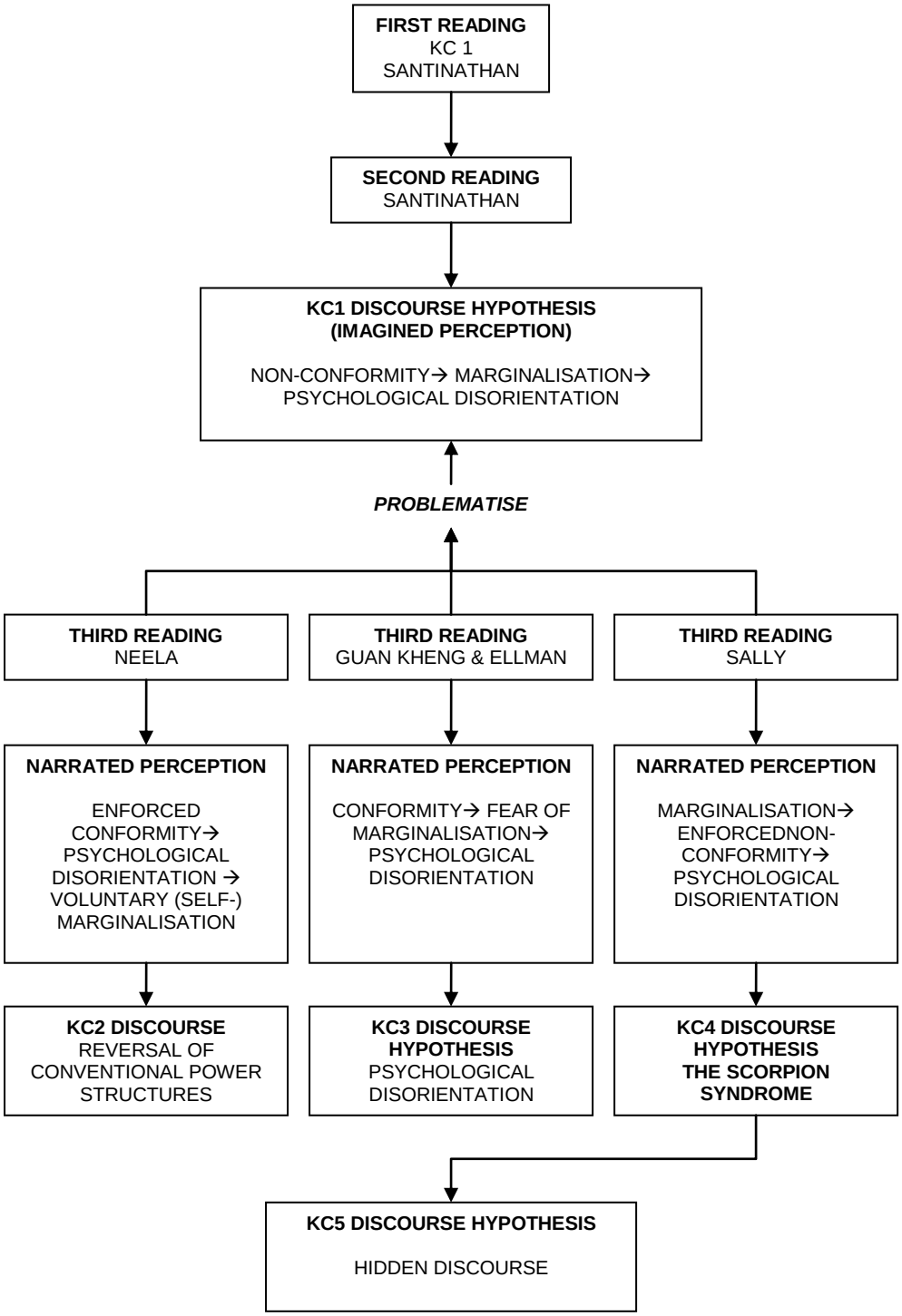

Figure 6.2 *Scorpion orchid*: Discovering new discourses from problematics of validating Discourse Hypothesis

Figure 6.2 shows the process by which new discourses are discovered. I use the validation process of the KC1 Discourse Hypothesis to uncover its problematics; and then from the problematisation (Narrated Perceptions of the KC1 Discourse Hypothesis) develop new Discourse Hypotheses. Thus the Narrated Perception of Neela is converted into the KC2 Discourse Hypothesis; that of Guan Kheng and Ellman into the KC3 Discourse

Hypothesis, and that of Sally into the KC4 Discourse Hypothesis. To define the Discourse Hypotheses, I consider the implications of my one-pointed investigations of the characters. Once the Discourse Hypotheses have been defined, the task is to validate them one by one, and through the validation process, discover more discourses. I shall explain how I arrive at the definitions of the new KC Discourse Hypotheses in the course of this discussion.

6.5.1 KC2 Discourses: reversal of conventional power structures

In defining the KC2 Discourse Hypothesis as "reversal of conventional power structures", I considered the two most significant aspects of Neela's story that emerged from my investigation; namely her self-empowerment and her overturning of conventional power structures such as inside-outside, centre-margin, male-female, oppressor-victim. Using this Discourse Hypothesis as a Diagnostic Tool to seek out other segments in the text with more or less the same themes, I find that these two aspects of Neela's character are major themes in the novel. The assumption is that the hypothesis is validated, and I can now speak of a KC2 Discourse. Figure 7.3 gives an overview of how the KCA2 Discourse branches out into three related discourses: "societal", "socio-political", and "political".

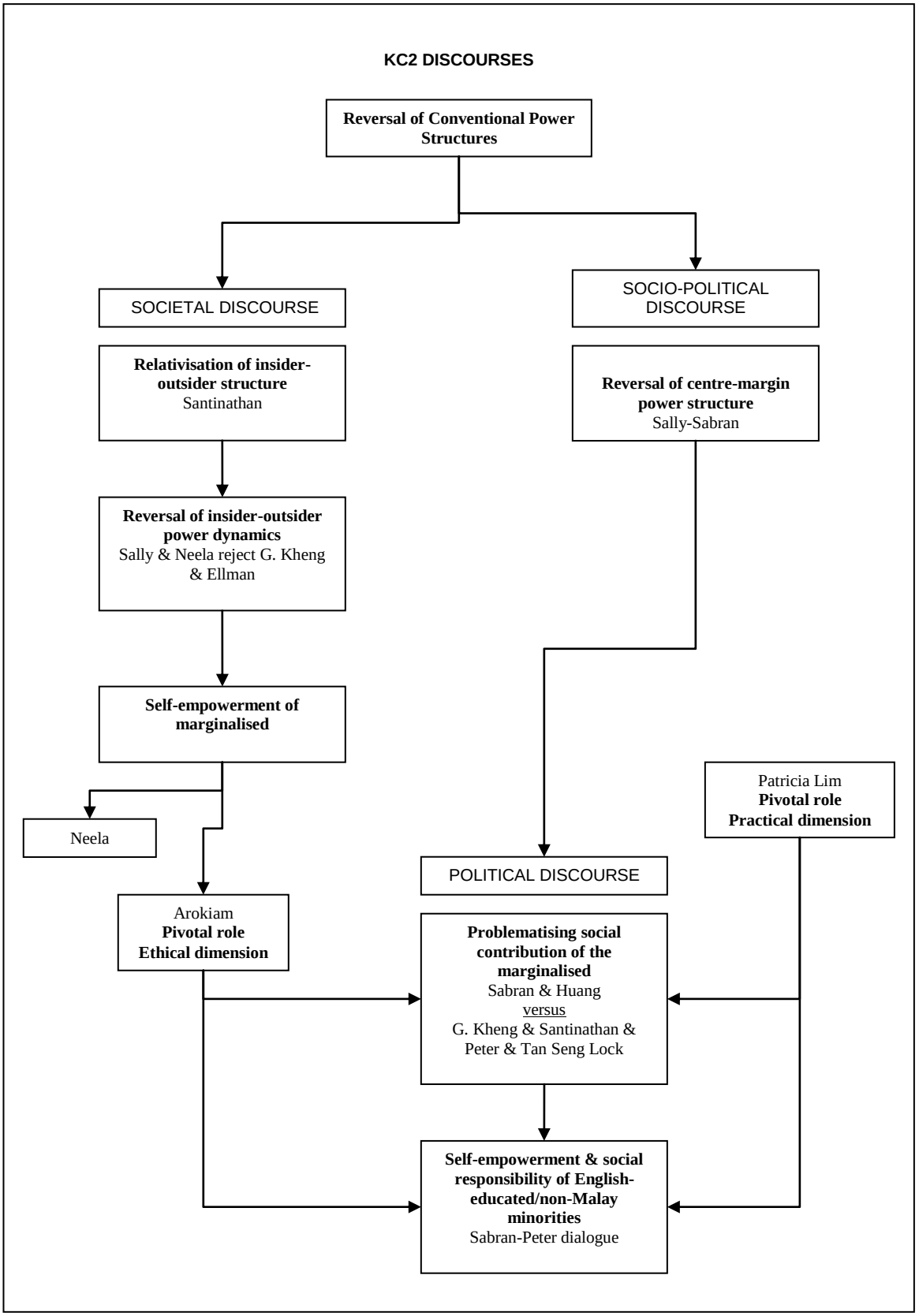

Figure 6.3 *Scorpion orchid*: KC2 Discourses—process of discovery

In the conventional power structure of interpersonal relationships (e.g. insider-outsider, male-female, and oppressor-victim), those who perceive themselves as insiders (e.g. Guan Kheng and Ellman) arrogate to themselves the power to alienate those they

perceive to be outsiders (e.g. Sally and Neela). Neela overturns all conventional concepts of power relations through her rejection of both Ellman and her family, and by choosing the unconventional, marginal life of a single mother in Malaya instead of returning to India. Neela's rejection of Ellman is reflected in Sally's rejection of Guan Kheng. By their rejection of the men, these women effectively reverse the power structure and make the men their outsiders. Related to this theme is the relativisation of the insider-outsider power structure, which is evident in Santinathan's story. Santinathan is an outsider only from the perspective of Peter and Sabran; from the perspective of Arokiam and his family, he is an insider. In a multi-ethnic society, everyone is both an insider and an outsider.

Also related to the reversal of the insider-outsider power dynamics is the self-empowerment of the marginal and marginalised, foreshadowed in Neela's and Sally's non-conformist efforts to free themselves from the restrictions and injustices of their ethnic traditions. This basically humanistic idea-ideal with its undertone of self-interest is given a humanitarian and ethical dimension by the character of Arokiam, who plays a pivotal role in the development of this discourse. Arokiam is the uneducated, homeless man who tries to save Sally from her rapists and is beaten and kicked, but stays behind to cover her nakedness. He is totally marginal. In the fictional world he is a vagrant, and in the narrative he makes but a brief appearance. But through his spontaneous, unconditional act of selfless courage, which transcends economic and social status, gender, and ethnicity, he serves as a foil for the defeatist attitude of the English-educated non-Malays who either retreat into themselves like Santinathan and Guan Kheng or choose exile like Peter and Tan Seng Lock, the student-activist who opts to be deported to China because he sees no future for the country (154).

All these themes—the relativisation and reversal of conventional power structures and the self-empowerment of the marginal and marginalised—are extended into the sphere of Malay political discourse through the encounter between Sabran and Sally (129-30), where Sabran is reminded that in the Malay world, he is the one who is marginal and not Sally. From Sabran's conventional perspective, he represents the centre of the Malay world and Sally the margin. He thinks of her as his *adik* or younger sister (128), in need of his protection (in contrast to Santinathan's attitude toward Neela). Sally's rejection of his help changes the power dynamics; and its significance is not lost on Sabran. Many months after their confrontation, Sally remains "an obstinate blur to the vision", and evokes in him a "sense of his inadequacy" and the urge to go back to his village, because "many old

thoughts had to be shed, hopes re-examined" (131-2). I read this as an indication that Sally has made him realise that with his university-level English education, he is marginal not only in the Malay world but also in the Malaya-Singapore polity. As he had pointed out to Ellman, "only a small fraction" of the Malayan population speaks English (91). In the Malay world, then, Sally represents the numerically larger and potentially more powerful centre, and Sabran the margin. Sabran later gets another reminder of his marginality, this time in relation to the political reality of colonial Singapore, from the British Officer who interviews him before his release from detention. He is told "with an avuncular smile" to stop "blabbing" about his meeting with Tok Said, or be charged with spreading rumours (133).

Sabran's awakening to his irrelevance addresses the marginalisation of the English-educated minority (the novel's primary target reader), a controversial issue in Malaysia after 1970, when the enforcement of the Malay Language Policy made English irrelevant. Like Guan Kheng, many of the English-educated found it "hard to discover what contribution" (75) they could make to the country. In the novel, the male characters represent a range of possible responses to the political change. One could try to disappear, as Santinathan does. One could accept the change and retreat to one's comfort zone, defined by Sabran as "a context he could take for granted, not one where nearly every gesture had to be thought out" (113). For Guan Kheng this comfort zone is the Chinese culture; for Sabran it is his kampung. One can choose exile, like Peter, whose comfort zone is a country where everyone speaks English; and like the student activist, Tan Seng Lock, who chooses deportation to China. Or one can, like Huang, the translator for the Chinese trade unions, retreat in the face of violence and wait for the right time to return and continue the struggle—a line of action implicit in his advice to Sabran not to do anything rash during the riots (109).

The text offers a solution to the problem of the English-educated by defining a nation-building role for them. In the definition of this role, I am inclined to see Neela's self-empowering step into the unknown and Arokiam's selfless courage and spontaneous response to those in need of help. These qualities are already present in Sabran's character (his overcoming of poverty, his political activism, and his concern for his friends). But they are given a practical direction by Patricia Chen, Sabran's fellow-student who is a relatively marginal character in the narrative. As the novel draws to a close, Sabran feels hopeless and plans to return to his kampung. But he meets Patricia, who asks for his help in persuading

Peter (now her fiancé) not to emigrate. The request transforms him from a disillusioned idealist to a pragmatic and diplomatic mediator between the English-speaking elite of the old order and the non-English-speaking majority who will be the elite in the new social order. This transformation is crystallised in the dialogue between Sabran and Peter (140-3). Here we see an eloquent Sabran where earlier he is shown as a relatively taciturn man (note especially p. 146-7, where "Sabran sat listening" while Ellman and Santinathan are arguing).

The role of intermediary during the transition from the old to the new socio-political order is envisaged for multi-lingual, English-educated Malays and non-Malays. Being equally comfortable in the traditional and the modern worlds, these "cultural amphibians" are seen as contributing to society as translators, mediators, knowledge transmitters, and social critics. The excerpts from the *Sejarah Melayu*, the *Hikayat Abdullah*, and *Syonan-My Story*[10] establish the traditional precedence for such a role; their authors were builders of cultural bridges and critics of their governments. The problematisation of conventional power structures thus ends in a discourse on the self-empowerment and social contribution of the English educated.

- Reflections on the KC2 Discourses

What I wish to highlight in this exposition of the KC2 Discourses is the hermeneutic value of the Principals and Satellites (P&S) and 10-Timeframes (10T) Forensic Tools. In applying the P&S, I paid attention to "minor" characters like Neela, Arokiam, and Patricia Chen, who have so far been neglected by critics of *Scorpion*. By doing this, I have uncovered their roles and functions in the novel's discourse. Although the use of the 10T has been implicit throughout the reading, its conscious application in the case of the KC2 Discourses enables me to place the discourse on the contribution of the English-educated minority in its historical context; and in doing so, bring into focus a "conflict" within the text itself. In principle the KC2 discourses reflect the Government's position in the 1970s. The National Operations Council, set up after the 1969 riots, was "a body representing all segments of society"[11] allowing "frank discussion" and a return to the "traditional Malay practice of governing by consensus" (Andaya & Andaya, 1982, p. 281). These are optimistic national discourses, as are the KC2 discourses revealed in this reading. Yet the novel ends on a note of despondence and dread; with the warning about the "fierce crocodiles" in the river. For an explanation of the contradiction between the message and the mood of the novel, I have to examine the KC3 Discourse.

6.5.2 KC3 Discourse: psychological disorientation

The KC3 Discourse is derived from the one-pointed investigation of the Guan Kheng and Ellman stories (6.4.2 and figure 6.2 above), where I noted their dissociation from their feelings, arising from their inability to admit that what they fear most—the loss of a part of themselves to the ethnic other—is already an accomplished fact. I also noted that Santinathan, Sally, Neela, and Sabran suffer from some form of disconnection from the reality of the outside world. The theme of the characters' inability to see the obvious is the basis of an exploration of the impact of the colonial experience on local perceptions and discourse on race. Figure 6.4 outlines the process of discourse-discovery and shows how the KC3 Discourse is linked to the KC4 ("Scorpion Syndrome") Discourse and the KC5 ("Hidden") Discourse.

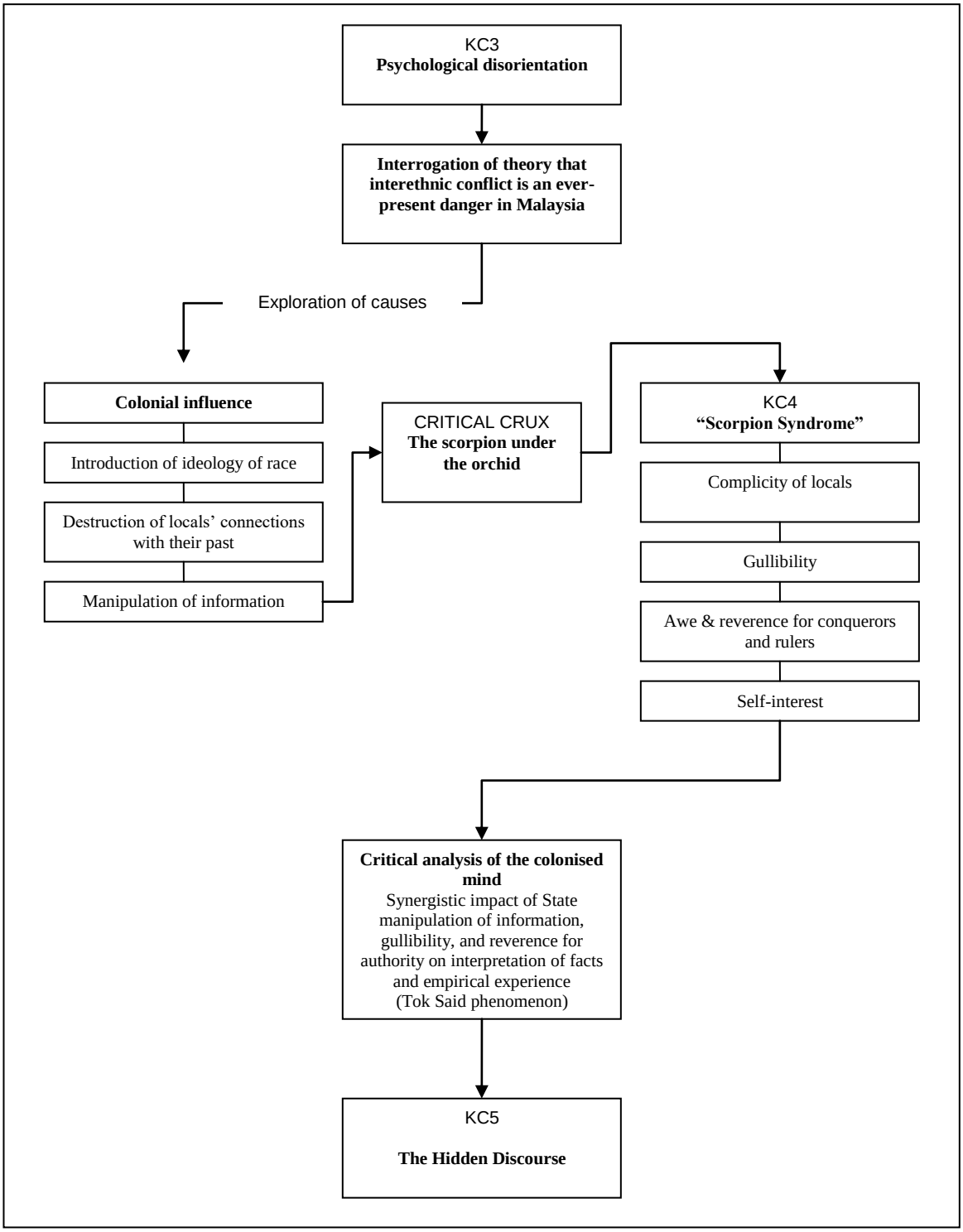

Figure 6.4 *Scorpion orchid*: KC3, KC4, KC5 Discourses—process of discovery

The starting point of my investigation of the KC3 discourse is the text's problematisation of the dominant "theory" in Malaysian discourse on social relations, especially since the 1969 riots; namely that interethnic conflicts are an ever-present threat to national unity. In the novel it is expressed by Ellman (147): "You have too little in common. The moment we go you'll fight and kill each other until one community gets the upper hand or the communists walk in". And it is problematised by the fictional reality.

The picture of local society being drawn for us in the text is not conflict-free. A close reading of the description of scenes and interpersonal dynamics reveals an almost Hobbesian view of contemporary society—nasty and brutish. Chapter 1 closes with scenes of gratuitous violence: Santinathan throwing a shoe at the lizard, and the flogging of a man at a secret society meeting. In Chapter 2 the trade union protestors are described as "football partisans returning from a rousing game" (17). The four friends, who look on this scene of tribal behaviour, are shown indulging in primal pleasures: eating, drinking, anticipating sex with Sally, taking pot-shots at one another about their racial identity, and participating in their form of gratuitous violence—the ragging of a university freshman. However, a one-pointed investigation of passages in the novel that depict or mention interpersonal conflict or violence shows that conflicts are more likely to be intra-ethnic than inter-ethnic in origin, as Figure 6.5 shows.

INTERETHNIC CONFLICT	INTRA-ETHNIC CONFLICT	NON-ETHNIC CAUSES
MAIN NARRATIVE 1. Attack on Peter (problematic)	MAIN NARRATIVE 1. Santinathan & uncle (11) 2. Santinathan & Neela 3. Sabran & Sally DOCUMENTARY EXCERPTS 4. From *Hikayat Abdullah*: coercing of Chinese immigrants to "join this society" by Chinese Triad leader (16) 5. From *Sejarah Melayu*: enmity between Raja of Haru & Sultan Mahmud Shah, the ruler of Bentan (102)	MAIN NARRATIVE 1. Rape of Sally: a "multi-racial rape" (123) 2. Sally & Guan Kheng (127-8) 3. Trade union riots (a multi-racial protest against the British) 4. Torture of Peter's uncle during Japanese. Occupation. by local collaborators (151-2) 5. Massacre of Chinese during Japanese Occupation (152-4) 6. Shooting of Zaleha's husband by Japanese soldiers (103)

Figure 6.5 *Scorpion Orchid*: instances of social conflict and their causes

An analysis of conflicts involving people of different ethnicities show they can be attributed to an idiopathic tendency to violent expressions of power (e.g. Sally's rapists, the torturers of Peter's uncle), moral and emotional issues (Sally & Guan Kheng), anti-British sentiments (trade union riots), and the exceptional circumstances of war (the killing of Zaleha's husband and the massacre of the Chinese during the Japanese Occupation). The only incidence of interethnic violence is the attack on Peter. But whether the attack is truly motivated by racism, as he claims, is questionable. An extra-textual, historical investigation of conflict and violence in Singapore during the 1950s offers little evidence to support Peter's claim.[12]

In this discussion I shall confine myself to the text's reality because its construction is part of the text's discourse. A 3-Perceptions (3P) investigation comparing Peter's perception of reality with the text's depiction of reality suggests that the text is faithful to historical fact in making clear that the riots began as a demonstration of multiracial solidarity among the trade unions (17). I note, too, that at the height of the unrest, Sabran and Huang walk together through the city unmolested; Guan Kheng finds refuge in a mosque (128); and Sally's rape is established by Inspector Adnan to have been perpetrated by a "multiracial" gang—a macabre example of multiracial solidarity (123). It is true that during the riots Europeans and Eurasians are attacked; but these attacks are motivated by anti-British (i.e. political) sentiments. If Peter was assaulted because he is Eurasian, it may be for the same reason that the Eurasian was burned to death by rioters the following day (74): "Serves him right…. He wanted to be a European." The issue is further confused by Santinathan's belief that the assailants were those who had been sent to kill him for his betrayal of Zaleha, and that he, and not Peter, was the real target (104). If Santinathan is right, then the attack is ethnically motivated, however in a religious, and not a racial, sense.[13]

My main reason for questioning Peter's claim is based on a 10-Timeframes (10T) investigation. The 10T gives us a historical and historicist framework to place every event at any time in the past, present and future in its own past, present, and future (see Ch. V, 5.4.3.3). Placing Peter's assault in the timeframe of the novel, I find that it takes place the day before the riots, when Sabran is still talking optimistically and in the future tense about the demonstrations (59): "We are going to have a rally to demonstrate unity. I don't know what's going to come out of that." To get to the bottom of the matter, I shall examine Peter's background and psychology later, in connection with the KC4 "Scorpion Syndrome" Discourse Hypothesis.

Returning to the KC3 Discourse Hypothesis, in the text's depiction of interpersonal relationships, there is no evidence of interethnic animosity. Guan Kheng is aware that he, like Peter, is "in reality a stranger who had never understood the people among whom he had been born" (84), and Sabran realises that despite having worked together with Huang, he barely knows him (108). But ignorance or distance is not animosity. Sabran is disappointed in Santinathan's lack of social commitment, Guan Kheng's insufficient care for Sally's safety, and Peter's decision to emigrate; but he does not cut off ties with them. In his relations with his friends, including Huang, there is honest and open communication,

suggesting that an underlying bond is taken for granted. On the basis of the text's presentation of social reality, one has to agree with Sabran that race is "too paltry" an explanation for the drifting apart of his friends after the riots (136). But his very raising of the issue of race reveals the malaise underlying local perceptions of social relations: the obsession with race.

At this point, I think it is important to draw attention to the novel's depiction of this obsession with race. It is not based on a racism that affects people in a practical or action-oriented way. The novel is not problematising race as a problem comparable to the "race issue" in the United States or in Hitler Germany. It is problematising the concept of race as a problem related to the psychological dissociation of Ellman and Guan Kheng: the inability to see and accept that in (the fictional) reality, "race" as an issue does not exist; it is only a myth clung to despite the non-racist reality of their daily lives. This is established very early in the novel. Chapter 2 opens on an example of multi-racial cooperation: a scene of Chinese, Indians, and Malay trade union members gathering for their joint-action "showdown" with British Realty (17). Observing them are Sabran, Santinathan, Guan Kheng, and Peter, exemplifying multi-racial friendship. But ironically, the four men's conversation consists mainly in taking verbal shots at one another about their ethnicity. The irony is heightened in the next chapter, where we find Santinathan and Sally sharing confidences in a moment of post-coital intimacy. Inevitably the thought comes to mind that even for the race-conscious Guan Kheng and Ellman, there must have been similar moments of ethnic oblivion in their respective relationships with Sally and Neela.

My one-pointed investigation of social relations as depicted in the novel leads me to this *prajna*-insight: The question the text is forcing me to ask is not the aesthetic one of whether the fictional society is a verisimilitude of reality. Nor is it an ideological one of whether Ellman's theory of Malayan-Singaporean society is valid. The question I am being forced to ask is a socio-psychological one: Given a reality with little or no evidence of interracial violence, and where racial differences have little relevance in their everyday lives, why do the characters persist in thinking and talking in terms of racial differences and conflicts? Two excerpts from the *Hikayat Abdullah* in Chapter 2 provide a possible answer: colonial influence.

The significance of the two excerpts lies in that Munshi Abdullah was writing about the early nineteenth century, a transitional period when Malay political power was ebbing

and British influence on the rise. The excerpts thus give us a perspective on pre-colonial concepts of race, and the impact of early colonial rule on the local psyche. The first excerpt is an account of the arrival of the Balinese and Bugis female slaves who were bought and taken as wives by "men of all races" (27-8). Here we are given historical evidence that before British rule was firmly established, there was little or no racial discrimination among the local people. In the novel, this passage is placed at the end of Chapter 2; drawing attention to the contrast between the men's public, racially coloured bantering and the private, ethnicity-free conversation between Santinathan and Sally.

The second excerpt is an account of the discovery in Singapore of an ancient rock with indecipherable inscriptions on its face, and its destruction by the British engineer, Mr. Coleman, "because he did not realise its importance" (18-9). In the novel, this account of the obliteration of native voices from and of the past is placed between Sabran's optimistic report of the various trade unions' success in overcoming their language barriers, and Peter's glum prognostication that "a showdown with Realty [symbol of British capitalism]" would mean "trouble". This sandwiching of the historical past between two divergent viewpoints of the fictional present gives us in a nutshell the beginning and the end result of British rule. It begins with the destruction of the local peoples' understanding of and sense of connection to their past[14]; and it ends with the ethno-linguistic divisions of the local people on the one hand, and on the other, Peter's fear of the outcome of rebellion and his total identification with the aims and desires of the colonisers—"If I were the governor I'd line them up and shoot the bloody lot of them" (17)[15]. The British manipulation of information about the natives' past is underscored in Chapter 15, where Ellman dismisses the local account of the purported British expedition to Kelantan as "bogus history" (144-7).

In the analysis of Neela, I asked if her decision to strike out on her own as an unmarried mother in 1950s Malaya-Singapore is the action of a truly emancipated person or that of a colonial subject "programmed" by her reading of the "Great Romantics". I mentioned also Guan Kheng's lack of knowledge about the local world, and Sabran's idealistic dreams of the nation's future. In Peter's attitude towards the issue of race, I find echoes of the fear of post-colonial chaos expressed by Ethel Turner and Ellman. But it is through Guan Kheng's thoughts that I get an insight into the effect of the British manipulation of information on the local intellectuals. In the novel, it had earlier been established through Guan Kheng's free indirect discourse as he drives Sally into the city that he is a man rooted in his Chinese culture. Unlike Peter, he is well aware of the effect of

colonialism on the minds of the locals, and he is certainly not affected by western ideas of romance. Yet, due to a combination of the Government's manipulation of scientific research and his own unquestioning faith in the Government, he convinces himself by a circular logic that Tok Said exists, even though research shows that he does not. In Chapter 8 (75-6), Guan Kheng, pondering on the attack on Peter and the riots, makes two observations. His first observation attributes fear to ignorance and confusion. He realises that the violence of the riots has to be understood as "a soundless fury which confused birth and dying, and left growth to find a new relation to each"; that the people's failure or slowness to understand this is the "true blight of the colonial era"; and that the "invisible presence" of this blight creates "goblins which everywhere interfered with the discovery of originality."

His second observation concerns another "invisible presence" influencing popular thought: the belief in the existence of Tok Said. Through his thoughts we get a scientific perspective on Tok Said. We learn that three years earlier a research team sent by the Anthropology Society had concluded after "exhaustive enquiries" that Tok Said does not exist. All the team can establish is that the country abounds with local "*bomohs* or mediums"—evidence of the local population's superstitious inclination. The "gist" of the views of a Senor Francisco Xavier Entalban, "an old Portuguese Eurasian" in Melaka, is included in the report; but the whole report is later declined by the government. When Guan Kheng looks for Entalban in Melaka (77), he finds "a toothless hulk…who could have been Malay or Chinese or Indian or Eurasian staring vacantly across the waters of the Malacca Straits…."

Despite all the above evidence to the contrary, Guan Kheng believes in the existence of Tok Said. By a circular logic, he reasons that, regardless of what the research report says, the very existence of "the irrational scares…, the penitential throngs and the confusion everywhere" is proof that Tok Said exists and the scientists are wrong.[16] Ironically, he reasons from a position of conscious cynicism about the colonial agenda. For him, the government's rejection of the report is itself proof of Tok Said's existence—otherwise why would the government reject the report? Therefore the research team must somehow have been "fooled". Guan Kheng's "reasoning" shows how the colonised intelligentsia is caught in a double bind by the coloniser's manipulation of ideological information and scientifically researched findings.[17]

Guan Kheng's ruminations on the colonial government's handling of the Tok Said phenomenon reveals the methods used by the Repressive State Apparatus—to use an Althusserian term—to control and shape the local people's minds. The methods involve harnessing popular gullibility and fear to the practice of controlling information, in order to generate ever higher levels of fear and uncertainty. The research report is neither made public nor officially accepted, so that the people will believe in Tok Said's existence and continue to look for him. At the same time the official position is that Tok Said is a myth created by the Communists, and that his "predictions" are part of their "psychological campaign" (141), which one can be arrested for spreading rumours about. The result is that those who do not know of the report will regard the official position as an example of "western scientific scepticism". Those who, like Guan Kheng, know that the report has been rejected are so bewildered they have to perform logical acrobatics to explain the discrepancy between the "true but unofficial" belief and the "false but official" disbelief.

The confusion caused by this "smoke-and-mirror" manoeuvre has two important outcomes. Politically, and in the short and medium term, it allows the ruling power to maintain control, since the alleged link between Tok Said and the Communists legitimises the arrest and detention of dissidents and suspected dissidents, including non-Communist nationalists like Sabran. Psychologically, and in the long term, scepticism (or rationality) becomes the identification mark of the Westerner, while superstitious gullibility and fearful ignorance (i.e. irrationality) become accepted as part of the identity of the subject races. Thus Peter (141): "You know how we all are—always going to mediums and bomohs and holy men". With the general acceptance—indeed, embracing—of this self-image, the process of colonisation is complete and can be perpetuated. As Sabran declares (142), "Looks like long after the whites go, we will do their work for them, see with only their eyes…."

- <u>Reflections on KC3 Discourse</u>

Earlier, it was suggested that the question being asked by the novel is: In a reality where there is little or no evidence of interracial conflict, why do characters insist on thinking in terms of race and fear the eruption of interracial violence? The KC3 Discourse presents us with the colonial-historical answer to the question. And we have followed the argument up to the point where Sabran realises how profoundly the locals have been influenced by colonial rule and ideology. But the KC3 Discourse presents only half the answer; there is another, darker answer, which is not fully accessible to the western-educated characters; not

even Sabran. The only character who has an intimation of it is Sally, who has her insight during her rape. This darker answer is the KC4 Discourse.

6.5.3 KC4 Discourse: "Scorpion Syndrome"

The KC4, which I label "Scorpion Syndrome", is drawn from themes noted in the one-pointed investigation of Sally (6.4.3). In that analysis, I problematised Sally's self-image as the generous prostitute and helpless victim of men, as she herself does in her interior monologue at the time of her rape. I noted the element of the predatory in her attitude towards men; of duplicity in the way she manages the contradiction between her religious belief and her choice of career, and her complicity in Guan Kheng's shabby treatment of her. This self-destructive streak in her is comparable to Santinathan's irrational flight from the symbolic death of his ego by circumcision to the actual death of his career and future through expulsion from the university. It will be remembered that Santinathan's irrational flight was puzzling and inexplicable to me after the Second Reading. To explain it now, I have to crack the code of the novel's central metaphor, the scorpion, which is part of the novel's title. The relationship between the KC4 discourse and the central metaphor suggests that it may be regarded as the novel's core discourse. It is not, however, the hidden discourse. It is only partially hidden. I shall first explain how I arrived at my interpretation of the scorpion and then discuss the discourse arising from the interpretation.

- Solving a critical crux through the Zen-based conflict-to-insight procedure

I have mentioned that just before Sabran's release from detention, he has a direct experience of the speak-softly-but-carry-a-big-stick tactic used by the colonial authorities to control information (133). After this encounter, Sabran becomes aware of the extent to which the local people have been mentally colonised. On his way to meet Patricia Chen to discuss Peter's decision to emigrate, he observes two Eurasian girls and their friends chanting an English nursery rhyme. And he begins to muse on the "fiends" working obscurely on him and his friends, instilling in them the ethnocentric desire to return to what they believe to be their "true home" (137-8). It is at this point that we have the "orchid" passage, which gives the novel its title:

> "He loved the orchid whose stems flower, curving free away from supporting posts, but feared the scorpion which lurked among the roots in the rich soil. He and Peter had never been so distant as on that night when, Peter incoherent, himself utterly

> dumbfounded, they looked at each other with alien eyes. What was there to throw grapnel on, when even life-long understanding dissolved under a mysterious fury that sprang with suddenness and disappeared as unpredictably?"

While most critics in the past have interpreted the orchid as a symbol of the nation, the scorpion has been left unexplained. Since the general assumption among critics is that the novel is a depiction of a society constantly in danger of being split apart by multi-racial differences, one infers that the scorpion is tacitly understood by them as a metaphor for the interethnic animosity presumed to be lurking beneath the surface of Malaysian life. The interpretation of the scorpion as a metaphor for interethnic animosity is problematic, however, because the scorpion passage is preceded by Sabran's negation of the idea that racial issues lie at the root of the social upheaval (136), and its immediate context is Sabran's recollection of his argument with Peter and the sudden appearance of "a mysterious fury". What is this mysterious fury? Is it the fury of interethnic animosity arising from ethnic differences and leading to conflicts and violence? I would argue that it is not. There is nothing less mysterious or clearer in its "reasonableness" than the idea that ethnic differences lead to interethnic conflict and violence (which is why the theory has been held as truth in Malaysian social discourse for so long). I need to probe deeper. I need to follow Sabran's train of thought back to the episode where Peter is trying to convince his friends that his assailants had attacked him on account of his race.

During the altercation among the five friends following Peter's attack, Sabran and Guan Kheng were puzzled, while Santinathan and Sally were merely frightened. Only Peter was furious (69); he had "turned his wild eyes to Sabran and looked at him for a long time". Now, doing a one-pointed investigation of Peter, I find more information about the nature of Peter's fury. It is associated with the memory of his British maternal grandfather, who had called his Portuguese-Eurasian grandmother a "half-caste" and abandoned her after she returned to her family in Melaka (82). Of the four friends, Peter alone has a personal reason to hate the British. But strangely, instead of being anti-British, he identifies with them; and directs his bitterness and distrust at his own friends. The abrupt switch from "grandfather" to "His university friends" in this passage (82) is psychologically revealing:

> The separation, the enforced isolation was started by his grandfather. His university friends nearly had him fooled. Whether it was Sabran, Guan Kheng, or Santi, when it

> came to the crunch, their fun and games were nothing, they dropped you and looked after their own kind. Well, they could go hang for all he cared.

This turning on his friends instead of his grandfather is the "mystery" of his fury; and this is what likens it to the fury of the scorpion. There is a common (but scientifically baseless) belief that when scorpions are surrounded by fire, they will commit suicide by stinging themselves to death. It is true, however, that scorpions are cannibalistic. Individually and as a species, the scorpion is an apt symbol for the impulse to cooperate with one's enemies in one's own demise. I have noted inexplicable, self-destructive behaviour in Santinathan and Sally. But if the scorpion orchid is a metaphor for the nation, I hypothesise that there would be much more evidence in the novel of the local people's compliance with their conquerors. This evidence is the subject of my next one-pointed investigation.

The novel has three excerpts from historical texts suggestive of how the local people were complicit with their conquerors. In the chapter on Ellman (Chapter 9), there are two: the *Sejarah Melayu* account of the awe and naivety with which the local people received the first Portuguese to arrive in Melaka (90); and the *Hikayat Abdullah* account of the love and reverence for authority—"as for a father"—that the local people show Colonel Farquhar on his departure (100). In the final chapter, we have the *Hikayat Abdullah* account of how the British obtained Singapore from the Sultan of Johor for "a sum of $20,000" (147-50). In the main story, apart from Peter, we have the example of his mother. Despite the fact that her father had abandoned her and her mother, she hangs up a photograph of him and faithfully tends to his grave (139). The most scorpion-like are the local collaborators during the Japanese Occupation, who tortured Peter's uncle to death. In the following I shall discuss how this propensity to participate in colonialist enterprises is developed in the novel into a critical analysis of the colonised mind.

For any manipulation of information to achieve its goal, the recipients of the information must be willing to believe in its truth. In discussing the KC3 Discourse, I have shown that the text suggests that the ideology of race and interracial conflict are British imports. But where does the willingness to believe come from? The following passage from the *Hikayat Abdullah* suggests it comes from a combination of gullibility, fear of the unknown, and self-interest. It is an account of how the Sea Gypsies relate to a rock in the Singapore River (74):

> In the Singapore River estuary there were many large rocks…. Among these … there was a sharp pointed one shaped like the snout of a swordfish. The Sea Gypsies used to call it the Swordfish's Head and believed it to be the abode of spirits. To this rock they all made propitiatory offerings in their fear of it, placing bunting on it and treating it with reverence. 'If we do not pay our respects to it,' they said, 'when we go in and out of the shallows it will send us to destruction.' Every day they brought offerings and placed them on the rock. All along the shore there were hundreds of human skulls rolling about on the sand.

This is a description of superstitious belief; and the mention of human sacrifices is a reminder of the brutality engendered by superstition. The passage is of special interest because it is positioned at the end of Chapter 7, the chapter where Peter claims he has been attacked because of his race and where we see the four friends and Sally together for the last time. The next three chapters reveal not only how Peter, Guan Kheng, and Santinathan react to Peter's assault; but also the relationships between Guan Kheng and Sally (up to the point of Sally's rape), Ellman and Neela, and Santinathan and Zaleha—all stories of gullibility, fear, self-interest, betrayal, and human sacrifices. The excerpt thus introduces a discourse on the psycho-dynamics of these factors in the colonised mind. That Ellman and Ethel Turner are representatives of "the coloniser" is no reason to assume that their minds are not colonised; ideologues are almost always their own first victims. But in the following I shall concentrate on the local characters.

The discourse on the colonised mind may be divided into three parts. The first part, which I have already discussed in connection with Guan Kheng, deals with the way the local intelligentsia are so gullible that despite a basic scepticism, they will ignore scientifically researched data and misinterpret empirical experience to sustain their implicit trust in the governing authority. The second part deals with the combined effect of fear and gullibility on the characters' interpretation of facts and experiences, and I have established how fear and gullibility on the part of Peter and Santinathan make their perceptions of reality unreliable. The third part, which I shall now discuss, uses the characters' relations with Tok Said to show how their willingness to embrace the image of being superstitious—an image defined for them by colonial manipulation of information (6.5.3)—affects their decisions and actions in their everyday life.

As has been mentioned, for each character, Tok Said is associated with a different man. Sally meets an Indian, Santinathan meets a Malay man, Sabran hears the words of a Chinese temple medium, and Guan Kheng sees a man supposed to be Eurasian but in appearance racially indeterminable. The only character who does not meet a Tok Said is Peter, who believes the Government's claim that Tok Said is a Communist-inspired myth. Two aspects of the characters' approach to Tok Said reveal the extent to which their collective psyche has been shaped by colonial rule. First, they depend on racial markers as the primary means of establishing Tok Said's identity. In this regard, they are like Inspector Adnan, local upholder of British law and order, whose main investigative concern is to establish Sally's racial identity and those of her assailants (121). Second, despite doubts that the man they each have encountered is the real Tok Said, they act as though he is. The shift from scepticism to absolute faith is particularly pronounced in Sabran. He initially doubts that the Chinese temple medium is Tok Said or even a "holy man" (65), but thereafter refers to him consistently as Tok Said (108, 110, 133, 134, 141) and speaks of him not only as having charismatic power but also as if he himself had met the man; "If you had seen him, you would stay," he says to Peter (141).

Of the four who believe in Tok Said's existence, only Sally and Santinathan have had direct encounters with someone they take to be the man himself. Sabran has only heard the voice of a temple medium, and Guan Kheng has only read Senor Entalban's prediction in the Anthropological Society's report. Yet, without exception, they take the unpleasant predictions seriously; interpreting them literally, fatalistically, and from their own perspectives. And they allow their interpretations to influence their actions. The physically oriented Santinathan interprets the prediction of his imminent death as a threat to his life, and goes into hiding. Sally, who feels guilty about her chosen career, interprets the prediction of her being "forced to love" fatalistically, in terms of having to provide "free" sexual services either voluntarily as a prostitute or under duress as a rape victim. The idealistic Sabran, who sees himself at the centre of political events, is so stung by the accusation that he had only "played at believing" that he begins to judge his friends by their political commitment and sincerity. For Guan Kheng, Senor Entalban's words are an ominous warning of the need to accept what is to come (77): "Our time has come. …we see our fate, but refuse to admit it." As a result, he wholeheartedly accepts his social marginality and retreats into his "rational pride of race".

For each of the characters, Tok Said is the "repository" of their inner "other"; that is to say, the innermost fears, desires, and truths about themselves they cannot bear to acknowledge. They are like the Sea Gypsies, who legitimise and rationalise their survival instincts, greed and bloodlust by projecting them onto the Swordfish Rock, turning it into "the abode of evil spirits". This explains why, despite all evidence to the contrary, the characters must believe in Tok Said's existence; and why he must appear to each of them as an ethnic other. This principle of projecting one's inner "other" onto an external "other" also applies in Peter's "scorpion syndrome". (This whole issue really needs to be studied more carefully from the perspective of psychological theory, and I shall merely note the salient points here.) Because Peter is unable to acknowledge the anger he feels for his ostracising grandfather, he turns his anger on the Malays, who (in his eyes) now have the ostracising power his grandfather once had. The sentence "The separation, the enforced isolation was started by his grandfather" shows that Peter is intellectually aware of his grandfather's cruelty. But the text's mention of his mother's traditionalist reverence for her dead father suggests that Peter cannot holistically and unambiguously admit his anger about his grandfather without breaking a family taboo.

Here I find myself faced with the notion encountered earlier in my one-pointed investigation of Santinathan, Guan Kheng, Ellman, Sally, and Neela; namely, that the values of our education and upbringing determine the way we look at ourselves and relate to the world. Of the main characters, only Sally appears to have reached some kind of insight. Although she never doubted that she has met the real Tok Said, at the point of her rape, she thinks of him as "that stupid old man" (86) and from that point on we see her emancipating herself from first Guan Kheng and then Sabran, and finally her life in Singapore. Her uneducated status suggests to me that the target of the novel's critique of the colonised mind is the English-educated.

- <u>Reflections on KC4 Discourse</u>

The KC4 has given a depressingly deterministic picture of the inescapability of the influences of education and upbringing. The main characters are delineated in such a way that no matter what they do we find evidence of their bondage to some idea or value that makes it impossible for them to relate to reality as free agents. Without exception they behave as Ellman has predicted; they argue with one another and drift apart. Arokiam inevitably comes to mind as the one example of selfless courage and nobility. He is of course a man without formal education, but even he must have been brought up with some

values and ideals. So how much of a free agent is he? Can his futile attempt to fight off four men not be considered "suicidal"? Is Arokiam's action also a manifestation of the national "scorpion syndrome"? Is the text telling us that once our minds are colonised, they stay colonised forever?

6.5.4 Discovering KC5: the hidden discourse

As I read it, the novel in fact does have a discourse on how the mind can be decolonised. But it is not in the narrative content; it is in the technique of narration, hidden in what I perceive to be the text's literary game and puzzles. And it unfolds in my mind through my discovery of the game, my solving of the puzzles, and my perception of the game rules. I should point out here that I had read the novel several times in the past without the aid of the Zen-based Reading Procedure and never saw the literary game. It is therefore important that I identify what I think are the key aspects of the Reading Procedure that have contributed to its discovery.

Retracing the steps I took to the discovery of the first "clue" to the puzzle, the bamboo, I realise that the most important factors guiding my steps were the third and fourth Zen-based Reading Guidelines, "prioritise the unambiguous" and "prioritise logical analysis". It will be remembered that I began with the question as to why Santinathan has to be a labourer in the novel. My conflict with this narrative device was based purely on logic and empirical experience. Admittedly, from the start of the reading, I had brought to the text my personal "standard of reasonableness"; but all readers do that, whether they are conscious of it or not. Therefore, implicit in my rejection of the Indian-labourer stereotype was the thought that no "reasonable" writer should expect me to accept that a university dropout would "reasonably" work as a dockyard labourer, even in fiction—*especially* in fiction, since one of the unwritten rules about writing fiction in the "verisimilitude" mode is that fiction cannot be stranger than fact. If it is, it is usually a signal that some kind of literary game is being played (Hutchinson 1983: 37). In essence, then, my search in the Second Reading for a plot- or character-based reason for Santinathan's becoming a labourer was to determine who is "unreasonable"—the author or the character.

The same two guidelines led me to the first major insight, the connection made between the word "bamboo", the circumcision, and Santinathan's fear-driven behaviour. In examining the stream-of-consciousness passage (Chapter 10) I was puzzled by the repetition

of the word “bamboo”. The only other reference to bamboo in the novel is the excerpt from the *Hikayat Abdullah*, which contains the line “Do you wish to join this society or not?” Research showed that the excerpt refers to a Chinese secret society forcefully recruiting members among new Chinese immigrants to Singapore. It was possible to interpret the allusion as a covert criticism of the cultural hegemony apparent in Malay discourse[18] on national identity in the 1970s. But that would have implied a preference for the ambiguous. Unable to accept that interpretation without a sense of conflict, I focused on the question as to why torture or even death by bamboo would be perceived as being worse than death by fire. Logically (from my perspective), there can be no comparison because either method of death would be equally horrendous. At this dead-end point of logic, a connection was made in my mind between the bamboo and the circumcision knife. The connection was then verified by checking against historical reality and validated with evidence from the text. The validation through textual evidence in turn enabled me to discern the mythic structure of the Santinathan story, see parallels in the other narratives in the novel, and from there discover the KC2 and KC3 Discourses.

It was again the prioritising of the unambiguous and the logical that led to the understanding of Peter’s “mysterious fury” and its connection to the scorpion metaphor, and thus the discovery of the KC4 Discourse. But in the course of validating the KC4 Discourse I found my “standard of reasonableness” and faith in logic being eroded. The erosion reached a critical point when the P&S investigation of Peter’s family history led to the *prajna*-insight that I am being unreasonable and bizarre in failing to see that there are profound dimensions of the all-too-human in the seemingly irrational inability to let go of a part of one’s self, be it Santinathan’s piece of skin, Guan Kheng’s ethnicity, Peter’s family tradition—or, for that matter, my attachment to my standard of reasonableness. This “awakening” caused a mental shift toward non-discrimination. I began to question my earlier conclusion that the novel ends on a dire note just because the last line mentions “fierce crocodiles”. Why had I not given equal importance to the preceding lines describing a scene of interracial cooperation between the Datok Bendahara and the Kapitan China, who had “gone upriver to Jelai, the place where they are digging for silver” (157)?

Reviewing the reading as a whole, I am able to discern the rules of the novel’s literary game and from them deduce the KC5 Discourse. There are a number of qualifying devices by which the novel selects its players for the literary game. One of them is that one has to be able to recognise stereotypes and reject them. This I stumbled on by accident when

I picked as my Conflict Area my rejection of the Indian-labourer stereotype. Another qualifying device is that one has to be able to recognise irrational behaviour and seek its cause. Since most of the main characters are, as I have shown, psychologically disoriented in one way or another, the novel provides many clues for the discovery of this qualifying device. It has to be said that the depiction of Santinathan is a particularly crafty example of this qualifying device. From the time he first appears in the novel until his delirium (Chapter 10), Santinathan is a fear-driven man already in the process of psychological disintegration. But nothing in the text tells us we are witnessing a nervous breakdown in progress, and we do not have a portrait of a previously fearless and "psychologically whole" Santinathan with which to compare this character taking shape in our mind as we read. His past comes to us as memories—his own and Sabran's: unreliable sources of data. Without a reliable, unambiguous reference point by which to measure Santinathan's mental health, we are bound to judge his behaviour by our own "standard of reasonableness". If we do not find Santinathan's behaviour odd we will simply not probe further and the text's secondary level of meaning will not exist for us. On the other hand, the novel holds up many other examples of irrational behaviour that are relatively obvious: Ellman's dissociation from his emotions, Guan Kheng's circular logic, Sabran's unjustified and unjustifiable shift from scepticism to absolute faith in his Tok Said, and Peter's "mysterious fury". When we, the readers, fail to recognise these characteristics as symptoms of psychological disorientation, we effectively turn these character portraits into both mirror and measure of our own psychological disorientation—a sobering thought. But that, as I understand it, is the game the novel is playing with the reader.

The bamboo puzzle holds two qualifying tests. One is a mindset change vis-à-vis the issues of interethnic conflict and violence. The puzzle seems to be testing whether I, like Peter in the novel, automatically associate all hints of violence with interethnic conflict. If I did, or had, I might never have solved the puzzle. The other test is whether I am knowledgeable about cultural practices outside my own ethnic experience or, like Guan Kheng or Peter, am "in reality a stranger who had never understood the people among whom he had been born or the land in which he had spent his whole life" (84). If I had never somehow, somewhere, at some time, learned about the use of the bamboo knife for circumcision, I would never have solved the puzzle. The bamboo puzzle, then, is a test not only of how the reader perceives reality, and also how involved he/she is in his/her own social reality.

From these observations of the game's qualifying devices, one may deduce the gist of the discourse on decolonising the mind. One must free oneself from the prison of stereotype thinking, be astute in discerning between rational and irrational behaviour and yet refrain from judging, have an awareness of cultural practices other than one's own, and be engaged in the reality in which one lives.

6.5.5 Conclusion to the Third Reading

What came into prominence during the Third Reading is the deconstructive nature of the novel's discourses, which centre on unravelling the mindset of the English-educated minority who feel marginalised in the new political order following the end of colonial rule. The main thrusts of the discourses are the destabilisation of conventional socio-political structures based on insider-outsider and centre-margin frameworks; the interrogation of social and national discourses based on the unreflected assumption that inter-ethnic violence is the inevitable consequence of ethnic differences; an historical analysis of the origins of the ideology of race; and the critique of the complicity of the locals in perpetuating the colonial enterprise. The self-destructive and cannibalistic nature of this complicity is implied in the novel's central metaphor, the scorpion orchid.

The most significant discourse discovered is the KC5 "hidden" Discourse, a discourse built into the novel's literary games and puzzles. The hidden discourse gives us a perspective on the novel's didactic aim, which is that the reader should, through the act of reading and solving the puzzles, realise the extent to which his/her mind has been enslaved by the ideologies and perspectives of his education and upbringing. Once uncovered, the hidden discourse enables us to discern the lessons taught in an indirect way in the other discourses. From the critical analysis of the colonised mind (KC4), we can infer we are being told in a backhanded way that the truths we need to know already exist within us and in our pre-colonial past, just like the interethnic harmony we desire (KC3). This basic message has three implications for the way we deal with our realities. First, to see the inner truth and the outer harmony that were always already present, we have to question the stereotypes and theories promoted by those who seek to control us (e.g. the government, community leaders, and parents) in the same way we should question the words of non-existent "holy men". Second, we discover these truths in and through our experiences with other people—in the same way that Sally learns the meaning of love from Arokiam, Sabran learns his true social place and function from Sally and Patricia, Santinathan learns about

social responsibility from Peter's and Sabran's rejection of him and from the unknown Eurasian's death by fire, and Peter learns where his true home is from actual encounters with white Britons. Third, as suggested in the stories of Peter and Sally, we learn these truths by reconnecting with our histories and traditions, and unflinchingly accepting what we see there, however unpleasant.

The call for courage in facing one's inner truth is related to the call for courage from the English-educated minority to empower themselves to make useful contributions to society (KCA2). We are made to see that the English-educated minority is an ethnically diverse minority and not confined to the non-Malays. Thus in the novel it is Sabran who has to learn that there is a need for a change in mindset regarding his social status: marginality is only a state of mind, and all that is required to reverse the power structure is a focal shift and the courage to act. It is perhaps because the mindset-change is so important that the text thoroughly deconstructs and demolishes the stultifying, traditionalist demand for conformity to established social norms (KCA1); as well as all the other "social theories" that have become a part of the discourse on Malaysia and national unity. The final object of deconstruction is the reader's mind, but it is accomplished only when the reader recognises that the novel's "hero" is none of the main characters, but the marginal character, the homeless vagrant Arokiam, whose one act of courage and compassion is made authentic by his freedom from racial, class, gender, political, and ideological discrimination.[19]

6.6 COMPARING PAST READINGS OF *SCORPION ORCHID*

The intention of this comparison with past readings of *Scorpion* is to give an idea of the differences between the outcome of the Zen-based Reading Procedure and those of readings using other approaches. The main concern is to highlight where the outcomes of past readings diverge significantly from the outcome of the Zen reading. The focus will be on (a) the perspective from which the text is approached; (b) what is seen as the problem the text is addressing, and what the solution it offers; and (c) how the most problematic indeterminacies in the text are interpreted, in particular Tok Said, Sally, and the metaphor of the scorpion orchid.

6.6.1 Review of Past Readings

One of the earliest articles on *Scorpion* is a brief book review, "Lloyd Fernando. *Scorpion orchid*" by U. Parameswaran (1979), included here because its key ideas find a resonance in later critiques. The text is perceived as espousing the view that the "attempted union of cultures" is made impossible by the "tug" of the characters' "disparate cultural roots". It is described as a "drawing" of the "concentric circles of racio-cultural non-acceptance", and this idea is somehow reflected in the "central image" of the orchid and the scorpion. At the same time, Sally is understood as symbolising "the land itself", on account of her being "in some strange way, the pole around which they [the four friends] had been magnetised all unawares".

Abdul Majid Nabi Baksh was among the first critics to discuss the novel in some detail. His article, "The Malaysian racial dilemma in Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion orchid*" (1981) reflects the perspective dominant in discourses on Malaysia, namely that the country is faced with the "ever present danger" of racial conflict. Abdul Majid thus identifies the novel's main concern as "the very tenuous and fragile nature of these interracial relationships and the way [they] can at a moment's notice, be negated for no apparent reason and lead to interracial bloodshed". He suggests that the author's view of the "racial dilemma" is that it is not an economic or political problem, but a problem "involving the people themselves"; arising, that is, from the lack of trust and "ease with each other". The solution that the text is seen to be offering, then, is the "eradication of the psychological barriers" separating the various races, through "increased, frequent and close contact". Somewhere in this statement lurks the suggestion that Abdul Majid believes that it is not psychological barriers alone that must be eradicated, but racial differences as well; for he suggests that Sally, whom he describes as "racially indeterminate" (meaning "she is what the beholder would make of her"), may be interpreted as "Fernando's vision of the ideal Malaysian". At the same time, he suggests that her racially indiscriminate giving of "love" to her faithless clients may be understood as a metaphor for the "relationship of the country to its inhabitants". Sally thus becomes a "symbolic representation of the country". The mysterious and protean Tok Said is understood as "the embodiment of the Malaysian consciousness, a psychological entity akin to the Spiritus Mundi of Yeats". Tok Said's prediction of Sally's fate thus becomes "merely a case of the country's consciousness speaking to the country!"

In "The Empires' orphans: stayers and quitters in *A Bend in the River* and *Scorpion Orchid*" (1986), Koh Tai Ann discusses the text from a postcolonial perspective. She focuses on the text's treatment of the dilemma faced by minority groups, particularly the English-educated, who are marginalised by those who come to power in post-Independence societies. The text's solution to this dilemma is identified as "the commitment and faith of its citizens". She finds that although the novel begins with alienation and exile, it ends on a note of acceptance of the new society. Her analysis of the meaning of "acceptance", "faith" and "commitment" leads her to conclusions about the text's discourse that are similar to some of the conclusions reached in my Zen-based reading. She finds, for instance, that the "conclusion to the novel" is "a decision not to allow oneself to 'become nothing in the world' … to find—if necessary, make—a place in it for oneself, … make a new future, create one's own history and thus freedom for oneself and the succeeding generations". The creation of "one's own history" is understood also as a rejection of Eurocentric views of history and the returning to one's cultural roots to re-connect with one's past; and it is in this context that the literary-historical excerpts are discussed. The guarded optimism she detects in the novel is reflected in her interpretation of the orchid as a metaphor for the new society. It is "a hybrid… an exotic plant not entirely indigenous" (47), and its survival will depend on its "ability to draw upon both an innate and a bred capacity for adaptation to a new host". Its existence is constantly threatened by the scorpion (the correlate of which is not identified), but its continued presence in the local landscape "testifies to a tough capacity for survival".

K. S. Maniam's "The Malaysian novelist: detachment or spiritual transcendence?" (first published in 1987, reprinted in Quayum & Wicks, eds. 2001) is a paper focusing on the "difficulties and achievements" of Malaysian writers who use English as their "language of creation". It contains a brief review of *Scorpion*. For Maniam, the novel's "more explicit concern" is to explore the "divisive forces", namely "political and racial loyalties", in Malaysian society; and the solution it is seen to offer is the idea that it is "only through forging a religious brotherhood that a common Malaysian identity can be achieved". However, according to Maniam, because of the restrictions imposed on writers in a pluralistic society, the author cannot make direct references to the cultural and religious practices of the various races. Therefore Tok Said and Sally are created as "common figures" to symbolise "both spiritual unity and emotional integration". Tok Said is thus seen as representing the "spiritual centre"—a "literary projection of the writer's ambition to see Malaysian society more united at a deeper, spiritual dimension". Sally, on the other hand, is

seen as representing the “more earthly centre of love”—a “kind of emotional mother to all the races”.

Zawiah Yahya’s monograph, *Malay Characters in Malaysian Novels in English* (1988), takes a sociological approach, combining the “literary analysis of characterization with a sociological analysis of the Malay society” (11). The focus is on assessing whether the depiction of Malay characters in local, English-language novels reflects the realities of Malay society. Thus, Sabran and Sally are discussed, but no attempt is made to analyse the text as a whole. Two aspects of her analysis bear some resemblance to my Zen-based reading. The scrutiny of individual characters resembles the Principals and Satellites approach used in this study’s Second and Third Readings. But Zawiah’s discomfort with regard to the text’s depiction of Sally’s character (60)—“Sometimes her influence comes through so strongly you wonder whether she is a person or simply an idea”—is rationalised in terms of Sally’s function in the text’s structural and thematic aims. Thus, her “dubious” ethnic identity and personal background are explained as symptomatic of the text’s suggestion that “genuine love and harmony”, which Sally epitomises, “is only possible if it transcends the boundaries of race and religion”. Interestingly, Tok Said and Inspector Adnan are not included for analysis.

Shirley G. L. Lim has written three separate surveys of contemporary Singaporean and Malaysian literature in English (published in 1988, 1989, 1994), in which *Scorpion* is discussed. I shall not review her 1994 essay, “Centers and the fringe”, here because her somewhat self-contradictory discussion of the novel’s “stylistic polarities”, which rests on her reading of the stream-of-consciousness passage in Chapter 10, may be fundamentally flawed. She ascribes the passage to Sabran, suggesting that they are his “subconscious thoughts as he is chased during the riots”, when there is no such episode in the novel. The 1989 article, “Gods who fail: ancestral religions in the new literatures in English from Malaysia and Singapore”, which is about local writers’ “reliance on religious symbols”, makes a brief mention of *Scorpion*. Its basic viewpoint does not differ significantly from the 1988 article, “Voices from the hinterland: plurality and identity in the national literatures in English from Malaysia and Singapore”, which is what I shall review here. The 1988 article seeks to defend local literature in English against the “popular bias in newly emerging Third World nations” that “the use of language of the ex-colonial masters” is “an infidelity on the part of the writer to the indigenous cultural world”. Local writing in English is thus presented as “an evolving literature which, while ethnic-based, is also nationalistic in

temper". Against this polemical background, *Scorpion* is seen as a "deeply political novel containing a dark, bitter message": that the birth of a nation is necessarily "painful, careless of individual destinies [and] divisive". Lim is of the opinion that the novel's approach to "the thorny issue of pluralism and national identity" is based on the premise that the separate individuals of a nation must go through the undesirable and bloody, but necessary, process of first jettisoning their sense of their own past, their religious faith, and their racial origin; and then depend on the one "recognizably Asian" identity that can hold them together to move toward a "racial fusion". This "recognizably Asian" identity is identified by Lim as the "inner life of irrational and superstitious sentiment", which is manifested in their "public intensity and devotion of response" to the "holy man". According to Lim, the novel's "holy man", Tok Said, "symbolises the irrational, spiritual forces at work in the nation, working first to destroy before giving birth to the unknown future". She concludes that, like its title, the "entire meaning of the book is an oxymoron": "the scorpion's venomous nature balanced against the orchid's beauty, fragments of racial selves balanced against a forced national identity, violent political transition against the abiding faith of religion, the individual's value against social necessity".

Zalina Mohd Lazim's paper, "Emerging Voices in *Scorpion Orchid*" (1994) examines the way the different communities in Malaysia are given voice in *Scorpion*, and how this "polyglossic presentation" reflects the author's ideas. The paper takes as the text's premise the idea that social harmony is a fragile fabric that may be torn apart at any time by interethnic conflict and violence. The central theme is identified as the choice the individual must make with regard to his relation with the country: "Do you want to join this society or not?" Sally is understood as symbolising the land. She concludes that the author's message, as reflected in the voices of the characters, is that the country is as strong or as weak as the people themselves, and the decisive factor is their commitment and desire to belong to it.

Ganakumaran Subramaniam's "Ethnocentricity in Post-Colonial Malaysian Literary Works: Extent of Unity in Diversity" (1994), aims at examining how inter-racial and inter-cultural relationships are reflected in selected Malaysian literary works, among them *Scorpion*. Like earlier critics, he takes the position that the text demonstrates the author's view that "the apparent harmony and social tolerance [in the country] is but superficial". Sally is viewed as being used by the author "as both a character and a metaphor" to symbolise the nation. Like Sally, the nation "transforms herself accordingly to accommodate the people", but like Sally's clients, the people treat her badly. Tok Said is understood as

"the spirit of nationhood", which, according to Ganakumaran, is the reason the British "fear his presence". The conclusion drawn then is that "Fernando reminds us that there remains a danger whilst we keep searching for ourselves: we may lose our sense of attachment and belonging with the spirit of the land that sustains us".

Malachi Edwin Vethamani's unpublished doctoral thesis (1996) is entitled *Character Presentation and Interaction: Styles of Minority Discourse in the Malaysian English Novel*. It compares the representation of Malaysian characters of different racial origins and their interaction in *Scorpion* and K. S. Maniam's *In a Far Country* (1993) from a socio-linguistic perspective. The study sites itself in the controversy created by the official labelling of Malaysian literary works in English as "sectional" literature, as opposed to "national" literature (a status reserved for literary works in Malay)—a controversy linked to the issues of the special position and privileges accorded the Bumiputera (mostly Malay) and the effective marginalisation of the other ethnic groups (mostly Chinese and Indian). The study concludes that, in contrast to Maniam's more confrontational stance, Fernando tends to reinforce the official, ethnically and linguistically structured, hierarchy by giving priority to the Bumiputera (i.e. Sabran's) point of view, and by portraying Sabran as a mentor to the non-Malay characters. A comparison of this conclusion with the outcome of the Zen-based reading is not possible, primarily because Vethamani's focus is on the interaction between characters of different racial origin. He notes that Malay is used as the "language of solidarity" by Sabran when speaking to Sally in hospital, and that he fails nevertheless to "get through to her"; but he does not go on to examine the details of the conversation to explain why. (In my reading, the conversation is used by me to support my argument that in *Scorpion* conflict is shown to be as likely to be intra-ethnic as interethnic and that even within a single ethnic group, there is a hierarchy, and its own centre and margin.)

Bernard Wilson's article, "Do you wish to join this society or not?": the paradox of nationhood in Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*", published in 2000, approaches the text from a postcolonial perspective. He sees it as a novel that addresses, not "the relationship between the colonial and postcolonial and the redressing of that balance", but "the lingering sense of Diaspora that exists for many Malaysians". As such, Wilson considers that the characters' perception that their "common enemy" is British colonialism is "flawed", because "at the heart of the matter is the fact that the enemy exists within their own increasingly fraught relationships and what each has come to represent to the others". What is seen as the text's central problem is thus sited in the issue of ethnic differences and the

conflict arising from the inability of the characters to transcend their ethnic identity. Any lingering effect of one hundred and fifty years of British rule is hermetically sealed out of the text's discourse, for Wilson suggests that the word "colonised" may be read as "achieving a concrete sense of self", and to be "truly colonised" is to believe that one "belongs". The question, "Do you wish to join this society or not?" becomes, then, a refrain redolent of a coercive drive to ethnic homogeneity as a condition for nationhood and "national" identity. The author is seen as challenging this coercive drive through Sally, who is "both nature and nurture, a personification of the all-embracing qualities of Malaysia". Wilson finds contradictions in what he sees as the text's answer to the tyranny of ethnic homogeneity: the transcendence of ethnic barriers, a sense of "belonging", and the realisation that identity is "fluid". Sally's "propensity to transcend race (and language)" is "also the cause of her spiritual and physical destruction by those not yet ready to accept fluid identity". The optimism implied in Peter's proposed return is "undercut" by "the betrayal of Sally, the shadowy Tok Said's apocalyptic prophecies and the disintegration and displacement of the principal characters". Wilson thus questions whether the forging of bonds through "more permanent links" and a "physical connection with the land" is sufficient to provide "unity and a sense of common purpose". He concludes that Fernando shows that ultimately there is "no pat solution".

6.6.2 Comparison of Past Readings and the Zen-based Reading

A comparison of past readings and my Zen-based reading reveals some fundamental differences in perceptions of the novel's themes and theses. The most important difference is that most critics have assumed that the novel supports rather than seeks to demolish the view that Malaysian society is constantly in danger of being split apart by interethnic conflicts and violence. There is also a tendency among non-Malay critics to assume that the novel speaks exclusively from and for the non-Malay margin, contesting not so much western imperialism as the "neo-colonialism" of the post-Independence Malay ruling elite. In my reading, I have shown that the text's contrapuntal interplay of perspectives does not allow the taking of racially partisan positions; and that the target of the text's criticism is the compliant or complicit subject of oppression. In connection with this, it is worth noting that past critics have generally not offered an interpretation of the scorpion, the novel's central metaphor, which I interpret as symbolic of the impulse to turn one's fury on oneself or to cannibalise one another in the face of external threat. From my reading, the novel's central "message" is that we (individually and as a nation) are our own worst enemy.

Divergences in assumption as to the novel's central message have an impact on how Sally and Tok Said are interpreted. In general, past critics have perceived them as symbolising the land and its spirit, respectively. Malaysian and Singaporean critics tend toward a more optimistic view of the novel's message. For them, Sally and Tok Said symbolise the positive and negative requisites for true social harmony. Sally thus represents loving generosity and openness to the ethnic other, while Tok Said represents the cautionary spirit warning us that failure to appreciate the country and its ethnic diversity leads to conflict and violence. Foreign critics tend to derive from the text the pessimistic message that the solution to the country's interethnic problems is enforced ethnic homogeneity, which can only lead to bloody conflict. For them, Sally signifies racial fusion, which is demonstrated as unachievable by her rape and Tok Said represents the irrational force demanding racial fusion regardless of the cost to the individual. In my reading, Tok Said is simply a figment of the colonised native's imagination, while Sally is a psychological study of the cooperative victim. Here, I must note that without exception past critics have not paid any attention to Arokiam and Patricia Chen, whereas in my Zen-based reading, these two "marginal" characters play important roles as means to the resolution of the problems raised in the novel's discourses.

The most important difference between past readings and my Zen-based reading is that none of the other critics has perceived the game-playing aspect of the novel's technique of narration, which challenges the reader to deconstruct his/her colonised mind by deconstructing the text. The fact that this game has remained invisible to critics for so long attests to the text's continuing relevance and value. The appearance of Zawiah Yahya's *Resisting Colonialist Discourse* in 1994 is a reminder that the need to recognise the extent to which one has been "interpellated" by colonialist discourse is as important today as it was thirty years ago, if not more so. One might be inclined to ask if the author has been "over clever" in making his message so impenetrable; but as Peter Hutchinson points out (1983: 38), "no reader likes to feel insulted as far as his ability to read critically is concerned. The more the discovery is his own, the greater the sense of personal satisfaction".

6.7 SUMMARY

This chapter demonstrated the practical application of the Zen-based Reading Procedure and tested its heuristic value in terms of whether it produces a reading outcome significantly different from the outcomes of past readings. In approaching *Scorpion* with

the Zen-Based Reading Procedure, I went through the steps of the 3-Reading Strategy, which makes use of the reader's conflict with the text to lead to the discovery of the novel's discourses. The First Reading identified the depiction of Santinathan's character as the first Key Conflict (KC1): why does Santinathan have to be a labourer? This question led the Second Reading during which a one-pointed investigation of the segments in the text relating to the KC1 was done. The Forensic Tools, 3-Perceptions (3P), Principals and Satellites (P&S), and 10- Timeframe (10T) were used for the investigation. At the end of the investigation, a KC1 Discourse Hypothesis was formulated: "that the failure to conform to society leads to marginalisation and psychological disorientation". The KC1 Discourse Hypothesis was then used as a Diagnostic Tool in the Third Reading to be validated against other segments of the text. The strategic aim was to use the process of validation to discover new discourses.

The Third Reading began with the identification of stories in the texts that resemble the story of Santinathan. The stories identified were the love stories between Ellman and Neela, and between Guan Kheng and Sally. One-pointed investigations of these four characters were conducted, and it was found that the stories of these four characters do not validate the KC1 Discourse Hypothesis, but instead problematise it. From the problematisation, three new Discourse Hypotheses were derived: KC2 ("Reversal of Conventional Power Structures"); KC3 ("Psychological Disorientation"), and KC4 ("The Scorpion Syndrome"). These Hypotheses were then used as Diagnostic Tools and validated against other segments of the text. Through the process of validation, the KC5 Discourse, which is hidden in the novel's literary game and puzzles, was discovered and defined.

The review of past readings shows that the Zen-based Reading Procedure has produced an outcome radically different in both substance and essence. In substance this reading's contribution to the study of *Scorpion Orchid* is the discovery of a network of discourses exploring, interrogating, and deconstructing the stereotypes and ideologies that have informed discourses on Malaysia from colonial times to the present. In essence the Zen-based reading's contribution lies in its retrieving from the text a hidden discourse structured as a literary game challenging the reader to recognise and deconstruct his/her own colonial mindset by solving literary puzzles. Perhaps this reading's most useful contribution is that it has effected a reorientation of perspectives on the novel, opening up new areas for further research and study involving the use of theoretical approaches from other cultures, traditions, and fields of knowledge.

[1] It has to be made clear that "comprehension" does not mean agreement with or acceptance of the text's perspective; it is merely an understanding of "where the text is coming from", not in terms of what we know of the author, but in terms of how the text's "consciousness" is revealed through its "narrative idiom" or, if it is a deconstructive text, its deconstructive techniques. This idiom is the text's "language", which the reader must acquire a familiarity with in order to break down the barrier between him- or herself and the text.

[2] In the portrayal of Santinathan in Chapter Two, we see him as a mercenary, opportunistic, and uncouth social parasite. There is a strong suggestion that he is driven mainly by physical appetites, which he wants to satisfy without payment. He is, in short, a "free-loader". 1. Obsession with money: Although money has been set aside for his education (9), he acts as if he were indigent. He eats alone (19); but joins his friends for a second dinner after learning that he does not have to pay (21). He offers to carry a *kavadi* at Thaipusam for ten dollars, combining a mercenary bent with a tendency to make light of religious rites (22). He is more interested in eating his free dinner than in ragging the freshie, but will hold the freshie to ransom for a ten-dollar loan (24). While eating, he is eyeing Sally, to whom he suggests that she should "love" him for himself, not for money (25-6). He accepts without demur the money Guan Kheng gives him to pay for his session with Sally (27). 2. Attitude to politics: He rejects Sabran's suggestion that he act as translator for the Indian workers of the trade unions because such work puts one in the way of "trouble" (20). Yet he seems to be anti-British, accusing Peter of identifying England as his "home", and throwing doubt on Peter's acceptance by the British as one of them because of his Portuguese surname, D'Almeida (23). 3. Attitude to women: On being told by Peter that Ethel Turner is demanding the five essays he owes her "or else", his response is one of gender- and sexuality-related contempt: "That bitch needs to be bedded with a gorilla." (21). When the four are discussing Sally, Guan Kheng asks, "But how many girls can you find like her?" and his answer is, "Hundreds" (26).

[3] For readings of Chapter 10 by other critics, see Abdul Majid Nabi Baksh (1981: 56); Shirley Geok-lin Lim (1994, p. 144); Malachi Edwin Vethamani (1996, pp. 343-5)

[4] I am deeply grateful to Dr. Fadillah Merican for pointing out these textual differences to me and for loaning me her copy of the 1976 edition.

[5] In *Games Authors Play* (1983), Peter Hutchinson explains that literary games serve an "important role" in "providing a secondary level of meaning or of aesthetic enjoyment to any work" (7). The emphasis of the aesthetic enjoyment is "the pleasure which is derived from analysis and recognition, or the pleasure of *mastery* over a text which has been presented as a specific form of challenge"

> As a story unfolds, a series of 'moves' is worked out between these two figures [i.e. the author and the reader], and although in practically all such literary games the author himself is aware of the playful procedure in which he is involved, not all readers will appreciate the techniques by which that author is provoking a challenge" (1).

[6] In the following discussion, the terms "inside" and "outside" denote the states of belonging and not belonging to a single ethnic system; "centre" and "margin" denote the distribution of influence in a socio-political system, which may be mono-ethnic (e.g. the Malay world of Sabran and Sally) or multi-ethnic (the Malaya-Singapore polity of Sabran and Peter D'Almeida).

[7] The Islamic code of moral behaviour requires that when one sees others doing wrong, one can do one or all of three things, depending on which action the circumstances allow: (1) take action to stop it, (2) speak up against it, or (3) be aware of it and distance oneself from the wrongdoing.

[8] Writing in 1978, the sociologist, S. Husin Ali noted (1981, p. 83): "When we talk about rural poverty we really mean Malay poverty, since a large majority of the rural people are Malays (about 67 per cent). Roughly 74 per cent of all the poor in the country are Malays, and 65 percent of all the Malays are poor. This does not deny the fact that there are also non-Malays in the rural areas and new villages and many of them are poor too. But comparatively their number is much smaller."

[9] This would make Neela something of a novelistic anachronism. For an idea of how rare it was in the England of the 1950s and even the 1960s for a young woman to choose to be an unmarried mother, see two novels dealing with the subject, Lynne Reid Banks, *The L-Shaped Room* (1960), and Margaret Drabble, *The Millstone* (1966)

[10] These three texts were written during periods of socio-political change caused by foreign invasion. The date of the *Sejarah Melayu*, a collection of stories about "the descent of the Malay Rajas with their customary ceremonial", is uncertain, but it would have been written some time after the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese (1511). Munshi Abdullah, author of *Hikayat Abdullah*, was Malay language teacher, scribe, and translator to British East India Company officials and Christian missionaries at the time of the establishment of Singapore (1819) and the British takeover of Melaka from the Dutch (1824). Mamoru Shinozaki, author of *Syonan-My Story*, was city administrator of Singapore during the Japanese Occupation (1941-45). His book is an account of his experiences during the Occupation. Munshi Abdullah and Shinozaki (not enough is known about the author of the *Sejarah*) were cultural amphibians. Munshi Abdullah was in fact part-Tamil, although he thought of himself as Malay, and was a champion of the Malay language. Shinozaki was the Japanese Press Attaché in Singapore when the Pacific War broke out. Apart from his facility with the English language, he had an affinity for the Chinese and their language and culture, having previously lived in China for four years; and during the years of the Occupation, he made use of his position as a high-ranking Japanese civilian to protect the local people and make their lives more bearable. All three writers were, in their writings, critical of their own government and people. Shinozaki, for instance, is critical of the treatment of the local people, particularly of the Chinese and Eurasians, by the military and secret police of the Japanese administration. The *Sejarah* was written by a courtier at the request of his Sultan. It is therefore circumspect in its criticism. Nevertheless, it is difficult for the reader to ignore the contrast between the accounts of the heroic and humanitarian deeds performed by both rulers and commoners in the past histories and legends, and the accounts of the excesses of Sultan Mahmud Shah, the last effective ruler of Melaka before the Sultanate fell to the Portuguese. Munshi Abdullah has been regarded as the "prototype of the Malay social critic" (Tham, 1978, p. 186). His use of his literary works to put forward his ideas for social reform remains to this day part of the Malay literary tradition.

[11] For an example of the contribution made by a non-Malay to the NEP framework see Puthucheary 1998, pp. 31-2

[12] The only riot that may be termed "inter-ethnic" is the so-called Maria Hertogh riots in December 1950. But whether it is in fact inter-ethnic depends on the perspective from which one views the riots. The riots arose out of the legal battle over the custody of a Dutch-Eurasian girl left with a Malay family during the Japanese Occupation by her parents, who then sought to reclaim her after World War II. The riots may be considered inter-ethnic in the sense of "inter-racial" from the perspective of the Europeans and Eurasians who were attacked by Malays. But from the perspective of the Malays, it was about religion, culture, and British highhandedness. They were after all fighting to keep a Eurasian child. See Haja Maideen, *The Maria Hertogh Controversy: The Nadra Tragedy* (1991). For a historical overview of political unrest and popular riots in Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s, see R. Clutterbuck (1984).

[13] See my remarks on the Maria Hertogh riots in previous endnote.

[14] We can also make a connection between this excerpt and Sally's enforced break with her traditions as well as Neela's "forgetfulness" of hers.

[15] To pin down Peter D'Almeida's colonialist attitude and perspectives, a Bakhtinian dialogical analysis would be useful, to show similarities and parallels between his language and that of Ellman, Ethel Turner, the British Officer, and Inspector Adnan Hamid.

[16]The following opinion expressed by Abdul Majid Nabi Baksh (1981: 52) in his analysis of *Scorpion* is another example of the kind of faulty logic typical of the dominant view on interethnic conflict in Malaysia: "The novel deals with the Singapore racial riots of the early 1950's. The danger of racial conflict erupting among the different ethnic groups who populate Malaysia and Singapore is as real today as it was in the Singapore of the early 1950's. The May 13, 1969 riots as well as *measures adopted thereafter by the Malaysian government to prevent such a recurrence are ample testimony to this ever present danger.* So that the racial conflict treated by the author is but a metaphor of the real concerns of the novel: the relationship between the different races; the very tenuous and fragile nature of these interracial relationships and the way these relationships can, at a moment's notice, be negated for no apparent reason and lead to interracial bloodshed." (*Italics mine*). The logic in the italicized part of the sentence needs to be interrogated. Does the existence of measures to prevent the recurrence of racial conflict constitute "ample testimony" that racial conflict is an "ever present" danger? The logical answer is: not necessarily. While one may concede that the measures are "ample", one may not infer from their ampleness that the danger is ever present. My Third Reading has shown that Fernando not only does not subscribe to this type of faulty logic, but actually seeks to deconstruct it.

[17] The clear distinction made between government information or ideology and scientific knowledge lends an Althusserian touch to the text's critique of colonialism and its impact on the colonized, suggesting that it may be rewarding to take a Marxian approach to the text.

[18] In an interview with Time Magazine in December 1996, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Mohamed is reported as saying: "The idea before was that people should become 100% Malay in order to be Malaysian. We now accept that this is a multi-racial country."

[19] That the call for courage, self-empowerment, and social engagement is heavily veiled by a narrative technique using non-sequiturs, ambiguities, indirection, puzzles and games suggests it has a politically subversive intent of a topical nature. Malaysia in the 1970s and 1980s saw a number of repressive actions by the government. Closest in time to the publication of the novel (and perhaps most pertinent) were the 1974 arrest and detention of university students and lecturers under the Internal Security Act (another British legacy), when they demonstrated in support of hunger marches by farmers in the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia (see S. Husin Ali 1981 and 1996). More discourses may be discovered with a New Historicist study of *Scorpion* as a subversive text.