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SULTAN ABDUL MUBIN OF BRUNEI: TWO LITERARY DEPICTIONS OF HIS REIGN

ANNABEL TEH GALLOP

Introduction

According to Brunei sources, the seventeenth century witnessed one of the most traumatic episodes in the history of the sultanate: the murder of the twelfth Sultan, Muhammad Ali, by his Bendahara, who subsequently ascended the throne as Sultan Abdul Mubin. Pengiran Bungsu, a nephew of the late Sultan, was appointed Bendahara, but soon began plotting revenge at the behest of a Kedayan chief. Sultan Abdul Mubin was tricked into moving his capital to Pulau Cermin, an island at the mouth of the Brunei river, while in the capital of Brunei, Pengiran Bungsu proclaimed himself Sultan Muhiuddin. The long and bloody civil war which ensued was finally resolved with Sulu intervention, culminating in the storming of Pulau Cermin and the death of Sultan Abdul Mubin, and victory for Sultan Muhiuddin.

As an indication of the significance of this period for Brunei history, the death of Sultan Muhammad Ali is accorded 'the first date given in any Brunei source' (Brown, 1970:144), namely 'malam hari Isnein [i.e. Sunday] 14th Rabial Akhir, A.H.1072' (Low, 1880:13), while the death of Sultan Abdul Mubin 'took place twelve years after that of his victim Merhoum Tumbang di Rumput' (Low, 1880:17), placing Sultan Abdul Mubin's reign as A.H.1072-84 (A.D.1661-1673/4). A century later, Thomas Forrest referred to this episode in his account of his visit to Sulu in January 1776 (Forrest, 1969:334), while a recent brief archaeological survey of Pulau Cermin revealed a quantity and variety of shards suggesting sophisticated rather than simple domestic use, compatible with the reported siting of the palace and fortress on the island (Harrisson, 1970:201). In a detailed study of this period, Majul brought together a number of historical sources which, whilst not able to confirm the precise dates, do not contradict the Brunei account of events (Majul, 1973: 176-84).

However, during the period of upheaval itself, Brown noted that 'no contemporary European or other external sources describe the events or even make note of them' (Brown, 1970:144). Conversely, Nicholl has attempted to seek confirmation of these events in precisely those periods in which an unexplained absence of external activity in Brunei, like that which occurred after 1647, could be deemed indicative of a condition of internal crisis such as might
have been entailed by the murder of Sultan Muhammad Ali and the war of succession. Between 1648 and 1654 there was no communication between Batavia and Brunei until an embassy arrived in Batavia from one Paduka Seri Ilmu Alam, who could have been from either of the warring parties, requesting Dutch assistance, which was refused (Nicholl, 1989:189). Nicholl's main reason for not accepting the Brunei date of the death of Sultan Muhammad Ali as authentic was the fact that his calculations gave a different weekday for 14 Rabiulakhir 1072 from that stated in the Brunei sources. Yet it is well-known that in the conversion of A.H. to A.D. dates using standard tables, the resulting weekday is often different from that expected, and this incompatibility in itself is never reason enough to jettison the whole date. Moreover, there were other periods in the late seventeenth century where external sources for Brunei events are scanty in the extreme (cf. Nicholl, 1989:189-90), and until more evidence to the contrary emerges, it would be premature to discard the date of A.H.1072 out of hand.

This turbulent period of 'one country, two rulers' — pada masa itulah dua raja di dalam Berunai (Sweeney, 1968:57) — is described in a number of versions of the Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei, and is also the subject of the first Brunei novel, Mahkota berdarah by Yura Halim, published in 1951. By comparing Mahkota berdarah with a manuscript of the Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei, this paper aims to show that the novel is based upon a text of the Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei, and explores the process of literary transformation wrought by Yura Halim. These two Brunei literary works, one 'traditional' and one 'modern', are then discussed with particular reference to the depiction of concepts of treachery and loyalty.

The reign of Sultan Abdul Mubin in the Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei

The most accessible account of Sultan Abdul Mubin's reign in the Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei (henceforth SRRB) is found in a manuscript compiled in Sandakan in 1936 by Haji Abdul Ghaffar bin Abdul Mumin Serawak, and edited and published by Amin Sweeney (1968) as MS B (henceforth B). This episode forms the most important constituent part of the manuscript, where it occupies 12 of the 31 pages on the history of Brunei. A detailed synopsis is given below.

Pengiran Bongsu, son of Sultan Muhammad Ali, the twelfth Sultan of Brunei, kills the son of Pengiran Bendahara Abdul Hak. When the Bendahara hears that his son has been killed for no reason he goes to see the Sultan accompanied by forty of his men, finding him in the audience chamber with Pengiran Bongsu. The Bendahara appeals for justice to the Sultan, who agrees that his son must die in punishment. At this point
the prince gets up and vanishes into the palace. The Bendahara and his men follow, but the prince jumps down and escapes into the forest. Failing to find him, the Bendahara kills everyone else in the palace. On seeing the carnage Sultan Muhammad Ali offers up his own life, and is garrotted by the Bendahara in a grassy field, hence his posthumous title, Marhum Tumbang Di Rumput.

The Bendahara seizes the royal regalia and installs himself as Sultan Abdul Mubin. Pengiran Bongsu is installed as Pengiran Bendahara Seri Maharaja Permai Sura. One day, while out hunting, the new Bendahara is chided by the Kedayan chief Orang Kaya Besar Imas for failing to avenge the death of his father. Orang Kaya Besar Imas assures Bendahara Bongsu of his support, and suggests a secret plan to destabilize the country. The Bendahara obtains the consent of his relatives to proceed with this course of action. For three months, the Sultan’s palace is attacked each night by Orang Kaya Besar Imas and his men thrusting spears through the floorboards (mengaruk), and everyday life in Brunei is severely disrupted. The Bendahara seeks an audience with Sultan Abdul Mubin, and advises him to move to Pulau Cermin for safety. The Sultan agrees, and when his new palace is ready he moves to the island. After some time, the Bendahara returns to Brunei. He then prevents the remaining two-thirds of the populace and all but three of the cannon from moving downriver to the island. After a week the Bendahara has still not returned to Pulau Cermin, and Sultan Abdul Mubin sends the Orang Kaya Di Gadong to Brunei to order him back. The Bendahara informs the Orang Kaya that he refuses to return in revenge for the death of his father. When Sultan Abdul Mubin hears the news, he is furious.

The Bendahara is then installed as Sultan Muhiuddin, the thirteenth Sultan of Brunei, and so there are two rajas in the realm of Brunei. Sultan Muhiuddin, seated in Brunei proper, is supported by the people upriver, while Sultan Abdul Mubin on the island is supported by those over in Saba’. War breaks out, but after much hardship due to the blockade of the river mouth, the Brunei forces request peace. However Sultan Muhiuddin merely uses the interlude to retrench, and then to re-attack. After further fighting, Sultan Abdul Mubin is driven out of Pulau Cermin and over to Kinarut in Saba’, where the Brunei forces are in turn defeated. Sultan Abdul Mubin is able to return to Pulau Cermin while the Brunei forces retreat to Brunei, and the war recommences.

The Brunei forces then send a letter requesting help from the Betara Suluk, who manages to trick his way past the Sultan’s forces on Pulau Cermin by promising to mediate between the warring Muslim brethren. Sultan Muhiuddin offers Kimanis to the Sulus in return for military assistance against Sultan Abdul Mubin, and the final assault begins.
The Brunei forces are stationed on Bukit Cendana, and the Sulus on Pulau Kaingaran. Sensing the end is nigh, for his jinn has deserted him, Sultan Abdul Mubin fires the royal regalia towards his foes on Pulau Kaingaran. The island is then stormed by Pengiran Karta and the Sulu forces, who proceed to loot and plunder. Sultan Abdul Mubin is chased into the mosque where he is garrotted by the Sulus. He is buried on Pulau Cermin together with his slain warriors, while the other nobles who have survived the war surrender. The Sulus sail off with their booty while Sultan Muhiuddin and his captives return to Brunei, and to this day there is nothing on the island save graves.

Before analysing the depiction of treachery in this episode in the SRRB, it is helpful first to review the nature of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in the Malay state, as most symbolically expressed in the Sejarah Melayu in the legendary contract agreed between Seri Teri Buana and his minister Demang Lebar Daun prior to Seri Teri Buana’s marriage to Demang Lebar Daun’s daughter Wan Sendari. This agreement has been much discussed, most recently and relevantly for the present purposes by Kratz (1993:74-77). In essence, the ruler promises never to shame his subjects, while Demang Lebar Daun (who subsequently became Bendahara) promises that his descendants will never commit treason. If either side breaks its promise, chaos will ensue. The solemn vow is summarized in the Sejarah Melayu:

_Itulah sebabnya maka dianugerahkan Allah subhanahu wa ta‘ala kepada segala raja-raja Melayu, tiada penah memberi aib pada segala hamba Melayu, jikalau sebagaimana sekali pun besar dosanya, tiada diiktunya dan digantongkannya dengan kata yang jahat. Jikalau ada seorang raja memberi aib (seorang hamba Melayu) itu alamat negerinya akan dibinasakan Allah subhanahu wa ta‘ala. Syahadan segala hamba Melayu pun dianugerahkan Allah subhanahu wa ta‘ala tiada penah derhaka dan memalingkan muka kepada rajanya, jikalau jahat sekali pun pekertinya dan aniaya sekali pun_ (Winstedt, 1938:57).

This formula was to be the basis of government of the kingdom of Melaka and its satellites and heirs.

In the Sejarah Melayu, the greatest provocation imaginable happens: the son of the Bendahara of Melaka is killed by a follower of the son of the Sultan for no just reason. During a game of sepak raga, Tun Besar, son of the Bendahara Paduka Raja, knocks off the head-dress of the crown prince Raja Muhammad, the favourite son of Sultan Mansur Shah, who happens to be riding by. One of Raja Muhammad’s men immediately stabs Tun Besar and kills him. On hearing the news and seeing his men arm in readiness to avenge the death, the Bendahara cries out:

When the matter reaches the ears of Sultan Mansur Shah, the first thing he does is to ask the messenger for the Bendahara’s reaction. After hearing the Bendahara’s steadfast words, the Sultan is overcome with fury at his son, and banishes him to Pahang.

In this episode, there is a crucial moment during which the stability of the entire kingdom of Melaka hinges on the Bendahara’s utterances, a fact of which the Sultan is fully aware as is shown by his first question to the messenger. Despite his personal anguish, the Bendahara fulfils his side of the bargain, upon which the Sultan immediately accedes to the Bendahara’s one demand, despite its gravity. Thus, through restraint and wisdom, honour is restored and the ancient contract survives unbroken, and peace and prosperity return to Melaka:

Maka masyhurlah kebesaran negeri Malaka dari atas angin datang ke bawah angin (Winstedt, 1938:125).

Echoes of the Bukit Siguntang agreement and acknowledgement of the enormity of the crime of derhaka can be found in nearly all Malay states and their historical texts, and Brunei is no exception. According to the Batu tarsilah and all known versions of the SRRB, the Sultans of Brunei trace the origin of their authority to Johor whence the royal regalia were obtained:

Maka adapun Sultan Muhammad Tajuddin menitahkan kepada Tuan Al-Haj Abdul Latif menyuratkan silsilah ini; ketahuilah oleh segala anak cucunya raja yang mempunyai tahta singgahsana mahkota kerajaan di dalam negeri Berunai dari 's-salam, yang turun temurun yang mengambil pesaka nobat negara genta alamat dari negeri Johor kamalu 'l-makam, dan mengambil pesaka nobat negara genta alamat dari Minangkabau iaitu negeri Andalis (Sweeney, 1968:51).

In B, the Johor connection is made even more explicit: it was in Johor that Awang Alak Betatar was installed as the first Muslim ruler of Brunei with the title Sultan Muhammad. Awang Alak Betatar was accompanied on his voyage to Johor by his minister Patih Berbai, who was installed at the same time as the first Pengiran Bendahara Seri Maharaja, implying inheritance of the same Sultan-Bendahara relationship that underpinned the kingdom of Melaka. Furthermore, a recently-described version of the SRRB formerly owned by Almarhum Pengiran Digadong Sahibul Mai Pengiran Haji Muhammad Salleh opens with a condensed variant version of the opening events of the Sejarah Melayu not found in other known manuscripts of the SRRB, further strengthening this link. And in the most authoritative modern indigenous account of royal customs and traditional statecraft in Brunei, first published in 1958, the opening sentence outlines the very foundation of the state:
Negara Brunei terdiri adalah dengan persatuan dan perpaduan hati rakyat yang telah menyerahkan kuasa diri masing2 kapada Raja (Sultan) untuk menjadi hak Negara dengan berdasarkan 'Raja tidak boleh dzalim'dan 'rakyat tidak boleh derhaka kepada Raja' (Yura, 1975:43).

In B, the Sultan-Bendahara relationship is put to precisely the same test as in the Sejarah Melayu, when the son of the Bendahara is killed by the son of the Sultan. In at least one other version of the SRRB, the similarity becomes even more pronounced when the cause of the murder is a game — a cockfight in which the prince’s bird was worsted by that of the Bendahara’s son — as inconsequential as that which led to the killing in Melaka. In the Brunei case, there is an initial hope that the episode could be defused in a similar way to the case in the Sejarah Melayu: Bendahara Abdul Hak lays the matter before Sultan Muhammad Ali, asking for justice. The Sultan’s response is impeccably fair: he agrees that his son must pay the price for his action, even if this be death. But at a crucial moment, the guilty prince escapes, — and it is this which gives such a ring of truth to the tale — something in the Bendahara snaps, and he runs amok in the palace. From that moment, the contract is shattered, and events must run their bloody course. Carnage, regicide, the usurping of the throne, rebellion and civil war, outside interference, the destruction of the sacred regalia, the loss of Brunei territory — all these come to pass before the usurping Sultan is killed by his own Bendahara and the throne is restored to the rightful line. None of this chaos is necessarily surprising within the context of traditional Malay society as outlined above, for we have been led to expect an upside-down world when the covenant that underpins the state is broken. What is extraordinary is that throughout this dramatic tale of treason and revenge in B, not once is the word derhaka used to refer to the Bendahara’s action and its consequences.

What is the significance of this strange reticence? The trauma of treason was undoubtedly felt as strongly in Brunei as it would have been in Melaka; so much so that Sultan Abdul Mubin is completely dropped from one important Brunei genealogy, the Batu tarsilah, where the succession jumps directly from Sultan Muhammad Ali to Sultan Muhiddin:


The almost identical silsilah which comprises the first part of Sweeney’s MS A also omits Sultan Abdul Mubin from the royal lineage (Sweeney, 1968:12). Moreover, in the two cases in MS A where reference is made to derhaka, in the reign of Marhum Di Tanjong (Sultan Hasan), retribution is swift and certain:

... dan mentuanya derhaka dibunuhnya, dan beberapa raja besar2 akan
derhaka, sekaliannya habis dibunuhnya . . . (Sweeney, 1968:13).

One interpretation that could be drawn from these observations is that the particular version of the SRRB contained in B reflected the interests of the descendants of the Pulau Cermin nobles, followers of Sultan Abdul Mubin, who surrendered and were taken back to Brunei at the end of the civil war. These 'Island Rajas' and their opponents were said still to form important factions in the political affairs of Brunei as late as the middle of the last century (Brown, 1970:144). Amongst the most notable of the Island Rajas were Raja Muda Hashim of Sarawak and the Pengiran Bendahara Muda Muhammad (Low, 1880:18), while the author of the Syair rakis, Pengiran Syahbandar Muhammad Salleh, was said to be descended directly from Sultan Abdul Mubin (Mohd. Jamil, 1983:1). The official genealogies commissioned by the 'Brunei Rajas' and committed to paper and stone would understandably have had the liberty to banish the name and memory of Sultan Abdul Mubin from the royal line (Hughes-Hallett, 1981:10; Brown, 1988:78); after all, the genealogy inscribed on the Batu tarsilah was compiled at the instigation of Sultan Muhiuddin himself and Sultan Kamaluddin, son of Sultan Muhammad Ali (Shariffuddin and Abd. Latif, 1974:253). On the other hand, the Island Rajas who wished to preserve for posterity the memory of their forebear's reign were faced with what could be termed a slight problem of presentation. In the closely-knit court circles of Brunei, there could be no open denigration of Sultan Muhiuddin, from whom the present rulers were descended. Moreover, even from a pro-Sultan Abdul Mubin stance, the chronicler faced the difficult task of encompassing within his tale the unpalatable fact of derhaka, and the accompanying wanton destruction followed by regicide. In B, the approach taken is to present the sequence of events in a detached and seemingly objective fashion, concentrating on the dramatic aspects (of what is in any case a cracking good tale), consciously producing a text apparently devoid of any value-judgement, positive or negative.

With this interpretation, certain elements of the text begin to fall into place. This reading explains and shows up the discernible (albeit extremely subtle) tendency throughout B to present Pengiran Bendahara Muhiuddin in a poor light. In one of the most direct of such encounters ever endured by a royal personage in a Malay text, he is shamed practically to his face by a Kedayan chief for not avenging the death of his father. The Kedayan chief is cast as king-maker; it is he — not Pengiran Muhiuddin — who is responsible for both planning and implementing the plot to unseat Sultan Abdul Mubin. During the war between the Island and Brunei, it is the Brunei side who request a truce only to break it once they have had a chance to regroup. Furthermore, it is Sultan Muhiuddin who is credited with inviting in the Sulus and offering them Kimanis in return for military assistance, thus bearing responsibility for the loss of Brunei lands in Sabah.

B was chosen for a detailed analysis as it gives a full account of the episode
in question, and moreover it is the only source for which a reliable edition of the Malay text exists. Even though very few other manuscripts of the SRRB are generally available, numerous references in the published literature point to a large number of variant versions of this episode, reflecting a wide spectrum of political allegiances with respect to the reign of Sultan Abdul Mubin; this is particularly apparent in the role accorded to the Sulus in each version. At one extreme are sources such as the Batu tarsilah, Sweeney's MS A, and the manuscript genealogy seen by Treacher (1885), all of which simply maintain a studied silence on the whole subject of Sultan Abdul Mubin. However, there were also pro-Brunei/anti-Island versions in existence, and according to Low the version most prevalent in Brunei in 1875 and which was (not surprisingly) adhered to by the then ruler, Sultan Abdul Mumin\(^{13}\) (r.1852-85), asserted that it was Sultan Abdul Mubin who invited the Sulus in, but the Sulus took so long to arrive that in the meantime the Bruneis had succeeded in winning the battle and slaying Sultan Abdul Mubin (Brown, 1969:152). It would be highly surprising if references to derhaka were found to be lacking in this latter text.

Among those manuscripts which can be identified as being in the pro-Island camp there is great variation in detail. In a copy of the Silsilah belonging to Pengiran Kasuma — whose sympathies and relationships, according to Low, were with the Island Rajas — it was asserted that prior to the final assault in the civil war, peace had been solemnly made three times but was on each occasion broken by the Brunei Raja (Low, 1880:16), but even this manuscript concurred with the then prevailing version in Brunei in denying the assistance of the Sulus, or that any agreement was made for the cession of Brunei territories (Low, 1880:17). By comparison, manuscripts such as B and that translated by Low\(^{14}\) (1880:11-18; henceforth referred to as L), and those used as sources by Mohd. Raus (unpublished) and by Yura Halim and Jamil Umar (Majul, 1973, 178-79), all of which assert that the Sulus were invited in by Sultan Muhiuddin, can be adjudged to be very much more blatantly pro-Island. When Pengiran Kasuma heard that Low had obtained ‘the authentic copy from which the [translated] text is taken’, he said ‘that it contained the true version, that at present adopted having been invented to conceal the shame of the Brunians’ (Low, 1880:17), implying that the versions contained in B and L, though recognized, were too politically sensitive to circulate freely in Brunei in c. 1875.

A parallel dualism is found in Magindanao and Sulu accounts of this episode in Brunei history. According to a Sulu source reported by Low, the Bruneis appealed for help first to Magindanao, but were refused, whereupon they turned to Sulu. When the Sulu fleet arrived on the scene, both warring parties bid for Sulu support by offering as booty the territory belonging to their rivals. The Sulus threw in their lot with Sultan Muhiuddin who offered them the territories to the north of Kimanis belonging to Sultan Abdul Mubin,\(^{15}\) being very much closer to Sulu than Sultan Muhiuddin's lands to the west of the Brunei river.
which they were offered by Sultan Abdul Mubin (Brown 1969:152).
Unsurprisingly, in the Sulu sources ‘the Soolooks did all the fighting, the Brunei people only looking on’ (Low, 1880:17; cf. also Majul, 1973: 179-80).

A very different, and less heroic, view of the Sulu role in this affair was recounted to Thomas Forrest in 1776 by ‘Fakymolano’ — Pakir Mawlana, the former Sultan of Magindanao who had long-standing grievances against the Sulu for their machinations in Magindanao succession struggles, including the murder of a rival claimant whom they had initially agreed to help. According to Pakir Mawlana, ‘the same piece of treachery was transacted at Borneo’, for while it was Sultan Abdul Mubin who had invited the Sulus in, at the point where defeat by the Brunei forces became clear, the Sulus turned on Sultan Abdul Mubin and murdered him, before plundering the island and returning home.

A full comparison of the pro- and anti-Island versions of the SRRB must await reliable editions of more manuscripts. In the meantime, the particular version of the SRRB preserved in B discussed above can essentially be seen as an exercise in damage limitation, an attempt by a sympathetic chronicler to present the reign of Sultan Abdul Mubin in the most honourable and acceptable terms possible given the unavoidable fact of the unpalatable means of his accession to the throne of Brunei. At all costs the dreaded ‘D’ word is avoided, but this mode of presentation is in itself a tacit admission of the enormity of the crime of derhaka.

The reign of Sultan Abdul Mubin in Mahkota berdarah

Just fifteen years after Haji Abdul Ghaffar completed his version of the SRRB, Mahkota berdarah (henceforth M) was published in 1951. As well as being the first Brunei novel, for many years M bore the further distinction of being the only Brunei historical novel. The author (real name: Pengiran Haji Muhammad Yusuf bin Pengiran Haji Abdul Rahim, now Yang Amat Mulia Pengiran Setia Negara) is a highly distinguished Brunei statesman and intellectual. He was born on 2 May 1923 in Kampung Kandang, Tutong, and like so many of the pre-war Malay intelligentsia and nationalists, studied at the Sultan Idris Teachers Training College at Tanjong Malim, Perak, in 1939. He spent the war years studying in Japan, in Tokyo and Hiroshima (where he was when the atom bomb fell), returning to Brunei in September 1945 (Gunn, 1997:102). He then held various senior government appointments culminating in five years as Menteri Besar of Brunei (1967-72), after which he retired from government service. Pengiran Setia Negara is also a prominent businessman, and at the time of writing was serving as the Brunei High Commissioner to Malaysia.
Pengiran Yusuf began writing in the 1930s, from the earliest days using the pen-names Yura Halim, Sekunar Hayat, and Tunas Negara for his poetry, short stories, and essays. In addition to producing the first Brunei novel, his *Sekayu tiga bangsi* (1965) was the first published anthology of Brunei poetry. Pengiran Yusuf has also written widely on Brunei customs, history, and culture, and in 1946 composed the words for Brunei’s new national anthem.

*M* was first published in Jawi script in 1951, but the exact publication details are subject to a number of conflicting claims, as tabulated below:

- *Pengiran Bendahara menjadi Sultan atau Makhkota yang berdarah.* [Place not given]: Saudara Mas (Sabtu, 1983:79).

Thereafter the novel’s publishing history is clearer: in 1961 it was published in roman script by Pustaka Cesar in Brunei with the title *Mahkota yang berdarah* (Mas Osman, 1985:38). Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (henceforth DBP) Brunei reissued the novel in 1985 as *Mahkota yang berdarah*, and a second edition was published in 1987 with the shortened title *Mahkota berdarah* (Yura, 1987). A partial dramatization of the novel, entitled *Pulau Cermin*, was performed by DBP Brunei on 28 September 1982 at the first ‘Malam Tetamu DBP’, held in honour of Yura Halim.

Prior to publication, substantial cuts were made to the novel against the author’s wishes, apparently at the instigation of the ruling authorities at a time when Brunei was still a British protectorate. Even after publication, the novel appears to have undergone at least one major revision (presumably at the time of its first reissue by DBP Brunei in 1985), as is apparent by comparing paragraphs from the 1961 edition cited in Mas Osman’s analysis of the novel (Mas Osman, 1985) with the 1987 edition. These alterations range from the splitting up and shortening of sentences to changes of wording and even substantial omissions of text. Many of the names of the principal characters have also been revised: Pengiran Bendahara Mahyuddin (1961) and Pengiran Bendahara Muhyiddin (1987); Sultan Ali (1961) and Sultan Muhammad Ali (1987); Sultan Abdul Bubin (1961) and Sultan Abdul Mubin (1987); and Pengiran Siti Mariam (1961) and Pengiran Isteri Mariam (1987).

A synopsis of the novel (according to the 1987 edition) is given below:

After a cockfight, Pengiran Muda Alam, son of Sultan Muhammad Ali, twelfth Sultan of Brunei, kills the son of Pengiran Bendahara Abdul. After conferring with his officials (Pehins), the Bendahara, followed by
Sultan Abdul Mubin of Brunei

forty armed followers, goes to see the Sultan. Finding him in the audience hall with Pengiran Muda Alam, the Bendahara lays the matter before the Sultan, who agrees that his son must die in punishment. At this point the prince gets up and vanishes into the palace. The Bendahara and his men follow, but finding that Pengiran Muda Alam has fled, the Bendahara runs amok in the palace, killing nearly all the inhabitants. When the Sultan witnesses the devastation, he offers up his own life too. He is garrotted by the Bendahara in a grassy field on 14 Rabiulawal 1002 [sic], and is known henceforth as Almarhum Tumbang Di Rumput.

The Bendahara then installs himself as Sultan Abdul Mubin, thirteenth Sultan of Brunei. He installs as Bendahara Pengiran Muhyiddin — a nephew of the late Sultan who is married to Pengiran Isteri Mariam, daughter of Almarhum Tumbang Di Rumput — in an attempt to placate the family of the murdered Sultan. One day, while out hunting, the new Bendahara is urged by a supernatural voice to return and fulfil his duty. On his way back, he is chided by the Kedayan chief Pehin Orang Kaya Imas for failing to avenge the death of his father-in-law. With the consent of his relatives, the Bendahara decides to take action.

From that moment on, the houses and palaces of Brunei are attacked each night by mysterious spears thrust through the floorboards, and everyday life in Brunei is severely disrupted. All efforts to apprehend the attackers — who are in fact the Kedayan, under orders from the Bendahara — fail, and after three months the Bendahara advises Sultan Abdul Mubin to move to Pulau Cermin for safety. When the new palace is ready, Sultan Abdul Mubin moves to the island, accompanied by a third of the inhabitants of Brunei. After seven days the Bendahara has still not arrived, and Sultan Abdul Mubin sends Pehin Orang Kaya Digadong Seri Nara to Brunei to investigate. The Pehin finds Brunei fortified and the Bendahara flying the royal yellow standard, refusing to move and intent on taking revenge. When Sultan Abdul Mubin hears the news, he is furious.

War is declared. After three months of battle, the Brunei forces negotiate a cease-fire, but merely use the month-long lull to retrench and re-attack. This time, Sultan Abdul Mubin is driven out of the island and over to Kinarut. However, the Sultan himself leads his troops back into battle, and the Brunei men are forced again to withdraw to Brunei. During this second lull, the Bendahara goes out one night incognito, and hears for himself the suffering of his people due to the war he has brought about.

The Brunei forces then request help from the Betara Suluk — at that time still a Brunei vassal — who manages to trick his way past the Sultan's forces on Pulau Cermin by offering to mediate between the
warring Islamic brethren. Pengiran Muhyiddin offers the Suluks independence and the territory of Kimanis in Saba in return for military assistance, and the final assault begins, with the Bruneis stationed on Bukit Candan and the Suluks on Pulau Kaingaran. The Sulus actually prove to be cowards and useless fighters, but Pengiran Isteri Mariam, dressed as a man, leads the final assault on Pulau Cermin. Sensing that the end is nigh, Sultan Abdul Mubin fires the royal regalia into the sea. His sons Pengiran Kawat and Pengiran Zamban run amok killing all their retainers; then the royal family gather in the mosque and, in an act of collective suicide, set it on fire, leaving no one alive. Sultan Muhyiddin is then crowned fourteenth Sultan of Brunei.

The synopsis has been given in such detail to highlight the remarkable degree of consistency between *Mahkota berdarah* and the text of the *SRRB* as found in B. Even more striking is the congruence with L, where, for example, as in M, Sultan Muhyiddin is described as the son-in-law rather than the son of Sultan Muhammad Ali. The similarity between the texts is reinforced by the comparison of select passages. In each of the three pivotal passages below, the text of M is fully corroborated by at least one of B or L, if not both. The first example is the Bendahara’s plea for justice to Sultan Muhammad Ali on hearing that his son has been killed by a son of the Sultan. M and L are in full agreement, and note the threat implicit to the stability of the state in the Bendahara’s final sentence, a warning that if dissatisfied with a ruler, the rakyat always had the option of voting with their feet:29


**B:** *Ya tuanku shah ‘alam sekarang apalah halnya anak patek telah dibunuh oleh paduka anakanda duli tuanku dengan tiada apa satu salahnya’* (Sweeney, 1968:57).

**L:** ‘Oh, my Lord, King of the World, what is the reason that my son has been killed by the Prince? If this matter is not enquired into by your Majesty, it will fall out that your Majesty will be left alone in the country, for the subjects of your Majesty will say that, if your Majesty’s son does such things, what may not be expected of those who are of inferior rank? And the end of it will be that Brunei will become desolate’ (Low, 1880:12).
The second example relates to one of the most important incidents in the tale, the Kedayan chief’s incitement to revenge. Again, M and L are in apparent agreement right down to the mention of *sembah*:


**L**: *When the Orang Kaya Imas saw the Pangiran Bendahara coming towards his house, he pretended not to have observed him, and said as if to himself: ‘Fie, all these Rajas are without shame; their father has been murdered, and they seek no revenge; it is a creditable thing for those to hold up their hands in obeisance’. He then spat on the ground, and for the first time turning to the Pangiran Bendahara looked towards him . . .* (Low, 1880:13).

The third example chosen is the meeting between Sultan Abdul Mubin and the Betara Suluk, in which the Betara Suluk tricks the Sultan into letting him sail upriver to Brunei.

**M**: *‘Ampun tuanku, adapun patik semua datang ke mari ini ialah disebabkan mendengar khabar-khabar angin yang duli tuanku berperang sesama sendiri . . . mengikut fikiran patik yang cetek ini, kejadian yang telah berlaku ini, iaitu berkelahi sesama sendiri itu adalah semata-mata satu kerugian yang amat besar. Selain daripada tuanku bersaudara, adalah juga sama-sama Islam. Jikalau boleh dijunjung terlebih elok tuanku berdamai sahaja.’ ‘Di antara perbantahan ini bukanlah kehendakku, ini adalah angkara dari Pengiran Bendahara Muhyiddin, si zalim itulah yang mengajak*
Annabel Teh Gallop

berperang. Dialah yang menipu aku.'

'Jikalau demikian halnya, jika ada ampun kurnia Kebawah Duli Tuanku, baiklah patik mengadap mendapatkan paduka anakanda Pengiran Bendahara itu ke hulu. Mudah-mudahan dapat kita selesaikan dengan aman.'

'Baiklah, aku pun berkenan atas fikiran Betaka Sulok itu jalan yang kebajikan', titah Sultan Abdul Mubin (Yura, 1987:74-75).


L: . . . the Batara of Soolook told him that the reason he had come was that he had heard that they were fighting amongst themselves, and that it was, in his opinion, very unfortunate that Islams should be at war with one another; he would, if possible, advise that peace should be established. The Raja of the island said: 'This war was not of our seeking the Pangiran Bendahara has brought it about'. The Batara of Soolook then said: 'I will pass on to Bruni and see the Pangiran Bendahara'. The Sultan Abdul Mubin said, 'Very well, I am very anxious for peace' (Low, 1880:16).

The point of these lengthy and repetitive quotes — just three of numerous cases where M duplicates word-for-word or phrase-for-phrase the sense of B or L — is to establish beyond reasonable doubt that M is not just a piece of fiction loosely inspired by a traditional story, nor is it, as has been suggested, a modern rendering of an orally-transmitted tale (Mas Osman, 1985:39), but it is actually based closely on a written text (or texts) of the SRRB. Yura Halim’s precise sources are as yet unidentified, but as is clear from the comparisons above, his prime source is likely to have been a manuscript similar in many respects to that translated and published by Low.

There are, of course, differences between the text of M and the known SRRB versions of the story, some of which can clearly be attributed to the creative imagination of the novelist. Other changes, however, are more interesting in that they may be indicative of textual variance in the hitherto undescribed version(s) of the SRRB upon which M is based. For example, there are a number of places in which B, L, and M — and other known versions of the
Sultan Abdul Mubin of Brunei — all differ on matters of detail, where M may represent a variant manuscript. One such instance is the identity of the prince who killed the Bendahara’s son, sparking off the whole unfortunate train of events: in B this prince is Pengiran Bungsu himself, while in L he is Pengiran Digadong Omar. In M he is identified as Pengiran Muda Muhammad, who, after fleeing the palace, made his way to Sambas where he became a great chief. In another small detail, the number of ships in the Sulu armada is forty in M, five in L and unspecified in B; M’s figure of forty is corroborated by another known manuscript of the SRRB\(^3\) and also by another source seen by Low (1880:16). In M, Pengiran Muhiuddin is only installed as Sultan after the death of Sultan Abdul Mubin; in B and L, he assumes the throne of Brunei as soon as Sultan Abdul Mubin has moved to Pulau Cermin.

One of the most striking differences between all the sources is the manner of Sultan Abdul Mubin’s death. In L Sultan Abdul Mubin is garrotted by a joint Brunei-Sulu force but in B just by the Sulus. In another version of the tale referred to by Low, Sultan Abdul Mubin does not meet his death through the garrotte, but by the keris, the method of his own choosing (Low, 1880:17). The method of death described in M — suicide by fire together with the other royals — if indeed taken from a manuscript of the SRRB, could be interpreted as the most pro-Sultan Abdul Mubin version described so far, in denying Sultan Muhyiiddin the ultimate fruits of revenge. In the Hikayat Hang Tuah, such a hypothetical ending to the Hang Jebat-Hang Tuah duel would have been the worst possible blow to the prestige of the Sultan of Melaka:

*Adapun tatkala itu semoga-moga ditutup Allah ta’ala hati si Jebat daripada membakar istana. Jika ia membakar habislah negeri Melaka itu binasa, si Jebat tiada terbunuh oleh Laksamana; itu pun daulat Sultan Melaka juga* (Kassim Ahmad, 1973, quoted in Kratz, 1993:90).

A detailed analysis of M reveals that the text of the source version(s) of the SRRB has been faithfully preserved as the skeletal framework of the novel. Fiction is then used to add colour and detail, to flesh out the characters and — the main innovation — to explore the psychological motivation for their actions. This is done through expanding and embellishing existing scenes, and by interpolating additional scenes or exchanges of dialogue. A good example of this creative process is the description of events leading up to the death of Sultan Muhammad Ali. Given the political constraints discussed in the first part of this paper, the narration of this episode in the SRRB is a masterpiece of understatement, with the causal sense of the brief conversational exchange between Sultan Muhammad Ali and Bendahara Abdul Hak rendered almost opaque by its sparseness and studied avoidance of moral comment:

*B: Maka titah baginda Sultan Muhammad Ali kepada bendahara itu, ‘Hai bendahara, apalah pekerjaan bendahara demikian? Lain orang yang*

L: The Sultan, on seeing the Bendahara go into the palace and kill the people belonging to it, said: 'Oh, Pangiran, what is this you are doing? One person has committed a crime and you are killing others'. The Bendahara replied: 'The eyes of your slave were obscured'. His Majesty then said: 'Kill me also', and the Bendahara said: 'Very well, my Lord' (Low, 1880:12).

The obvious interpretation of this scene in the context of Malay political culture is that the shame of this spectacular assault on his authority, this flagrant act of derhaka, leaves Sultan Muhammad Ali no honourable option but death. However, in M, the author suggests a rather less elevated and more personal and emotional reason for Sultan Muhammad Ali's decision: grief and horror at the murder of all his household, including his favourite concubine Dayang Maimun and the assumption that his son Pengiran Muda Alam is included in the dead. In the passage below, the 'core' text based on the SRRB (identified by comparison with B and L) is printed in bold italic, to show up the fictionalized additions:


Didengar sahaja oleh Pengiran Bendahara suara baginda itu, ia pun berpaling lalu bersabda. 'Ampun tuanku beribu-ribu ampun, apakah mata patik telah pening', sembahnya lalu berdiri dan bertentangan dengan baginda serta menguatkan simpulan sabuknya, sedang segala anak buahnya berdiri di belakangnya, masing-masing berlumur dengan darah hidup, darah dari mangsa yang bukan patut menjadi lawan.

Oleh kerana segala isi istana baginda telah habis menjadi korban dari kehendak hati dan nafsu iblis Pengiran Bendahara, tentulah pada fikiran baginda puteranya itu juga telah sama menjadi korban, tambahan pula ke Dayang Maimun gundik yang sangat dikasih baginda telah terlentang di ruang tengah. Melihat keadaan yang amat menyedihkan, memandang keadaan istana telah menjadi tasik darah dari segala dayang-dayang dan gundik-gundik baginda itu, dengan rupa yang sedih penuh berserah ke hadrat Allah baginda bertitah, 'Jikalau demikian ini baiklah sudah peramba sekali, supaya senang tuan peramba
Sultan Abdul Mubin of Brunei

hidup dijunjung'.

At this point in B, events are brought to a climax in characteristically terse fashion:
B: Maka lalu ditangkapnya oleh Pengeran Bendahara Abdul Hak akan Sultan Muhammad Ali, lalu dibawanya ke tengah padang rumput lalu dikujutnya di sana oleh bendahara; maka mangkatlah baginda itu.

In M, despite Sultan Muhammad Ali’s unresisting capitulation, he is granted a semblance of majesty to the end. There is a moving interlude in the midst of the turmoil: the Bendahara, aware of the horror of the train of events he has started, feebly attempts to justify the taking of the terrible process to its logical conclusion, but is countered at every turn by Sultan Muhammad Ali, speaking with quiet dignity:

‘Ah, tuanku, sepala-pala menyeluk pekasam.’
‘Peramba, walau tuan peramba basuh dengan air mawar sekalipun tak kan hilang bau busuk pekasam itu.’
‘Tuanku, mandi biarlah basah.’
‘Peramba, mandi walau habis air selautan, tak kan hersih badan dan jiwa tuan peramba dari bernoda.’
‘Tuanku, sekali terminum darah.’
‘Peramba, minumlah hingga kering, hisaplah hingga kempis, tetapi darah peramba tetap mengalir dan tak kan hancur dari bumi Brunei.’
(Yura, 1987:18).

As can be seen in the above exchange, the historical atmosphere of the novel is carefully nurtured by the author — himself a Brunei noble — through his detailed knowledge of royal Brunei etiquette and modes of address, confident mastery of traditional literary style, and impressive stock of gurindam and peribahasa with which the text is peppered.33 Yet ironically, this ‘traditional’ mode of speech is far removed from the style of dialogue employed in the SRRB, which is generally direct, matter-of-fact, and free from flowery metaphors.

This particular chapter in the story is drawn to a close with the murder of Sultan Muhammad Ali. In contrast to the perfunctory description of this event in B, in M the portentous atmosphere at the scene of execution is drawn with great skill; one can almost hear the birds falling silent at the final breath of the twelfth ruler of Brunei:
M: Di darat istana baginda, di satu halaman yang hijau rumput-rampainya, di mana sepohon kelapa cenderung ke barat tidak berbuah lagi, sedang teja pelangi membangun, mengaum menderam bunyi guruh bertalu-talu, hujan turun rintik-rintik, matahari senja menjadi kuning warna cahayanya, air Sungai Brunei sedang pasang perbani menyebabkan

As should be apparent from the above examples, despite the textual faithfulness to the SRRB, the novel has moved away from the traditional idiom in the internal dynamics of the story, for events are now fuelled less by specifically Malay values than by universal human urges such as love, desire, greed, and revenge. In short, what the author has attempted in M is a psychologically-convincing interpretation of the reign of Sultan Abdul Mubin, and in doing so, has effected a fundamental transformation of literary genre from traditional Malay court history to modern historical novel. One of the crucial contributory factors to this transformation is the apparent lack of a beneficiary in M. Traditional Malay historical texts were conceived and executed for the particular benefit of their authors or patrons. The identity of the recipient of the honour is usually immediately obvious, as in the case of royal chronicles written at the behest of a ruler to enhance his line of descent and support the legitimacy of his rule. In other texts the slant is more subtle: the Sejarah Melayu was commissioned by Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah of Johor from his Bendahara Tun Seri Lanang, and a slight bias towards the Bendahara line is discernible throughout the text. In the SRRB a variety of points of view are apparent depending on the particular manuscript used, with some biased towards Sultan Abdul Mubin and others towards Sultan Muhiuddin, and as discussed in the first part of this paper, the apparent ambivalence of B can be interpreted, within the given political and historical context, as reflecting a pro-Sultan Abdul Mubin stance. A common denominator in all these texts is the existence of a beneficiary.

In contrast, M yields up no real heroes. At first glance, the ambivalence of B appears to be reproduced in M, for although Pengiran Muhyiddin is ostensibly the main character, Sultan Abdul Mubin is treated equally — and perhaps even a little more — sympathetically. While Pengiran Muhyiddin is never to be found in the front line of the battle, Sultan Abdul Mubin is portrayed as a brave and fearless warrior. Even the massacre in the palace is shown not to be a premeditated act of derhaka, but a spontaneous act born of a father’s grief and anger: following the murder of his son, Pengiran Bendahara Abdul Hak is so beset by sorrow that he sets off quite alone to seek an audience with Sultan Muhammad Ali, while his forty men follow of their own accord. And yet at the same time, both characters are depicted negatively in the grip of a thirst for revenge and power at any cost. With a rousing speech, Sultan Abdul Mubin sends his warriors off to attack Brunei — and their own kith and kin:

Demikianlah titah Sultan Abdul Mubin tatkala ia melepaskan segala hulubalangnya yang hendak menyerang Bandar Brunei iaitu tanahair mereka sendiri dan pergi membunuh saudara mereka sendiri
Neither are Pengiran Muhyiddin and his relatives swayed by humanitarian considerations in their decision to avenge the death of Sultan Muhammad Ali, in the passage which yields the title of the novel:


Within the text, both protagonists are judged critically by universal humanist standards of wisdom, compassion, and a desire for justice and peace. In *M*, the real victor of the struggle is neither of the main characters, but human nature with its insatiable lust for power, against which all hopes for a negotiated peace are futile:


The more far-reaching consequences of this conclusion can be seen in the novel’s most strident break with the past, in its treatment of the concepts of *taat* (loyalty) and *derhaka* (treason). Early on in the novel, the traditional Malay view of *derhaka* is spelt out in a scene which emphasizes the parallel with the episode in the *Sejarah Melayu* referred to above. Following the stabbing of the Bendahara’s son at the cockfight, one hot-blooded follower calls for revenge, to be immediately silenced by an old man in words echoing those of the Bendahara Paduka Raja in Melaka:


Thus the rules of engagement so studiously ignored by the author of the *SRRB* are in *M* explicitly acknowledged: despite the degree of provocation, retaliation amounts to treason. This episode must be borne in mind in evaluating the most important passage in *M*: a speech by one of the wisest of the ministers, the Pehin Orang Kaya Digadong Seri Nara, who has been sent by Sultan Abdul
Mubin to find out why Pengiran Muhyiddin has not moved to the Island. On finding the Pengiran Bendahara in a state of open rebellion in Brunei, the Pehin finds himself in the difficult position of instructing his now divided men, some of whom are in Brunei while others have settled on the Island. The will of God has taken its course, and his first command is that they should not commit derhaka:


His men are devastated at the split in their ranks, and beg him not to return to Pulau Cermin. The comparison with the stance of the Melaka Bendahara is here made explicit:

‘Wahai segala anak buahku! Mengapakah kamu berkata yang demikian itu, aku ini bukan lagi budak-budak yang kecil. Bukankah telah kukatakan yang kamu di Brunei hak Brunei, aku di Pulau hak Pulau, tinggallah kamu dengan hati yang taat kepada Allah dan raja, aku mesti kembali ke Pulau Chermin’ (Yura, 1987:56).

The Pehin’s men are so upset that some cry and others beg to follow him, and he is forced to chide them with even stronger language:


And in a shocking denouement, the Pehin continues, in a tone unheard of within a traditional Malay context or text:

‘Kerana pemerintahan baginda keduanya baik di Pulau Chermin mahupun di Brunei ini tiada ada kebajikan lagi’ (Yura, 1987:56).

He advises his men to steel themselves for the battle that is to come. If the cause of the battle had been just, and not civil war, he would have been in the forefront of the fighting. As it is, there is nothing he can do to alter the course of events; all that will come to pass will come to pass because Malays are bound by the chains of time and tradition to be loyal to their ruler:

‘Sabarkanlah hati kamu semua, tetapkan iman kamu, teguhkanlah semangat kamu, sudahlah nasibku dan nasib kamu semua, jikalau sekiranya bahaya yang akan menjadi ini bahaya yang bukan senegeri dan
Sultan Abdul Mubin of Brunei

sedarah akan dapat kamu saksikan dengan mata kamu kerisku ini berlumur darah dan pakaianku berpeluhkan darah. Tetapi seperti apa yang akan terjadi, apakah dayaku kerana bukan tempatnya, tetapi kerana anak Melayu taatkan raja', katanya dengan rupa yang sedih bercampur marah (Yura, 1987:57).

By traditional Malay standards, the Pehin’s speech is doubly extraordinary: firstly in so explicitly condemning the moral authority of both rulers, and secondly, in openly identifying the loyalty of Malays to their rulers — the fundamental prop of the sacred agreement — as contributing to their present suffering.35 In traditional Malay texts, derhaka — the greatest threat to the peace and prosperity of the realm of a just and legitimate ruler — is regarded as the most heinous crime; conversely the quality of taat is the most highly praised attribute of a subject. However, in the Pehin’s speech, although derhaka is still portrayed as the gravest crime against the kerajaan, and the need for Malays to be taat to their ruler is still presented as a social, political, cultural, and historical necessity, at the same time both realms are subjected to an independent moral scrutiny, and both are found wanting. In M both rulers are found to have fallen prey to their desire for revenge and power, and both are denied the moral high ground. Thus Pengiran Muhyiddin’s eventual triumph is presented in essentially non-committal terms in the final lines of the novel:

Baginda bersemayam di atas takhta singgahana kerajaan dengan adil saksama iaitu setelah berjaya merebut takhta dengan cara revolusi.

Jadilah Pengiran Bendahara menjadi sultan (Yura, 1987:80).

The double entendre of the original title — Pengiran Bendahara menjadi Sultan atau Mahkota yang berdarah — becomes clear: it applies to both Sultan Abdul Mubin and Sultan Muhyiddin, and both are stained by the bloodied crown.

In conclusion, although Mahkota berdarah is based so closely on a text of the Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei, and the traditional setting fostered through skilful use of language and an intimate knowledge of Brunei history and culture, the similarity does not extend beyond the structure of the text into its meaning. In Mahkota berdarah, individuals — royal or otherwise — are judged by the morality of their deeds, and in the face of lust for power and revenge, traditional Malay values such as loyalty to the ruler are themselves subjected to a higher moral authority. Yet, in view of its antecedents, the juxtaposition of these more ‘modern’ values onto the carefully-crafted traditional Malay society of the novel cannot help but appear somewhat iconoclastic.

Mahkota berdarah: Brunei perceptions

‘Penulisan novel di Brunei bermula dalam tahun 1951 dengan terbitnya novel Bendahara Menjadi Sultan (Mahkota Yang berdarah) karangan Yura
Resolution of the first Brunei literary conference held at Sekolah Melayu Raja Isteri Fatimah, Bandar Brunei, 12-14 June 1964.

While M’s pre-eminent position as the first Brunei novel is widely acknowledged, it has attracted relatively little critical attention (cf. Leman, 1987:40), and even less historical comment. It has been the subject of two undergraduate Academic Exercises: by Mas Osman at University Sains Malaysia in 1981/82, and by Selamat bin Abdullah at Universiti Brunei Darussalam in 1989/90. Mas Osman does not make the connection with SRRB, but assumes that M is based directly on oral tradition:

_Pada peringkat awalnya cerita-cerita mengenai kisah sejarah tentulah diturunkan daripada satu generasi ke generasi melalui lisan. Sehingga Yura Halim, dengan kekuatan daya imaginasi yang memukau menulis cerita ini dalam bentuk yang ada sekarang, melalui gaya bahasa yang sederhana, dan terhasillah sebuah novelet sejarah_ (Mas Osman, 1985:39).

He thus regards the tale essentially as an ‘old story’ (‘Meskipun novelet ini hanya menceritakan sebuah kisah silam . . .’), and analyses M according to literary criteria such as plot, characterization, setting and style. He concludes that the main theme of the novel is how the human thirst for revenge can lead to the destruction of society itself:

_Tema utama atau persoalan pokok Mahkota Yang Berdarah pada pendapat saya adalah sikap manusia yang suka dendam-mendendam merupakan satu gejala masyarakat yang boleh menghancurkan masyarakat itu sendiri_ (Mas Osman, 1985:39).

On the other hand Selamat bin Abdullah, who interviewed Yura Halim and learned that the novel was based on SRRB, nevertheless takes the view that M should be regarded as pure fiction, with no extra-literary significance being read into it:

_Misalnya jangan kita menganggap latar masyarakat dalam [M] adalah sebagai simbol atau lambang masyarakat Melayu Brunei yang sebenarnya, tetapi kita menganggapnya sebagai satu fiksi semata-mata_ (Selamat, unpublished:103).

and further:

_Jadi watak-watak dalam M itu tetap berupa fiksi yang sangat mendiri dan bebas dari sebarang pengaruh kontekstual yang mungkin mengganggap watak-watak sejarah dalam SRRB yang termuat dalam [M] merupakan modal atau lambang tertentu bagi sosio-politik dan budaya Brunei_ (Selamat, unpublished:133).

One chapter of Selamat’s dissertation comprises a comparison between M and SRRB, he notes the differences in plot and the larger cast of characters in M, and compares and contrasts the style of dialogue in the two works. Drawing

One writer who does categorize M as fundamentally a political novel is Haji Abdul Hakim. He recalls the incident in the Hikayat Hang Tuah where the crown of the Sultans of Melaka falls into the sea and is swallowed up by a white crocodile, symbolizing the loss of Melaka to the Portuguese, and wonders if a similar significance can be read into the loss of the Brunei crown. He observes that the author has refused to take sides in the novel, leaving it up to readers to draw their own conclusions:

_Beliau [Yura Halim] tidak menyebelahi mana-mana pihak yang bersengketa dan memulangkan kepada pembaca untuk membuat keputusan masing-masing (Abdul Hakim, 1989:6)._ 

Despite the devastating encroachment of both territory and sovereignty in the centuries following the civil war, at the time of the novel’s publication in 1951 Brunei had survived intact as one of the oldest Malay Muslim monarchies in South-East Asia. On 4 June 1950, Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin of Brunei died unexpectedly in Singapore whilst en route to England. He was succeeded by his younger brother, Pengiran Muda Omar Ali Saifuddin, who in July 1947 had been installed as Pengiran Bendahara Seri Maharaja Permaisuara. On 31 May 1951 the coronation of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin Saadul Khairi Waddin, twenty-eighth Sultan of Brunei (r.1950-67), took place. The significance of the publication that year of the first Brunei novel under its original title, _Pengiran Bendahara menjadi Sultan_, would not have been missed.

Yet as indicated above, published comments on _M_ have generally taken the work at face value as a novel, focusing strictly on its literary qualities, with little examination of its historical dimension. This approach could be said to have taken its cue from no less an authority than the erstwhile Pengiran Bendahara himself: Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin, the most literary of all Brunei rulers and perhaps even of all Malay sultans (Abdullah, 1987:36), himself an acclaimed author of _syair_ and doubtless intimately acquainted with both the content and political import of the _SRRB_ and other Brunei traditional texts. In an undated foreword (presumably to the first edition), he welcomes the publication of the novel:

_Seterusnya kita berasa tersangatlah bangga serta gembira dengan tersajinya buku yang berharga ini di medan perpustakaan Melayu mengandungi riwayat sejarah Negara Brunei tua yang termasyhur dan bersemarak antero Alam Melayu di zaman purbakala. Sungguhpun kandungan buku ini sebagai bayangan cerita sahaja akan tetapi_
maksudnya teramatlah berguna untuk bacaan am sebagai roman sejarah
(Yura, 1987:iix).

He expresses hopes that the publication of other such ‘hidden gems’ of Brunei history — ‘berbagai-bagai kisah rahsia-rahsia negara kita ini yang masih terpendam lagi’ — will follow.

The royal seal of approval is thus granted to this account of one of the darkest periods in Brunei history, here characterized as ‘a tale of the history of old Brunei, renowned and celebrated throughout the Malay world in ancient times’, in a form ‘highly suitable for general consumption’. This metamorphosis of a portion of the SRRB — the elite view of the history of Brunei, formerly restricted to learned and aristocratic circles (cf. Brown, 1984:11) — into a popular historical novel has at the same time clearly demystified it and freed it from the constraints of Malay court historiography. This echoes the process of the emasculation of classical Malay literary works, traditionally produced and consumed within the palace milieu, through being repackaged as educational texts for vernacular schools in the Malay peninsula by the British colonial authorities (cf. Sweeney, 1980:6-8). Moreover the strictures and sensitivities that continue to govern historical writing in Brunei (cf. Saunders, 1995:346) are apparently deemed not to apply to fictional works, even one that has yielded an interpretation so at odds politically with the spirit of its august sources.

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Notes

1. This is a revised version of a paper originally presented at the ninth European Colloquium of Indonesian and Malay Studies, ‘Images of the Malay-Indonesian World’, held at the University of Hull, 5-9 July 1993. I am grateful to participants at the Colloquium for their comments on this paper.
2. Equivalent to Monday 7 December 1661 (Gregorian) or Monday 27 November 1661 (Julian) (this and subsequent A.H. dates in this paper have been converted to A.D. dates using the Freeman-Grenville tables). However, a recently-described manuscript in the Muzium Negara, Kuala Lumpur, which contains ‘historical sketches and genealogies of Brunei’ (Chambert-Loir, 1980:15), gives the date of death of Sultan Muhammad Ali as Sunday 14 Jumadilakhir 1072, equivalent to Thursday 4 February 1662 (Gregorian) or Thursday 25 January 1662 (Julian).
3. Nicholl’s computation of 14 Rabiulakhir 1072 as Wednesday 17 December 1661 (Gregorian) or Thursday 25 January 1662 (Julian) appears to be faulty by a factor of 10 days; see n.2 above. Moreover malam hari Isnin is Sunday, not Monday; see n.4 below.
4. This is a perennial problem for historians of the Muslim world, and is due to the varying methods of ascertaining the start of each lunar month, whether visually or
by calculation, and the fact that Muslim days are calculated from sunset to sunset, rather than from midnight to midnight. The sixteenth-century royal Mughal chronicler, Abu 'l Fadl, stated in the Ā'in-i Akbari 'The month according to this [Hijrī] system is reckoned from the sight of one new moon, after the sun has completely set, until the next is visible. It is never more than 30 nor less than 29 days. It sometimes occurs that four successive months are of 30 days, and three of 29' (Hodivala, 1923:254). By comparison, in the Freeman-Grenville (1963:60-63) tables, the months are assigned standardized alternating lengths of 30 and 29 days, commencing with 30 days for Muharram; it is thus obvious that discrepancies of a few days are bound to occur. In a detailed overview of the various systems, one Indian historian concluded: 'In these circumstances, it is futile to look for exact coincidence between the dates and week-days given in the Mughal chronicles and the equivalents obtained by the application of the book-rule by modern calculators. The European Tables have no claim whatever to infallibility and their sole foundation is an artificial formula which has nothing to recommend it except its general utility or convenience for practical purposes. It cannot therefore be too often repeated that the Tables are liable to mislead, if allowances are not made for the possibility of error on not one, but two grounds, the discrepancy of a day arising from the general use among orthodox Muslims in old times of a computation resting only on "popular observation" of the New Moon and the similar difference due to the "neglect of the portion of the European day" between sunset and midnight' (Hodivala, 1923:259-60). Hodivala generally took the view that court historians would not be mistaken about the weekday of auspicious events, and in his own calculations of the chronology of the Mughal emperors, where necessary he has adjusted the date to fit the day.

5. B subsequently lists Sultan Muhiuddin as the thirteenth ruler of Brunei and Sultan Abdul Mubin as the fourteenth (Sweeney, 1968:62,71), although the narrative clearly states that Sultan Abdul Mubin reigned first.

6. In this version, of the three heirs of Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain, only one named Seri Pahlawan descends to Gunung Si Guntang and is discovered by Wan Malani. Many marriages produce no offspring until Seri Pahlawan marries Tuan Sandari, daughter of Demang Lebar Daun, and four children are born to their union, the youngest being Sang Nila Utama. After marrying off his four children, Seri Pahlawan himself sails to Minangkabau and marries again, and also obtains as regalia the sword Si Mandang Kini, the spear Lembuara, the seal Kayu Kempa, and the crown. Meanwhile Sang Nila Utama sails to Temasek where on seeing the lion he names the island Singapura. He takes the title Sri Tri Buana and builds his palace at Johor and his son becomes the Raja Johor. He then hears of the Raja of Brunei called Awang Alak Betatar, and sends for him, and gives his daughter in marriage (Mohd. Jamil, 1990:43-44). At this point the narrative appears to converge with other versions of the SRRB such as B.


8. The author of this work is also the author of Mahkota berdarah.

9. Notwithstanding the fact that the office of Bendahara in Brunei was not held by a high-ranking non-royal as in Melaka, but has always been the prerogative of the royal line (cf. Gullick, 1988:62).

10. Hikayat Negeri Brunei by Mohd. Raus bin Hj. Mohd. Amin, compiled in 1943, and partially serialized in Berita Brunei from 6 November to 18 December 1958, when the paper ceased publication. The episode in question is given below, in the last published instalment of the work:
Annabel Teh Gallop

Sekali peristiwa putera Sultan bersabong ayam dengan putera Bendahara maka kalahlah ayam putera Baginda, langsung dibunohnya pula akan anak Bendahara Abdul itu dan ianyapun lalu melarikan diri ke Pulau.

Manakala Bendahara mendengarkan kabar itu, maka beliau pun sangat marah serta menghadap Sultan dengan empat puloh orang hambanya untuk mempersembahkan hal yang telah berlaku itu. Baginda memberi titah hendak menyuroh bunohkan puteranya yang ganas itu tetapi sebelum dapat dikerjakan pembunohan, putera Sultan pun lari masok ke Istana dan diikuti oleh Bendahara.

Setelah dilihatnya oleh Bendahara akan putera Sultan itu tidak ada lagi disana, maka ianyapun tampil membunoh segala isi Istana. Shahadan setelah Baginda masok ke Istana, dilihatnya hal yang telah berlaku itu, maka Baginda pun bertitah kepada Bendahara menyuroh disembunahkan dirinya pula. Bendahara pun dengan segera menangkap Baginda lalu dibawanya keluar ketengah rumput.


An English translation of the complete text of Hikayat Negeri Brunei is given in Mohd. Raus (unpublished).

11. See Maxwell (1996:174-75) for a discussion of the Kedayan role in this affair.
12. In B, after the death of Sultan Abdul Mubin, Sultan Muhiuddin is subjected to an unflattering comparison with his cousin Raja Tengah: *Maka raja itu terlalu sangat gagah berani serta dengan kebalnya pula. Maka dari itu sangatlah susah dihatinya Sultan Muhiuddin akan saudaranya Raja Tengah itu . . .* (Sweeney, 1968:65); Sultan Muhiuddin then resorts to intrigue (muslihat) to remove Raja Tengah from Brunei by sending him to Sarawak.
13. Low was never actually allowed to see Sultan Abdul Mumin's own copy of the Silsilah (Low, 1880:17).
14. This is most probably the manuscript copied c. 1845 described by Low in 1875: 'I have met with a copy of a short history of Brunei, apparently for the most part compiled earlier but copied about 30 years ago which work has more marks of care, correctness and authenticity than any other I have seen on the subject' (Brown, 1969:152).
15. Sultan Abdul Mubin would have inherited the estates in Sabah from his mother, the deaf-mute daughter of Sultan Saiful Rijal (Sweeney, 1968:55).
17. Long had a deadly hate subsisted, and still subsists, between Sooloo and Borneo, the Borneans alledging that the Sooloos had encroached on their territories. About fifty years ago, a Bornean Pangaran was at war with the Eang de Patuan (such is stiled the sovereign) of the place. He had fortified himself on an island called Pulo Chirming, at the mouth of the river Borneo, and called on the Sooloos to assist him. They came, but worsted by the Borneans, they fell upon the Pangaran and defeated him. They then plundered the island, and sailed home (Forrest, 1969:333-34).
18. All references to and quotations from the novel Mahkota berdarah refer to the 1987 edition (Yura, 1987).
19. The second Brunei historical novel, Pahlawan Pengiran Sakam by Mohd. Salleh Abdul Latiff, was published in 1993 by DBP Brunei. Other historical novels set in Brunei by the Malaysian writer Harun Aminurrashid (who served as Director of Education in Brunei for some years before the second World War) were published in Singapore in the late 1940s, including Dayangku Fatimah, Darah Kedayan, and Jong
Biographical information on Yura Halim from Mas Osman (1987) and Abdullah and Muslim (1984).

21. ‘Yura’ is a composite version of his name Yusof Rahim, and has been given as a family name to each of his eleven children, his second son being named (Pengiran) Yura Halim.

22. Apparently used when greater anonymity was deemed expedient (Abdullah and Muslim, 1984:xiv).

23. Notes reconstructed from published references; I have not seen any editions prior to the 1987 edition. As the first private printing press only opened in Brunei (in Kuala Belait) in 1953 (State of Brunei Annual Report 1953, p.153), it is quite plausible that the novel may have been printed at the Persama Press in Pulau Pinang, but issued by a Brunei publisher.

24. Bahana, XIX (42), 1984, 23.

25. According to a preface to the 1987 edition:

Menurut penjelasan penulisnya kepada dua orang wakil Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka yang menemui beliau di terataknya pada permulaan bulan Disember 1987 yang lalu, bahawa pada mulanya kisah sejarah ini telah ditulis dalam bentuk sebuah novel yang agak tebal, tetapi atas arahan pihak tertentu pada masa itu, sebahagian daripada isinya yang tebal itu terpaksa dibuang sekitanya mahu diterbitkan dalam bentuk buku, kerana bahagian-bahagian tersebut boleh menimbulkan kesan yang tidak diingini kepada pihak yang berkuasa pada masa itu. Oleh sebab hasrat penulisnya yang begitu besar supaya kisah sejarah ini dapat diterbitkan juga dan dibaca oleh anak bangsanya sebagai satu ristaan kepada sejarah tanahair maka akhirnya beginilah bentuknya yang dapat pembaca tetapi sekaran (Yura, 1987:vii)

The jettisoning of several chapters was confirmed by Yura Halim in an interview with Selamat bin Abdullah in 1989:


With hindsight, a cryptic comment in the author’s preface to the first edition, dated 4 March 1951, may refer to these enforced edits:

Dalam pengertian sejarah digubah, disusun semula kita dahulukan maaf kerana buku kecil ini belum melengkapi maksud yang sebenarnya. Hanya terserahlah kepada para pembaca yang dapat mengukur lengkap dan tidaknya (Yura, 1987:xi).

26. This prospect of censorship should not be belittled: the only other novel of this period by a Brunei author, Tunangan pemimpin bangsa, was written by H.M.Salleh in Kuala Belait during one hundred days’ imprisonment by the British after being suspected of being a Japanese collaborator. After publication by Sentosa in Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan, the novel was banned from circulation in Brunei and the author rearrested by the British for the use of the word ‘penjajah’ (Abdullah and Muslim, 1987:xxvii).

27. Compare, for example:

Telah dipersetujui, maka dengan bersulit-sulit dihantarlah utusan ke Betara Sulok, tidak berapa lama di Kuala Brunei kelihatannya empat puluh buah perahu yang besar, angkatan Betara Sulok yang cukup dengan makanan dan alat senjata, tetapi apabila sampai di Pulau Chermin disuruh panggil oleh Baginda di Pulau (Mas Osman, 1985:44).
Annabel Teh Gallop

and:


In Mas Osman’s analysis of M, he wrote:

Apa yang saya kurang menyenangi tentang novelet ini ialah pengarang suka menggunakan ayat-ayat yang panjang sehingga menggunakan lebih daripada sepuluh baris. Padahal ayat-ayat tersebut bisa dipendekkan, dan ini tentulah akan membawa kesan yang lebih menarik pada novelet ini (Mas Osman, 1985:45).

Mas Osman is now a senior editor at Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka Brunei, and may thus be partially responsible for the stylistic changes apparent in the new DBP Brunei editions of M.

28. In at least two instances, the 1987 edition is significantly abbreviated. Compare this example:

Oleh sebab hatinya terlampau murka sehingga gelaran Pengiran Bendahara Mahyuddin disebutnya rendah iaitu Awang Mahyuddin, padahal itu semuanya adalah kerana angkara murka yang amat berlebih-lebihan. Walau disebut Si Mahyuddin sekalipun dia tidak akan berubah dan bukanlah erti darjat dan mertabat warisnya itu akan hilang malahan dia tetap dalam kebesaranannya sebagai seorang anak raja yang sama sedarah dengan baginda iaitu darah raja juga hanyalah bezanya sebab gelaran sahaja.

Perkataan yang demikian itu adalah semata-mata mengalamakan manusia yang rendah di dalam akhlak sebagai manusia yang mengenal erti hidup. Adalah kesetria yang sebenar-benar kesetria itu walau musuh sekali pun wajib dimuliakan kerana sifat kemanusiaan yang sama mempunyai adab dan adat serta rasa kesopanan hidup (Mas Osman, 1985:45).

with:

Oleh kerana baginda terlalu murka sehingga gelaran Pengiran Bendahara Muhyiddin itu disebutnya rendah iaitu dengan panggilan Awang Muhyiddin sahaja. Walau disebut Si Muhyiddin sekalipun ia tidak akan berubah dan bukanlah erti darjat dan mertabat warisnya itu akan hilang malahan dia tetap dengan kebesaranannya sebagai seorang anak raja yang sama sedarah dengan baginda iaitu darah raja (Yura, 1987:58).

29. An example of one such incident is described in the Silsilah Raja Sambas (Kratz, 1980).

30. This conclusion was confirmed by Yura Halim in the course of an interview with Selamat bin Abdullah in 1989:

Untuk pengetahuan umum, novel Mahkota Berdarah ini merupakan sebuah karya adaptasi dari Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei yang kemudianya digubah Yura Halim menjadi sebuah karya sastera dalam bentuk prosa iaitu novel (Selamat, unpublished:6).

31. There are a number of fictional embellishments designed to heighten the drama of the tale. One example is the ‘romantic element’, the role created for Pengiran Muhyiddin’s wife Pengiran Isteri Mariam, daughter of Sultan Muhammad Ali. In another instance, whereas the SRRB is quite devoid of supernatural elements, save for Sultan Abdul Mubin’s attendant ‘jin kafir’ (Sweeney, 1968:64), in the novel Pengiran Muhyiddin has a mystical dream-like encounter in which his destiny is revealed, and Sultan Abdul Mubin is said to be invulnerable (kebal) to the assault of bullet, sword, or keris (Yura, 1987:68). Scattered through the text are wide-ranging literary and historical references: a mention of the Brunei hero Bendahara Sakam (whose exploits are also recounted in the SRRB), an explicit reference to the Sejarah
Melayu, a cock crowing thrice heralding disaster, and, in a scene very reminiscent of that before the Battle of Agincourt in Henry V, one night during a lull in the battle an incognito Pengiran Muhiyiddin goes 'walkabout' (or rather, 'rowabout') through Kampung Air and overhears harrowing evidence of the suffering of his people brought on by the civil war.

32. MS 932, Pusat Manuskrip Melayu, Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia; photocopy of a manuscript of the SRRB in the collection of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Cawangan Sabah. 56 numbered pages, written in a lined exercise book, appears to date from the 1950s. This is a copy of B, with lacunae, but with the list of Sultans (Sweeney, 1968:71) brought up to date with the mention of the coronation of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin on 31 May 1951. On p.50: Adalah cerita [c-r-t-y-a] ini telah didapati dan disalin daripada buku cerita Awang Nawawi yang telah disusun dan diatur oleh ayahnya Allahyarham Abdul Taib bin Awang Muhammad Teh bin Abdul Rahim. There is no mention in the manuscript of Haji Abdul Ghaffar, the compiler of B. I would like to thank Ms Siti Mariani Omar of the Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia for kindly supplying me with a photocopy of this manuscript.

33. Notwithstanding a few linguistic anachronisms: revolusi (Yura, 1987:36) and general (Yura, 1987:61).

34. Brown (1988:83) has commented on the low level of psychological commentary in traditional Brunei historical works.

35. Although similar scenarios were not unknown in traditional Malay texts, criticism of the ruler was not an option. Discussing the well-known and dramatic tale of the insubordination and subsequent death of Hang Jebat in the Hikayat Hang Tuah, Kratz has argued that 'the purpose of the Hang Jebat story is to express criticism of the sultan's rule in the only way possible, by creating a figure whose deeds were so bad that they obscured their original cause' (Kratz, 1993:80).

36. Selamat's analysis of the novel is based on the assumption that M was based on B: 'Sebagai sebuah novel yang berinspirasi sejarah yang sebenarnya iaitu berdasarkan Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei (Versi Amin Sweeney) . . .' (Selamat, unpublished:52). This assumption is untenable: despite the strong similarities between B and M there are also fundamental differences; for example, the initial cockfight is not found in B.

37. For example, the date of death of Sultan Muhammad Ali is given in M as 14 Rabiulawal 1002 (Yura, 1987:18), equivalent to Monday 8 December 1593 (Gregorian), and this fact is quoted by Mas Osman as evidence of the historicity of the novel (Mas Osman, 1985:45). Ironically, the year A.H.1002 (A.D.1593) is historically implausible, for according to external documentation, in 1589 Sultan Saiful Rizal — the seventh ruler — was on the throne of Brunei (Saunders, 1994:62), and it is most likely that A.H.1002 is a scribal error for the date of A.H.1072 (A.D.1661) cited by Low above. Even after the publication in 1986 of the Brunei royal family tree by the Jabatan Pusat Sejarah (Mohd. Jamil, 1990:55), which gives the date of death of Sultan Muhammad Ali as 1661, the date in M has apparently not attracted comment.

38. Haji Abdul Hakim comments on the novel's focus on troubled times:

Yura Halim menimba secebis kisah dari sejarah tanah air yang mendukacitakan: perebutan takhta kerana menuntut bela dan mempertahankan hak. Ini adalah persoalan politik yang bukan kecil. Akibatnya masyarakat Brunei berpecah dua dan perang saudara tidak terelakkan. Lebih dahsyat dari itu ialah permusnahan diri bersama keluarga setelah permusnahan mahkota dan cap khamap negara turun-temurun . . .

(Abdul Hakim, 1989:5-6).
References

Pustaka.