

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This study has been an attempt to design and develop a Zen-based Reading Procedure for the analysis of fiction. The aim was to bring an aspect of Asian tradition—the art of responding to criticism—into operation in local literary studies. This traditional response to criticism, which involves listening to other people’s views with an open mind and the ability to reflect on them with reason, is not usually thought of as a method of criticism. I would suggest, however, that the very process of reflection is a critical act, albeit non-confrontational in its final expression. In attempting to bring this non-confrontational form of criticism into dialogue with contemporary literary analysis, the hope is that it will not only improve the quality of literary critical practice but will also enrich the reading experience.

I began this study with the assumption that the reading of a book, like any intersubjective experience, is an encounter with an “other”. This means that to some extent, the reader will experience a sense of conflict when the views and values expressed in a text clash with his/her own (Ch I, 1.2). If literature is to play a significant role in promoting better understanding of other people’s cultures, values, and viewpoints, there is a need for reading to be transition from subjectivity to intersubjective understanding, especially in a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia. In most cultures it is recognised that any kind of intersubjective understanding requires insight and empathy. Since Buddhism places great emphasis on the development of insight (*prajna*), and since the reading and understanding of texts form an important part of *prajna* development (Chapters III and IV), I set out to derive a theoretical framework for a conflict-to-insight reading procedure from relevant aspects of Zen discourses on epistemology and approaches to texts.

One of the problems of using an Asian thought system for a theoretical framework is that most Asian thought systems are regarded as religions, and there may be some reluctance on the part of those who profess and practice another religion to use them. In my research on local approaches to texts (Ch II 2.2.1) I observed that critics and scholars tend to reject theories perceived to be in conflict with their own belief systems. On the other hand, they do use critical methodological tools that are culturally neutral and can be used with the value frameworks of their belief systems. In designing the Zen-based Reading Procedure (Ch V 5.1.1), therefore, it was a matter of importance to me that its methodology and critical tools should be culturally neutral, trans-ethnically applicable, and based on universally accepted truths about human experience.

The practical demonstration of the Procedure served several purposes. Apart from showing how the Procedure is used, and how effective it is in enabling the discovery of discourses in a work of fiction, the purpose was also to determine the extent of its trans-ethnic applicability. To these ends, the Procedure was applied to the analysis of two critically problematic Malaysian novels in English; one influenced by Zen and the other not. Further, in order to assess the Procedure's heuristic value, the outcomes of the Zen-based readings were compared with past readings of the same novels by critics who have used other approaches.

8.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Three significant findings emerged from the practical demonstration of the Zen-based Reading Procedure. The first and most significant finding is that the Procedure enables the discovery of new and hidden discourses that have not been discovered by critics in the past. The second significant finding is that the Procedure is applicable to both Zen-influenced and non-Zen influenced texts, and its application does not require knowledge of Zen philosophy. The third significant finding is that the *prajna*-insights enabled by the Reading Procedure are achieved through the relentless application of logic to the analysis, criticism, and validation of inferences—to the point where logic fails and supra-rational knowing takes over.

8.2.1 Discovery of new and hidden discourses

In Chapters VI and VII the Zen-based Reading Procedure was applied to the analysis of Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion orchid* (henceforth "*Scorpion*") and Lee Kok Liang's *Flowers in the sky* (henceforth "*Flowers*") respectively. The main finding is that the Zen-based reading outcomes are significantly different from the outcomes of past readings. These differences relate not only to the number of new discourses discovered, and the nature of the discourses; but also to the discovery of how intricately linked the discourses are to the novels' narrative strategies and structures.

The Zen-based readings revealed the existence in both novels of complex networks of discourses that can be divided broadly into two kinds of discourses; one critical-deconstructive, and the other therapeutic-soteriological. The critical-deconstructive discourses generally explore, interrogate, and deconstruct the race- and language-based stereotypes, ideologies and polemics that have characterised social discourse in and of Malaysia from colonial times to the present. The socio-political focus of these discourses is fairly easy to detect, and has been noticed and discussed by critics in the past. However, these past readings have tended to assume that the novels are participating in the polemics of national discourse; whereas the Zen-based readings show that the novels are mainly concerned with exposing the baselessness of the stereotypes and ideologies underpinning the polemics. Thus, far from participating in the polemics of national discourse, the novels are critiquing the polemics of those who fail to discern the emptiness of the stereotypes and the irrationality of the ideologies.

In both novels, the critique of stereotype thinking is supported by incisive analyses of the psychological ills lying at its root. These analyses are part of the therapeutic-soteriological discourses, which tend to be deliberately hidden from plain sight by narrative techniques such as indirection, gaps and silences; as well as by literary puzzles and enigmas. While there is ample evidence in both novels that many of the characters suffer from some kind of psychological dis-ease or disorientation, the reader has to solve literary puzzles and enigmas before he/she can find the perspective needed to judge the characters as psychologically unbalanced. Examples of such puzzles and enigmas in *Scorpion* are the "bamboo" puzzle, the "scorpion" puzzle, and the enigmatic portrayals of Santinathan and Tok Said. Examples in *Flowers* are the epigraph, the enigma of the carp, the significance of Ah Looi's dreams and the mystery of how she came to know of her husband's death.

In my experience, the solving of these puzzles led to insights into the underlying narrative structure (e.g. the “mythic” journey in *Scorpion*) and the pattern of deconstruction (e.g. the “puppet-kill-puppet” technique in *Flowers*), opening the way to the discovery of how the therapeutic-soteriological discourses are linked to the “surface” critical-deconstructive, socio-political, discourses and, eventually, to the act of reading itself. In *Scorpion*, the soteriological message—that the English-educated must emancipate their minds from inherited colonial stereotypes and ideologies and empower themselves to make useful contributions to the postcolonial task of nation-building—has to be “constructed” by the reader through the act of solving puzzles and discovering discourses. In the case of *Flowers*, an understanding of Zen helps the reader to understand the interrelationship of Lee’s Zen concepts of time and space, his arrangement of episodes, and the novel’s overall shape (e.g. the “coconut” structure), in which is hidden the Zen soteriological message: the need to live in the reality of the “momentary now” and to bring an end to conflict by understanding the fictional nature of social and personal myths (or “flowers in the sky”).

Basic to the Zen-based reading’s discovery of the above discourses and the nature of the discourses is the discovery that both *Scorpion* and *Flowers* are game-playing novels. That this game-playing aspect has not been perceived before by critics using other approaches suggests that the discoveries made in this study have a great deal to do with the fact that the theoretical framework of the Zen-based Reading Procedure is the Zen approach to texts, which is a system of what I call a “reverse hermeneutics” (Ch. IV, 4.4.2). In this system, the aim of reading is not to interpret and produce meaning, but the reverse; it is to prevent the reader from rushing to meaning and closure. The effect is that it leads the reader to become more aware of what the text is “doing” to him/her, and how. The end-result is that the reader gets more and deeper insights into the narrative techniques and structures of literary works and the discourses embedded or “hidden” in them. Since I, too, had read the novels using other reading approaches, and had neither discerned the narrative strategies and structures, nor discovered the discourses hidden in them, I have to attribute the outcome of my readings to the Procedure’s methodology. In trying to determine which aspects of the methodology has enabled the insights and discoveries, I arrive at my second most significant research finding, which is that the Procedure is trans-ethnically applicable and its application does not require the user to have any knowledge of Zen philosophy.

8.2.2 Trans-ethnic applicability of Zen-based Reading Procedure; no knowledge of Zen philosophy required on the part of the user

By reviewing the process by which I arrived at insights and the discovery of discourses in the practical application of the Zen-based Reading Procedure, I observed the following. First, the one-pointed investigation of the reader's conflicts with the text required in the Second Reading enforces the close attention to detail and thoroughness of reading and research necessary for the discernment of enigmas and puzzles. Next, in the solving of enigmas and puzzles, the third and fourth Zen-based Reading Guidelines—"prioritise the unambiguous" and "prioritise logical analysis"—force me to the dead-end point of imagination and logic, enabling the experience of *prajna*-insights. Finally, the validation of inferences required in the Third Reading forces me to find certainty for my answers to the puzzles and enigmas in the fictional reality of the text.

From my above observations, I realised that the Zen-based Reading Procedure is basically a tool-kit for the critical analysis, deconstruction, and validation of perceptions formed in the reading of a text. In this regard, the Procedure and its critical tools reflect the "reverse hermeneutic" functions of their originals in Zen *prajna* development. But this does not mean that one has to know anything about Zen to use the Zen-based tools. To clarify this point, I have to highlight the cross-ethnic and cross-cultural nature of my Zen-based readings of both *Scorpion* and *Flowers*, and draw attention to an important aspect of being Malaysian and of reading Malaysian literature: the fact that the reader is nominally of the same ethnicity or speaks the same language as the author does not mean that she automatically has "insider" knowledge.

Flowers is a Zen-influenced text. With its author, I share a number of similarities in terms of ethnicity, history, culture, and worldview. Like Lee Kok Liang, I am a fourth-generation, English-educated, Straits-born Chinese with affinities to the culture and language of the Penang Chinese. When asked, I would be inclined to describe myself, like Lee, as a "sceptical Zen Buddhist leaning towards Theravadaism" (Harrex 1993: ix). Where I differ from Lee is that I do not have a Chinese education; and whereas Lee's Zen and Theravadaism have a "sprinkling of Ganeshism" (*ibid*), mine are more likely to have a sprinkling of Sufi thought. The point of significance is this: although I was already familiar with Zen when I first read *Flowers*, and although my knowledge caused me to disagree with the reading outcomes of other critics, it did not help me to discover the novel's hidden discourses. Indeed, my knowledge of Zen had the effect of causing conflict and confusion

rather than clarity; because as someone whose knowledge of Buddhism and Zen did not extend to Chinese Buddhism and its practices, I had never heard of the *Surangama Sutra*. Like any other reader, I had to read all the *sutras* mentioned in the novel in order to identify the *Surangama* as the source-text, and I then had to read the whole *Surangama* in order to understand the phrase, “flowers in the sky”. Further, to get to the bottom of the novel’s critical crux, Ah Looi, it was necessary for me to research aspects of Chinese religious and social life, areas of knowledge quite alien to me. But in order to solve the enigma of her dreams and the mystery of how she knew of her husband’s death, I had nothing to depend on but logic and close attention to the text. The main contribution of my foreknowledge of Zen is that, being familiar with Zen’s predilection for paradox and irony, I was able to perceive (or make a more informed guess as to) the deconstructive purpose of, say, the epigraph—a guess that I then had to validate to my satisfaction.

In the case of *Scorpion*, it is a text which is not influenced by Zen. Its author and I (the reader) are of different ethnic origin. The only experience we may be said to have in common is that we both received our education in English and studied English Literature. But it was not my understanding of Fernando’s cultural background or personal history that enabled me to solve the novel’s puzzles. On the contrary, I had to know about things that lie outside both Fernando’s and my cultural spheres, as in the case of the “bamboo” puzzle. I might never have been able to solve it had I not been told by someone (probably in childhood) that circumcisions in the past were done with a bamboo knife. But here again, I might never have had this insight if I had not read the source-texts of the excerpts quoted in *Scorpion*, and found that the only excerpt with allusions to bamboo is from an episode in the *Hikayat Abdullah* that has nothing to do with inter-ethnic conflict. In the same way, I might never have solved the critical crux of the scorpion metaphor had I not read somewhere about the myth of the scorpion stinging itself to death when surrounded by fire¹, and then subsequently done research to confirm the myth, in the process of which I discovered the scientifically proven fact of the scorpion’s propensity to cannibalism.

What forced me to do the research were the Zen-based Procedure’s reading guidelines, which did not allow me to resolve my conflicts with the texts by resorting to answers given by other critics, ambiguous possibilities, and inferences that cannot be validated either by textual evidence or by logic. What enabled the making and validation of inferences was the 3-Reading Strategy together with its Forensic Tools, which “demanded” and enabled close attention to the details of the texts. In the final analysis, it was the careful

observation of the Zen-based Reading Guidelines and the application of the Procedure's critical tools that led to my insights and the discovery of the discourses. No knowledge of Zen philosophy is required in following guidelines and instructions on the application of tools.

8.2.3 *Prajna-insight occurs when logic is pushed to its limit*

Experience gained during the application of the Zen-based Reading Procedure suggests that the step-by-step, one-object-of-investigation-at-a-time approach can lead to the sudden and *prajnic* solution of critical cruxes or “puzzles”. This confirms the theory of *prajna* in Zen discourses and the theory of “intuition” in western discourses (Ch. III, 3.4.2) that intuitive knowledge or insight follows on research and use of logic. *Prajna* is essentially both the critical faculty required for the rigorous attention to detail and sustained logical analysis of problems, as well as the intuitive knowledge that makes itself available at the point that logic fails and the “thinker” stops thinking of himself or herself as the “seeker of solutions”. At this point, *prajna* as intuitive knowledge takes over and provides the solution by connecting the mind to its own store of knowledge in a supra-logical way.

From this explanation, it is seen that although *prajna* is usually translated as “insight”, it is more than “insight” as the word is understood in western literary theoretical discourse (Ch. I, 1.2). *Prajna* is not categorically inimical to logic, analysis, and research. Its real antithesis is *upadana*, the egocentric, appropriative urge that causes the mind to cling to the fiction of the subject-object polarity as the essence of cognition, and to indulge in *prapanca* (conceptual proliferation). In the context of the Zen-based Procedure, reading does not mean the ability to be more imaginative in concretising narrative gaps and silences, or more creative in extrapolating all possible meanings from ambiguous words and situations. It is the reverse; it is the eradication of the tendency to see more in the text than what it says. Further, in Zen-based reading, “empathy” is not “identification” with a character, which usually involves judging the character by one's own experience (“Yes, I can identify with X because I have been through the same experience”). Empathy in Zen-based reading is, again, the reverse: As Wayman (in Elder 1984:299-300) explains, it means one learns from the study of others, the nature of one's own mind. So in reading, the text's delineation of a character's mind evokes in the reader the thought, “Ah, so that's what it is to be X; I would probably feel/do the same if I were he.”

The Zen-based Reading Procedure is to a large extent a “reverse” hermeneutics. It holds back the reader from reaching for meaning and rushing to closure. It forces him/her to be aware of what he/she is responding to, and how. It enables him/her to investigate his/her responses and then make decisions about how he/she can respond, based on what the text says. This making of decisions as to how we want to respond to words and concepts is what “criticism” is, essentially. But in the Procedure, the reader is relentlessly forced to allow the text to show him/her the “correctness” of his/her decisions, so that he/she can abandon or modify them if they are found to be faulty. A by-product of this process of correction-by-the-text is that the reader can get to the “point of desperation” when *prajna* takes over and presents to the reader’s consciousness interpretive solutions that unlock the door to hidden discourses.

The impact of this reverse hermeneutics on the heuristics of reading is manifold. First, it emancipates us, the reader, from the desire to produce meaning, so that we begin to get a clearer idea of how the text creates meaning through its narrative strategies and structures. Secondly, it emancipates the text from our desire to produce meaning, so that we are better able to acknowledge the text’s “emptiness” (“*sunyata*” or non-closure-ability). This means that the “ultimate truth” is that in any given text there are endless possible “meanings”, which will be revealed through and by fresh approaches brought by the individual to the reading. Thirdly, through this awareness that the act of reading is not to produce definitive meanings because there are no definitive meanings to be produced, we enlighten ourselves as to where we stand in relation to the text and in relation to other readers of the text. We realise that there will always be an “otherness” in the text, which we cannot reach and should not seek to deny, distort, dominate, or seek to impose on other readers. We also enlighten ourselves as to where the text and all the readings produced in the past stand in relation to the larger reality of the time-space continuum, that is, in the context of history and the world. Each new reading experience, when put down in writing, produces a new text for other readers. But ultimately, all these texts produced from readings of the novel (including the author’s and the publisher’s) are second-level fictions; they must be analysed and evaluated like all other fictions.

To clarify this point, one final observation must be made of my Zen-based readings of *Scorpion* and *Flowers*. I have undoubtedly brought my personal, Zen-tinged worldview and values to my readings; as well as my store of knowledge of history, other people’s cultures, and so on. All of that has determined, to begin with, the nature of my Key Conflicts

(KCs) with the texts, which in turn determined the direction of my subsequent investigations. But all that can be said about my reading is that it is my personal attempt to resolve my conflicts with the texts to my satisfaction. The reader of my dissertation should not assume that I am giving or claiming to give the “definitive” readings of *Scorpion* and *Flowers*. Another reader with another worldview and set of values would find another conflict, and arrive at another reading. Let us suppose, for instance, that a reader disagrees with my understanding of “the four” in Chapter 10 of *Scorpion* as the four good and honest Muslims whose eye-witness account must be brought as evidence to support accusations of sexual misconduct in the Islamic world; and let us say he thinks they refer to the “Four Riders of the Apocalypse” in Christianity. It would be incumbent upon him to validate his inference with evidence from the text (and not from what another critic says). If he can validate his inference, then the reading outcome produced would be his, and his reading outcome would add to the body of knowledge and opinions that constitute the discourse on *Scorpion*. There is no necessity for this hypothetical reader to give up his/her own worldview and values, and adopt those of Zen in order to use the Zen-based Reading Procedure.

It is precisely for this reason that the Procedure’s 3-Reading Strategy begins with the identification of the reader’s conflict; it is to enable each reader to engage with the text on his/her own terms. What the Procedure tries to do is to engineer his engagement with the text in such a way that the reader’s perception of himself as the reader-subject, whose task is to “grasp” the text-object, is destabilised. When at every step of the engagement the reader is forced to allow the text to “correct” him, reading is experienced as a process where meaning is first made and then unmade, where his preconceptions, perceptions, and interpretations of the text are constantly being constructed and deconstructed. The more these moments of instability are experienced, the more opportunities are created for the occurrence of *prajna*-insights and the discovery of discourses he never saw before. To the extent that the Zen-based Reading Procedure helps him to realise that his preconceptions and interpretations are no less fabricated than the fictions of the text, to that extent can the Zen-based reading be regarded as a form of meditation, a laboratory for observing, modifying, and analysing one’s habits of responding to the otherness of the world and its texts.

8.3 CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL CRITICAL THEORY & PRACTICE

There are two ways that the Zen-based Reading Procedure can help in the development of critical theory and practice locally and, possibly, further afield. First, the Procedure can fill the current local need for a methodical, systematic, step-by-step reader-response approach to texts. Currently, for the “close reading” of literary texts, which is always necessary regardless of the theoretical approach, academics and teachers depend to a greater or lesser extent on western principles of textual analysis. While there is nothing intrinsically “wrong” with these principles, they do not always reflect the views of literature and the world subscribed to by local writers. The terms “plot” and “tragedy”, for example, may mean very different things to local writers; and the question that needs to be asked is whether we are in danger of judging local works unfairly if we take these terms as they are traditionally and normatively defined in the west, and use them as critical tools. As demonstrated in this study’s practical application, the Zen-based Reading Procedure can facilitate a re-orientation by re-directing the reader’s attention to aspects of the text usually left out of consideration (e.g. minor characters and peripheral episodes) towards a better appreciation of how a writer’s worldview influences the way he narrates and structures his narration.

Since the Zen-based Reading Procedure is essentially a tool-kit of hermeneutic aids, the hope is that it will be used in the reading and understanding of cross-cultural texts. A potential area is the study of Malaysian literature written in English by Malays and Muslims, where the Procedure could be used in tandem with existing Islamic and Malay traditional literary theories. All these theories can be useful in giving the non-Malay/Muslim reader a deeper understanding of the ideological substructures and the ideals and values informing Malay and Islamic works of fiction; and the Zen-based Reading Procedure can provide the tools and methodology to mediate the non-Muslim reader’s transition from non-comprehension to deeper insight.

Another potential area is at the pedagogical level. The Zen-based Procedure is structured as a step-by-step reading strategy requiring no knowledge of Zen theories and philosophies (unless one were analysing a Zen-influenced work). It may be useful for readers who are new to literary studies, and for schoolteachers, whose pedagogic aims usually do not include or prioritise the teaching of literary theory and the critique of ideologies; but rather are concerned with either helping younger students to understand a text, or inculcating in older students analytical and critical skills by encouraging

independent investigation of a text. As a pedagogical tool, the Zen-based Reading Procedure is straightforward, broadly applicable, and can be used in analyzing complex as well as simple fictions. It is designed as an active and interactive reading-and-thinking “game” with the text. The hermeneutic aids (i.e. reading guidelines, critical tools, and 3-Reading Strategy) provide the foundation and language for a consistent and systematic approach to uncovering the discourses embedded in fiction, but there is no single, “right” way to use the Procedure. The 3-Reading Strategy can be used by a lone reader, but it is also adaptable for use in group and classroom situations².

The second way the Zen-based Conflict-to-Insight Reading Procedure can contribute to the development of local critical theory and practice is in the broader field of the research and development of a local critical tradition. The significance of *Puitika Sastera Melayu* for this study is that in deriving his theoretical principles from texts and oral performances rather than from philosophical tracts, Muhammad Haji Salleh has established an empiricism-based methodology for the development of literary theories and theoretical frameworks. At the same time, however, the non-mention of criticism in Muhammad’s classification of the functions of literature in the Malay tradition gives food for thought. Is it possible that the feudalistic structure of traditional Malay society, which demanded absolute loyalty to the sultans on pain of death, drove the critical function of literature “underground”? Lim Kim Hui’s examination (2003) of how Malay proverbs are used to deliver indirect criticism suggests that we may find subversive, carnivalesque, and otherwise deconstructive-critical discourses in traditional folktales, fables, and “fairytales”. Perhaps the Zen-based Reading Procedure can help in the discovery of “hidden” counter-discourses, leading to the construction and definition of the critical tradition in folklore.

In modern times, the prohibition of criticism of those in power have led writers, including Muhammad Haji Salleh (see Ruzy Suliza Hashim’s “*Yang Empunya Cerita: Muhammad Haji Salleh’s Re-Vision of Sejarah Melayu*” in Zawiah Yahya, 2003: 86-105), to use techniques of indirection and other forms of subterfuge to get their criticism across. Here the Procedure can help readers to identify and analyse the critical methods used by local writers in the same way that it has enabled me to discover the game-master in *Scorpion* and the deconstructive puppeteer in *Flowers*. Once the writers’ critical methods are identified, they can be described and collected in a data bank of local writers’ critical practices, which can later be formulated and codified as aspects of the local critical tradition.

The review of the literature on contemporary western literary theory shows that we in Asia turn to the west for leadership in the field of critical theory at a cost. European literary theorists themselves are in a quandary as to how they should accomplish the much talked about paradigm shift required to align literary studies to twentieth century developments in linguistics and phenomenology. A survey of western reading theories shows that the theorists, especially in the field of phenomenological hermeneutics, also set as their ideals understanding of texts through self-effacement, empathy, and insight. But the questions as to whether and how these vital hermeneutic factors are to be developed and put into practice remain unanswered. In time to come, when western literary theorists engage the researches and findings of cognitive scientists in their theorisations, we shall undoubtedly see western literary theory developing in new and exciting directions. In the meantime, it is perhaps the Asians who must take the lead.

8.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It hardly needs to be said that further practical research of the Zen-based Reading Procedure has to be done. In its present state of development it has yet to be tested in the field. The review of past readings of *Scorpion* and *Flowers* shows that the Zen-based reading outcomes are radically different from those of readings by critics using other approaches. Since these outcomes are different from those of my own readings done previously without the help of the Procedure, I am persuaded that the outcome has more to do with the Procedure than with me. Nevertheless, there are questions relating to the Procedure's functionality and general applicability that can only be answered through empirical field research. For example, how well will the Procedure work for other users? Is it simple enough? Are there aspects of it that need to be adjusted, improved, refined, or scrapped? It would also be interesting to know how well it will work in tandem with existing literary theories, local and western.

The analysis of *Scorpion* as a text that deconstructs dominant views in local and postcolonial discourses on social relations in Malaysia opens up many possibilities for further research based on other literary theories. Of special interest, however, are the possibilities of approaching the text from the perspectives of non-literary theories. The Zen-based reading's discovery that the novel uses the circumcision as a metaphor for social conformity and responsibility suggests that an approach based on traditional, religious (especially Islamic), anthropological, and Jungian theories on initiation rites would be

extremely enlightening. The use of the scorpion as a metaphor for the impulse to cooperate with the enemy in one's own destruction either individually or as a nation requires closer study guided by theories on victimology, The Stockholm Syndrome³, and cognitive dissonance. Another area requiring a psychological-theoretical approach is the theme of psychological dissociation, especially as it relates to identity confusion, amnesia, and general emotional dysfunction. The representation of Arokiam as the authentic free agent suggests the need for an approach based on Existentialist philosophy. The Tok Said phenomenon seems like a good starting point for a Marxian, specifically Althusserian, study of how the State's manipulation of information and scientific research is represented in the novel. A long outstanding study is a comparison of *Scorpion's* narrative techniques with those used in the *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Abdullah* to launch veiled social criticism. And finally, an analysis of the novel from the perspective of literary games along the lines of Peter Hutchinson's *Games Authors Play* (1983) would be a useful and valuable contribution to the research and development of the use of literary games and puzzles in the Malaysian critical tradition.

As I have pointed out, an understanding of *Flowers* requires not only a knowledge of Zen, but also of Chinese eschatology. A more detailed study of the Chinese religious beliefs and cultural practices (e.g. Koh Tai Ann 2002) would be enlightening for those who are unfamiliar with this field of knowledge. There are however other more literary areas that can be explored. One area of study that would be fascinating is a study of the novel's stylistics. In reading Lee's works, one's attention is always drawn to the need to consider the novel from a Bakhtinian standpoint, not only in terms of the novel's treatment of the Chronotope, which I have been able to discuss only in outline, but also in terms of dialogics. Another interesting area to explore would be to approach the text using Lee's use of the puppet-kill-puppet technique described but briefly in the analysis. It would be interesting to know whether the same narrative strategies used in *Flowers* are used in his other works. And finally, an analysis of the novel from the perspective of Zen critical procedures (see Chapter IV) would be useful to the research and development of a theory of the Malaysian critical tradition.

8.5 CLOSE

The final words that must be said about the present study are that no claim is being made as to the uniqueness of individual aspects of the Zen-based Reading Procedure. There must be

innumerable readers who use some or all of them, consciously or unconsciously. If it were otherwise, we would not be able to benefit from the insightful readings of millennia of critics and scholars who have made and continue to make cross-cultural studies and translations possible. What can be claimed as original is this study's attempt to bring all these aspects together and systematise their application and use through the 3-Reading Strategy for the discovery of discourses in literary fiction. I would also emphasise that by designing and developing the Zen-based Reading Procedure, I am in no way suggesting that there is no room in fiction studies for ethnocentric, theory-guided and critique-of-ideology approaches. What I do suggest is that a critic could make use of the Zen-based Procedure to arrive at a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of a text's discourse before he/she takes a particular stand for or against the discourse.

To a large extent, this study, which is a pioneering study, has been a personal journey from conflict to insight and discovery. What my Zen-based readings of *Scorpion* and *Flowers* have demonstrated is that the Procedure can help the reader to engage with texts from an ethnocentric perspective, and guide him/her to a broader perspective without losing sight of his/her original values. Perhaps the most useful aspect of the Procedure is that it can open up many new, hitherto hidden, areas of a given text's discourses and at the same time invite further investigations with the help of other theories and approaches, both western and local.

¹ The memory evoked in me was the epigraph to *The Day of the Scorpion* (1968), the second volume of Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet*. The four volumes are *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966), *The Day of the Scorpion* (1968), *The Towers of Silence* (1971) and *A Division of the Spoils* (1975).

² An imaginative teacher might, for instance, convert the 3-Perceptions investigative process into a mock trial based on episodes and characters in a novel, with Imagined Perception representing the perception of an eye-witness; Narrative Perception the position of the defendant; and Modified Perception the conclusion reached by those playing the part of the jury.

³ The Stockholm Syndrome refers to the case where victims become emotionally attached to their abusers and defend the abuse. It takes its name from a bank robbery in Stockholm in 1973,