

***Persuratan Baru: An Alternative Paradigm to Western Literary Methodologies*¹**

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Abstract

As an ex-colony of Britain, the Malay literary world exhibits an intellectual rush to imbibe Western literary constructs at the expense of local literary tradition which, informed by Islam, has spanned centuries. These Western constructs, which contradict both Malay culture and Islam, the religion of the Malays, give rise not only to confusion of knowledge and epistemology (in particular the concept of literary function and aesthetics), but also reinvent new values and structures of literary form and practice. Malay literature thus takes on an unmistakably Western hue and identity. In the face of this foreign onslaught, local scholars feel an urgent need to revive analytical frameworks that are cognisant of Islamic precepts and Malay cultural dynamics. This is seen as a means to bring back to Malay literature the Islamic worldview and identity which have been eclipsed, and, in some cases, jettisoned altogether. One such framework is *Persuratan Baru* (Genuine Literature) or PB which is informed by the concept of *taklif*, principally accountability to God through observation of the *syariah* or Islamic jurisprudence. *Persuratan Baru* re-orientates Malay creative and critical writings by challenging the primacy of the story as the lynchpin of fiction. In its place, PB prioritises knowledge as the main organising principle of narrative on the one hand, and stylisation of ideas, with discourse positioned as a crucial tool of articulation, as an integrated method of foregrounding ideas in creative terms, on the other.

Keywords

Persuratan Baru, *taklif*, stylisation of ideas, discourse, story, knowledge

Introduction

By the end of the fifteenth century, Islam, which came to Southeast Asia around the twelfth century, had firmly established itself in the region particularly in the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, and the northern coasts of Java. Its rich

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tradition of letters, solidly grounded in the Islamic creed of *tamhīd* or belief in the oneness of Allah (SWT), had a tremendous impact on local Malay literature, primarily, transforming it from an oral to a written tradition based on the Arabic script. Enriched and energised by the Islamic literary tradition, Malay literature flourished for more than 400 years, climaxing in the golden era of the seventeenth century. The renowned scholar, Vladimir Braginsky, suggests that “literary self-awareness,” as he terms it, galvanised Malay writers into adopting and adapting the rich Islamic literary heritage at their disposal, which they then made into their very own Malay-Islamic literary tradition (*System* 29-31). It was thus that Malay literature or *pekerjaan kalam* that persisted until the onset of British colonialism in the nineteenth century bore the indelible mark of this Malay-Islamic literary tradition.

British colonialism was to change the Malay literary landscape altogether and set in motion fundamental and far-reaching changes in Malay literature, not the least of which was the very definition and nature of Malay literature itself. In the context of contemporary Malay literature, dubbed ‘modern’ Malay literature, the Malay-Islamic tradition that had charted the Malay literary heritage for centuries is soon side-lined or jettisoned altogether, and Malay literature begins to take on a distinctly western hue. Faced with the grim prospect of having their Malay-Islamic heritage and identity misrepresented or, far worse, literally written off the page, Malay scholars and thinkers have sought to question the suitability, appropriateness, and worthiness of western literary theories, orientations, paradigms and ideologies, in particular the worldview that informs these western methodologies. One such attempt is *Persuratan Baru* (hereafter PB), the brainchild of the local scholar, writer, and critic Mohd. Affandi Hassan, which seeks to restore Malay literature to its Malay-Islamic literary foundation. This article seeks to elucidate PB and its construction as a theoretical and practical framework, explain some key western concepts that it dismantles and demystifies, and clarify the substitutes, informed by Islam and Malay culture, that it then puts in place. In so doing, it does not seek to exhaust the features, characteristics, or discourses that make up PB’s philosophical underpinnings or the methodological tools that it puts in place. Rather, aside from limiting its discussion to prose narrative, which is a dominant narrative form in Malay literature, it aims to focus on a few selected western concepts that are in general currency in Malay literature, considered mainstream and therefore functionally significant, by way of mapping the context and the challenges with which PB has to contend. It is in the context of these challenges that PB’s position as an alternative paradigm may be best viewed, understood, and appreciated.

Persuratan Baru: The Context and the Challenge

That western literary concepts and methodologies have a powerful hold on Malay creative and critical works is a fact that is hard to dispute. The processes that initiated, developed, and sustained this hold, all of which serve to make western literary concepts not only difficult to dislodge but also seen as highly desirable and prestigious, have been amply discussed (Ungku Maimunah, 2009, 2007, 1997, 1995). Suffice it to mention here that colonial scholars such as Wilkinson and Winstedt wrote the history of Malay literature, mapped its periodization, determined its genre categorisation, spelt out its characteristics, functions and objectives and laid down what could be termed as the rules and regulations of what constituted Malay literature. These then found their way into the education system right through to the university level, all of which local scholars then put into use and guarded jealously. In the last three decades, the government, through its agency Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, helped to strengthen the hold further when it introduced the prestigious *Anugerah Sastera Negara* or National Literary Award. This, and similar but less prestigious, awards such as *Hadiab Sastera Perdana Malaysia* (HSPM), *Hadiab Sastera Kumpulan Utusan ExxonMobil* (HSKU) and the like adopt western ideas, formulations and criteria for purposes of selection, evaluation, and recognition of creative and critical works, thereby entrenching further the western grip on Malay literature. In short, as Mohd. Affandi Hassan puts it, it would appear that Malay literature assiduously strives to be as close a carbon copy of western literature as possible.

When the colonial administrator R.J. Wilkinson in his 1903 writing conferred upon Abdullah Munsyi the title of father of modern Malay literature based on the latter's realistic autobiographical works *Hikayat Abdullah* [The Story of Abdullah] and *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* [The Story of Abdullah's Voyage], Malay literature was positioned to accept realism as both a viable aesthetic formula and an artistic style. As is common knowledge, the development of realism in Europe in the nineteenth century saw the bracketing of realism with the novel form; indeed the realistic novel went down in history as an important legacy of the twentieth century (Watt, 1981). Malay literature became a willing recipient of this legacy, and subsequent developments in Malay literature saw realism, in particular the realistic novel, established as a preferred narrative form. This narrative form ushered in several key literary concepts that actively colour Malay creative and critical works to this day. Among the more important ones, and pertinent to the discussion at hand, is realism, a product of an age that places premium on scientific thinking, extols sensual reality or material reality that can be grasped by the senses, at the same time that it does away with reality that is spiritually apprehended. This, in turn, makes valid as its foundational basis a worldview that gives little or no relevance to aspects of the transcendental and the metaphysical. Likewise, the same scientific thinking with which realism is allied argues for detailed documentation as a viable

methodology, thereby making minute and explicit reporting an aesthetic necessity. Concomitant with this, realism prioritises the ugly and sordid aspects of life as a preferred thematic preoccupation (Morris 3). The same preoccupation with the ugly and the sordid finds favour not only among general Malay novelists but also among national laureates who champion it and whose works become models that are emulated. A quick run through the reports of the National Laureate Award would reveal similar partiality among judges (Ungku Maimunah, 2009; Mohd Affandi, Ungku Maimunah and Mohd. Zariat, 2008).

Alongside such preoccupations is the prioritisation of the story in the structuring of a prose narrative. In the context of “modern” Malay literature, E.M. Foster’s *Aspects of the Novel*, which became a general reference for both Malay creative writers and critics, insists that “the basis of a novel is a story, and a story is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence” (37-38). This emphatic assertion of the primacy of the story finds a faithful echo in the equally emphatic statement of the National Laureate S. Othman Kelantan some 40 years later who maintains that “an author who wishes to produce works of knowledge should rightly pen knowledge books and not literature” (Salbiah Ani, 2002).

Recognised and approved by the country’s highest award-giving body, story-making as a crucial prerequisite to writing a novel thus becomes solidly ensconced in ‘modern’ Malay literary convention. It is interesting to note that the national laureate S. Othman Kelantan pits story-making against knowledge or ideas in an either-or form. In short, story-making should take precedence over and above knowledge, which must necessarily take a secondary role. This fact is reinforced when the story is made synonymous with the message. In short, a reader needs to read a story until its conclusion before its message becomes evident, thereby making the story not only the principal focus of literary fiction but also the agent of its meaning-making. Further, as necessary complements to such demands, novel writing thus entails deploying all narrative elements such as plot, theme, setting, character/s and the like to structure a story, which is hailed as its primary function and ultimate objective. This, in turn, calls for placing the narrative space of a novel at the disposal of the story and its construction, as opposed to ideas and their discourse. The partiality for story also lends credence to accepting entertainment as a legitimate end of the creative endeavour. Indeed, in some cases entertainment would appear to be the ultimate objective of creative works. In the context of Malaysia, for example, demand for entertainment via prose fiction has made popular novels an enormously viable economic enterprise that is profitable for both writers and publishers.

With reference to critical writings, the 1980s saw the widespread and pervasive use of what has come to be known as the theme-structure formula, which subsequently became the standard convention for Malay literary criticism,

one that shapes it to this day, albeit in different guises. By and large, this formula, which, in truth, is formalism at its so-called best, prioritises literary devices and their use at the expense of content. The experiment with new techniques and the conscious attempt to be different, with the implied commendation of originality, is touted as a hallmark of great literature.

Since the last decade or so, Malay literary criticism has shown a clear and decided penchant for postmodern theories as tools to unpack local creative works and to pronounce judgements on their literary worthiness. As recently as 2009, the National Laureate Award report includes a postmodernist quote in its introduction by way of framing, reinforcing and authenticating the final judgement so arrived at (*Laporan* 6). Turning to women scholars, feminist criticism and feminist literary theories become a hot favourite, a choice that duly receives endorsement and acknowledgement, as exemplified by Norhayati's thesis-turned-book, *Puitika Sastera Wanita Indonesia dan Malaysia: Satu Bacaan Ginokritik* that won the Malaysian Principal Literary Award 2012 and The Academic Book Category Award the following year. The book, which faithfully applies Elaine Showalter's gynocritical tools to selected Malay and Indonesian novels, enthuses in glowing terms what it deems the women novelists' commendable writing styles as exemplified specifically in the explicit and detailed portrayals of sexual longings, desires and encounters. Thus, Norhayati is able to pronounce confidently that some of the selected novels, deemed pornographic or pulp fiction by both the Indonesian and Malaysian literary worlds, a point with which Norhayati concurs, are "special" (101) precisely because they address and recount with "honesty, boldness and courage" (111-12) and in all its intimate details the sensitive subject of sexual permissiveness. Such creative works and literary criticisms uphold the postmodernist insistence on the situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, as well as its disavowal of universality, truth, reason, or stability. Truth, as postmodernism would insist, is a social construct, a premise that celebrates denial of the transcendent and the metaphysical. It would appear that this pointed rejection of the spiritual and the transcendent raises neither concern nor alarm among Malay writers and critics, almost all of whom are Muslims. They argue that they confine their use of postmodernist theories and constructs to applying postmodernist methodological devices only rather than using, let alone imbibing, their philosophical content and import. That such a use nonetheless leads to endorsing pornographic novels and pulp fiction, for example, is legitimate and valid because, they claim, it is no more than an academic exercise in viewing local works through a postmodernist lens. In other words, use of postmodernism does not breach the Islamic creed of *tawhīd* or belief in the One and Only Almighty God. In sum, this position insists that Western methodologies and the worldview that informs them are thus not incompatible with Malay literary practices.

Persuratan Baru: An Alternative Paradigm

The above are some of the concepts and practices that inundate Malay creative and critical works. In formulating his theory, Mohd. Affandi Hassan is keenly aware that some of the concepts are secular in nature, contradict Islamic creeds and precepts, undermine Malay cultural values, and thus augment Malay literature's severance from its Malay-Islamic anchor. He thus sees a crying need to bring back into the Malay literary fold the strong Islamic foundation that once informed and stimulated the literary vigour of the seventeenth century. Through PB, he proposes a theoretical framework that professes Islam as its central cohesive source of truth, knowledge, meaning, and stability, at the same time as it celebrates Malay specificities, which it articulates within the parameters that Islam permits. It is significant that in translating PB into English Mohd. Affandi Hassan ignores its literal translation of "new letters" in favour of the more meaningfully significant "genuine literature." It is equally interesting to note that Abu Hassan Ali al-Nadwi, President of the League of Islamic Literature, 1984, with whose work Mohd. Affandi Hassan is not acquainted, independently proposes two categories of literature. The first is *al-adab al-ṣināʿī*, translated into English as "contrived literature," which is characterised by artificiality, superficiality, lack of ideas, and which preoccupies itself with word play for its own sake. The second category, whose characteristics are opposite to those of the first, is *al-adab al-tabʿī*, which has been rendered into English as "genuine literature."

As a theoretical framework for both creative and critical writings, Mohd. Affandi Hassan, in his seminal book significantly titled *Pendidikan Estetika daripada Pendekatan Tauhid* (1992) [The pedagogy of aesthetics from the approach of *tauhid* (the unity of God)], sets out to identify the weaknesses that beset Malay literature, to offer workable solutions that can rectify those weaknesses, and to provide practical methodological tools that can help Malay writers produce Malay-Islamic literary works (and critical writings) reminiscent of the intellectually rich and aesthetically fine works of old. To demonstrate the workability of his PB framework, Mohd. Affandi Hassan has produced several anthologies of short stories, the latest being *Balai Maqamat* (2014), and two novels, *Aligupit* (1993) and *Pujangga Melayu* (1997), the latter a tetralogy of four novels about a Malay philosopher-author. He has written extensively on Malay literature, a fact borne out by his regular, often lengthy, and academically critical postings on his blog <http://www.pbarublogspot.com>.

Right from the outset Mohd. Affandi Hassan makes clear that *adab* or propriety underpins the discourse on the pedagogy of aesthetics from the perspective of *tauhid*. al-Attas elaborates that *adab* refers to "the *recognition* and *acknowledgement* of the right and proper place, station, and condition in life," and whose observance leads to justice (*Islam, Secularism* 99, emphasis in original). Three main aspects relevant to the discourse on the pedagogy of aesthetics are

the spiritual, the physical and the intellect or reason. Spiritually, *adab* refers to the discharging of the duties of servant of Allah (SWT) and vicegerent on earth that man undertakes in accordance with Islamic injunctions, in order to attain piety and His favour. Physically, *adab* refers to a way of life at the individual and societal levels that respects discipline, integrity, decorum, and harmonious cooperation. From the standpoint of intellect, *adab* refers to the proper use of the intellect to know God. Sustained by the imperatives of *adab*, the pedagogy of aesthetics would necessarily focus on the *significance* of literature to both man and society that value and practise *adab*.

PB is a comprehensive and systematic framework that describes in clear terms both its philosophical and practical aspects. With reference to its philosophical basis, Mohd. Affandi Hassan sets in place three major concepts that are interrelated within a total system. These concepts are the nature of man, the nature of knowledge and undertaking or action, and the nature and function of literature. With regard to the first concept, the nature of man, Mohd. Affandi Hassan refers to man as God's perfect creation over and above all other creations, all of which are subservient to him. More importantly, God favours him with special attributes and abilities the most important being *ʿaql* or intelligence. Concomitant with this, al-Attas, from whom Mohd. Affandi Hassan draws some of his ideas, contends that the gift of life from God places man in a state of indebtedness to his Creator, a debt whose onus of repayment rests solely on man (*Islam, Secularism*). Since man owns nothing – God being the possessor of everything – he has only himself with which to settle this debt. Thus, man is instinctively predisposed towards wanting to understand, glorify, and seek God's pleasure, who is his Creator, Provider, and Sustainer. Further, this indebtedness precedes his primordial covenant with God, contracted in the realm of the souls before he was born and witnessed by all human beings, to worship none other than Allah (SWT) or *tawḥīd*, which is the essence of Islam. The belief in *tawḥīd*, as well as his indebtedness, necessarily demand of man the subjugation of his will to that of Allah (SWT) in a commitment of *total* submission. Hence, the name of the religion is *Islam*, which means *submission*. Thus, it is incumbent upon man to live his life in compliance with God's Revealed Law, Commandments, and Injunctions, and within the parameters that He has set down, as well as in accordance with the Traditions of Prophet Mohammed (SAW), God's beloved Messenger, and Servant. He is obliged to do so because it is his only option to return to his Creator in the pure form in which he was created, which is his *fiṭrah* or natural disposition. Mohd. Affandi Hassan reiterates that, in truth, this is truly the *ultimate* reason for the creation of man, which is none other than to worship God and to do His bidding. To this end, Islam lays down for man his two responsibilities as servant of Allah (SWT) and as vicegerent on earth, which demand of him to enjoin good and discourage evil. This belief in *tawḥīd* and the resultant religious obligations and

duties that follow submission to this belief, as elaborated below, constitute the Islamic *taṣammur* or worldview.

With his special attributes, moral strength and intelligence man is thus equipped with the freedom to make his choices accordingly. He is at liberty to choose to follow his *fiṭrah*, as is his wont, or to follow Satan who has vowed to lead him astray until the end of time. The responsibilities and consequences of his choice are his and his alone. He can choose to avail himself of the world around him and make it prosper for the benefit of humankind, thus rendering himself a good human being who is mindful and appreciative of God's gift of this world. At the same time, he is free to assiduously prepare for the more important final destination, the Hereafter, when he meets his Maker. This choice would lead him to victory or *al-falāḥ* in this world and the Hereafter. Indeed, such deeds or actions, undertaken in compliance with God's Revealed Laws, become an act of devotion or *ʿibādah*, and for which he would be rewarded accordingly. However, to choose to act without due regard to God's Laws is to render whatever he does an act not of *ʿibādah* but one of futility, which would cause destruction (*fasād*) and earn God's wrath in both this world and the next. His choices and the consequences thereof are clear and unambiguous, and therein lies his freedom, which is to live in consonance with, rather than against, his *fiṭrah*, and be requited for it. This, then, is the spiritual *adab* to which Mohd. Affandi Hassan refers.

Notwithstanding his manifest station in life as servant and vicegerent with its attendant responsibilities, man is forgetful, as made clear by the word *insān* (human being) from *nisyān* or forgetfulness. Mohd. Affandi Hassan draws attention to the Qur'anic exhortation for man to think and be mindful of his very humble origin, created from a man's sperm (ignoble liquid) that is ejected through a lowly passage and subsequently delivered into this world through a woman's equally lowly passage. Heedless of this humble origin, man becomes an overbearingly arrogant creature that dares defy and scorn the very Creator who gives him existence, thereby turning on its head the primordial covenant that positions him as servant of Allah (SWT). Thus his nomenclature, *insān*, serves as a constant reminder of his innate characteristic.

Tawḥīd (Unity of God), *fiṭrah* (natural disposition), *Islām* (submission), *ʿibādah* (act of devotion), *al-falāḥ* (victory), *fasād* (destruction), *insān/nisyān* (forgetfulness) and Islamic *taṣammur* (Islamic worldview) are some of the essential principles that constitute PB's configuration of the nature of man. It provides a succinct yet comprehensive and coherent understanding of man's place in the scheme of God's creations, his potentials, strengths and weaknesses; in short, his humanness. For purposes of easy comprehension and application of PB as a methodological framework, Mohd. Affandi Hassan synthesises these principles into the fundamental and meaningful concept of *taklīf*. Shah Wali Allah, whose writings influence Mohd. Affandi Hassan, defines

taklif as “imposition of religious duties” (238), a definition that underlines in no uncertain terms man’s unequivocal responsibility and accountability to his Creator for everything that he does, including his writings. Elsewhere in the same writing Shah Wali Allah further explains that *taklif* is indeed a crucial part of the primordial covenant: “He [God] gave them the capacity to be charged with religious duties [*taklif*] and He created in them knowledge of good and humbleness before Him. This is the basis of the covenant infused in their original nature [in the realm of souls], so that they will be held accountable according to it...” (199). *Taklif* thus becomes for man a logical extension of his God-given attributes of intelligence and freedom to make choices, so that his acts of devotion or futility may be judged, rewarded, or punished accordingly and justly. For Mohd. Affandi Hassan, this unflinching certainty and absoluteness that underlies the concept of *taklif* make it the most proper foundation for a framework based on Islam that PB is.

Against the backdrop of *taklif* as PB’s bedrock, Mohd. Affandi Hassan clarifies the second concept of the nature of knowledge and actions or undertakings. The primacy of knowledge in Islam is well known. al-Attas for example, points out that in the Holy Qur’an there are more than eight hundred references to knowledge (*al-ilm*, *mārifah*, *ilm*) (*Islam, Secularism* 73). Indeed, much has been written about this fact with cogent arguments vouching for its truth, not the least of which is the significance of *iqra’* or ‘read’ as the first word that God revealed to Prophet Mohammed (SAW) via the archangel Gabriel (A.S). *Iqra’*, a verb, is further qualified by the imperative that it be undertaken in the name of the Lord and no other, as stated in the Holy Qur’an (96:1), “Proclaim! (or Read!) In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created....” (A. Yusuf Ali 1761). In his conceptualisation of the nature of knowledge, Mohd. Affandi Hassan emphasises this very point, namely that *true* knowledge must necessarily inform decisions and judgements made. Mohd. Affandi Hassan refers to the Qur’anic verse (17:36) that cautions, “and pursue not that of which thou hast no knowledge” (A. Yusuf Ali 704), and the gravity of taking positions for which no certainty of true knowledge exists. Mohd. Affandi Hassan points to al-Ghazali’s clarification of true knowledge and the resultant conviction that it draws forth. True knowledge refers to the clarity that prevails, resulting in the total absence of doubt such that in the face of inexplicable magic such as a staff being transformed into a snake, reminiscent of Prophet Musa (A.S) confronting the Pharaoh’s magicians, the conviction remains unshakeable with no iota of doubt tainting it. Nothing less than this absolute certitude, al-Ghazali reiterates, is conviction. This quality of conviction, Mohd. Affandi Hassan argues, can only come from knowledge informed by faith or *īmān* in God.

According to Mohd. Affandi Hassan, there are three sources of knowledge, and they are revelation, intelligence, and experience. Allah (SWT)

or revelation is the only true and definitive source of knowledge, which the Qur'an affirms in verse 2:31. On the other hand, the two other sources require spiritual guidance before they can produce true knowledge. It is therefore crucial at the outset to distinguish between what Mohd. Affandi Hassan calls knowledge and sciences. True knowledge comes from faith while sciences come from intelligence and experience, which thus result in their different characteristics. Man *gains* true knowledge because God, in His infinite mercy, gives it to him through His Prophets and Messengers. However, man *acquires* sciences, the result of his own search for them. The distinction between the two presupposes a hierarchy of knowledge, which is a crucial point in understanding the nature of knowledge in Islam. As God's gift, true knowledge ranks highest in the hierarchy of knowledge, and its attainment, as Mohd. Affandi Hassan points out, necessitates fulfilling an antecedent condition namely spiritual commitment to His Injunctions and rigorous and diligent application of intelligence. Mohd. Affandi Hassan refers to al-Attas who epistemologically defines knowledge as "the arrival in the soul of the *meaning* of a thing, or the arrival by the soul at the *meaning* of a thing" (*Islam, Secularism* 154). Necessarily tempered by spiritual experiences, the concept of knowledge is thus different from that of sciences. Al-Attas puts it simply, "... for Islam... knowledge includes faith and true belief (*imān*)" (*Islam, Secularism* 80). Concomitant with this, the purpose of seeking true knowledge is none other than to know God, which is clearly distinct from that of sciences. Mohd. Affandi Hassan explains that true knowledge leads to knowing, understanding, *and* acknowledging God. Sciences, on the other hand, merely acquaint man with the object of his search without the benefit of felt understanding and the acknowledging (of God) that inevitably follows.

In light of the hierarchy of knowledge, the engagement of the spiritual dimension entailed in its pursuit, the purpose for which it is sought, and the certainty it demands and inspires, *adab* is thus crucial in ensuring that the imperatives of knowledge receive due respect and are not trifled with. Failure to recognise and acknowledge the right and proper place of knowledge, or absence of *adab*, *necessarily* leads to what al-Attas calls confusion in knowledge, whose consequences are dire (*Islam, Secularism* 80). This is because true knowledge is pivotal to the execution of action or undertaking (*ʿamal*), as al-Attas further elaborates, "Either one by itself is *batil* [falsehood], for in Islam there is no worthwhile knowledge without action accompanying it, nor worthwhile action without knowledge guiding it" (*Concept* 23). In short, knowledge and action must work in tandem, and this is precisely the reason Mohd. Affandi Hassan brackets the two as a sub-topic in its own right. Islam insists that knowledge inform action in order to raise the station of the latter to that of an act of devotion. The reverse, to undertake an action without guidance of true knowledge, is *kebusran* or an act of futility, which leads to *fasād* or destruction.

Clearly, the Islamic concept of knowledge is in sharp contrast to the western perspective that upholds knowledge, truth, and meaning as social constructs. As constructs, they are subject to and dependent upon man-made contingencies. Where Islam places faith in God as the source of knowledge and final arbiter of what is certain, valid and authoritative, the western position champions absence of certainty and authority. When applied to literature, this position lends support, for example, to the much celebrated postmodernist view that meaning is never stable, and that the reader can engage with the text in hand in any way he deems fit because the author is dead, as Barthes would insist. Mohd. Affandi Hassan sees this same trend consolidated in mainstream Malay literary criticism, whose zeal, for example, doggedly maintains that pornography is an honest and special work that merits recognition. For Mohd. Affandi Hassan, such a scenario is a manifest sign of loss of *adab*, whose rectification lies in the correct knowledge of literature and its attendant correct *amal* or production.

PB's third concept addresses the question of the nature and function of literature. In so doing, Mohd. Affandi Hassan simultaneously takes to task several principles that inform western literature, thereby showing up in clear terms the glaring difference between the respective Islamic and western perspectives. In Islam, for example, use of the pen is associated with knowledge whose purpose, as seen above, is to know Allah (SWT) and to be able to read His signs. Knowledge is to enable man to know his station in God's overall scheme of things, which is as servant and vicegerent, and to avoid overstepping or transgressing it so that he may achieve the condition of justice. The western literary position, however, trades off the use of the pen, with its attendant meaning of knowledge, for creativity, which, in its turn, has the attendant meaning of complete autonomy. This autonomy invests a writer with the authority to do what he pleases, thereby making subjectivity a cornerstone of western literary activity. This subjectivity facilitates fictionality as a preferred basis of western literary composition. Grounded in imagination, pretence or that which is invented, fictionality makes necessary the use of mimesis to reproduce nature or human behaviour in an imitative representational form. At the same time, mimesis necessarily limits the scope of imitation to that of material reality only.

In contrast to these assumptions, Islam is clear on the fact that man is incapable of copying or imitating God's creations. He must instead use knowledge to understand, interpret, and draw benefit from them. Herein lies the difference between the two stances. Whereas the west allows free reign to subjectivity and the imagination, Islam insists upon the use of the intellect to seek and use knowledge within the parameters of *adab* or propriety. Invested with subjectivity and autonomy, literary activities for western writers serve to gratify emotions and desires, at the same time that they facilitate justifying

entertainment as their proper purpose for being. For Muslim writers, however, the Islamic premise of *adab* transforms a literary undertaking into an act of devotion whose purpose is to serve Allah (SWT). The Qur'an is very clear on this matter when it applauds those writers for whom literature is a manifest sign of piety, and denounces those for whom it is no more than a site for empty rhetoric and word play. The verse Shu'arā' (26:224-226) makes this distinction very clearly:

And the Poets, –
It is those straying in Evil,
Who follow them:

Seest thou not that they
Wander distracted in every
Valley? –

And that they say
What they practise not? –

Except those who believe,
Work righteousness, engage much
In the remembrance of God,
And defend themselves only after
They are unjustly attacked (A. Yusuf Ali 973)

In light of the demands of *adab* and all that it entails, Islamic literature necessarily calls for celebrating the good and the beautiful as a manifest sign of God's truth and the devotion that it calls into being. The Qur'an refers to it as *kalimah tayyibah* or "goodly words" (14:24-25) and likens it to a strong tree with roots solidly anchored in the ground and branches stretched heavenwards, and that it bears fruit when He wills it (A. Yusuf Ali 626). On the other hand, an evil Word is like that of a rotten tree which is uprooted from the earth and is unable to stand firm. Drawing significance from this parable, Mohd. Affandi Hassan synthesises genuine literature as beautiful and meaningful [*indah dan bermakna* in the Malay original]. It is meaningful because its content is true; it is beautiful because its language is aesthetically pleasing and aptly structured to render effectively the full import and significance of the content. It makes invalid the use of techniques for their own sake, often undertaken in the mistaken quest for originality and difference, as some western paradigms would insist. Its construction demands of the writer his finest creativity in order to meet the two stringent objectives of truth and beauty. In short, a Muslim writer tempers his creativity with *adab* and avoids the practice of unleashing with

abandon what a creative writer perchance *feels* to be true and beautiful. Herein lies the difference between rhetoric and style.

PB's philosophical posturing makes necessary some significant reinterpretation of key literary concepts and their use in practical terms. Mohd. Affandi Hassan argues that the Qur'an does not tell stories for their own sake, but rather to give glad tidings or warnings, as necessary. In short, stories are a means to the higher purpose of edification. Concomitant with this, Mohd. Affandi Hassan turns on its head the position and purpose of story in Malay literature when he not only makes a clear distinction between story and knowledge but also, more importantly, allows knowledge to take precedence over story, which he relegates to the position of a vehicle for knowledge. The primacy of knowledge calls for a very different orientation to literary writing and criticism. To this end, Mohd. Affandi Hassan introduces a new literary concept for practical use, which is discourse or *wacana*. Spurned previously as suitable only for academic writing, discourse now takes pride of place as the main organising principle of literary writing, displacing story making. Discourse calls into play the use of argument, substantiation, collaboration, explanation, commentary, debate and the like as the wherewithal of genuine literature, which prioritises knowledge. The implication of this reorientation is, among others, to shift the axis for both creative and critical writings to content, as opposed to literary devices used or the story recounted, both of which are now deployed to facilitate discourse. Further, consonant with the idea of hierarchy of knowledge, true knowledge, as opposed to the sordid aspects of life that realism favours, becomes a preferred preoccupation. This, in turn, extends the reach of content beyond that of material reality.

Besides reinterpreting the concept of story, PB also advances a new writing style that Mohd. Affandi Hassan fashions after Ismail Faruqi's "stylization of ideas" (39), choosing to retain the English expression in his writings, which are in Malay. Subsequently, Mohd. Affandi Hassan tentatively renders the English expression into Malay as *siratan makna*, which is neither a word-to-word translation nor a literal one of the English original. It would appear that the word "stylization" rings a familiar bell reminiscent of the Japanese *kabuki* that is famous for its highly *stylised* movements. Thus, in describing PB's stylisation of ideas, some local critics, for example, are apt to point to metaphors, similes, and such-like devices that are elaborate, exaggerated and pretentious, which are often used as freestanding narrative entities with little or no perceived connection with the knowledge-content of the narrative or its overall development. These critics see such a use of narrative devices as indicative of PB's *stylisation of ideas*. In the context of PB, such a use would come under the rubric of rhetoric of fiction, the very narrative practices that PB wishes to supplant. Mohd. Affandi Hassan's *siratan makna* (to weave in the intended meaning), particularly the word *sirat* (weave), recalls the fine and

highly skilled Malay art of weaving (*sirat*) or embedding motifs and patterns into woven products such as fabrics or mats. Thus, in PB-based creative works ideas are woven skilfully into the narrative without being self-referentially ostentatious or prominent, thereby harmoniously bonding ideas and beauty. In short, stylisation of ideas is a specific and integrated *method* of writing that prioritises ideas, which are carefully and finely embroidered into the narrative as a beautifully accomplished style. In such a disciplined craft, PB duly avoids play on words, rhetoric, exaggerated and extraneous extrapolation of narrative devices, and the like. It also makes redundant such notions as art for art's sake and defamiliarisation, as well as the often consuming formalist preoccupation with literary devices.

Further, in the context of “modern” Malay literature with its almost watertight demarcation into the traditional and the “modern,” techniques associated with traditional Malay literature such as *syair*, *pantun* and *markah* (letters) are deemed inappropriate for “modern” Malay literature, thus depriving contemporary Malay literature of its rich heritage of old. Likewise, the heavy reliance on Forster's definition of story renders contemporary Malay literature stiff, largely tied to Freytag's pyramid, and very conscious of what shape a novel ought to take. PB's stylisation of ideas obviates the necessity of a prescriptive form, and liberates contemporary Malay literature to avail itself of any manner of expression as long as it gives due priority to discourse and ideas and is cognizant of *adab*. The rich and fine *syair* and *pantun*, for example, can once again grace and enrich contemporary Malay literature as they did before. Further, contrary to the charge that PB pays scant attention to form, which is touted as its weakness, the very absence of a prescriptive form is, in truth, its strength, for it challenges a writer's creativity to fashion a style that can suitably and beautifully foreground his ideas to advantage.

Based on PB's view of what constitutes literature and its function, Mohd. Affandi Hassan advances three categories of writing in an ascending level of worthiness and beauty. They are *karya persuratan* or works of letters that prioritise true knowledge and ideas, and they occupy the top position in the hierarchy. These are followed by *karya sastra* or works of literature that prioritise the story, subjectivity and writers' freedom to do what they please, while at the bottom of the rung is *karya picisan* or pulp fiction that busies itself with the erotic, pornographic and similar preoccupations that foreground carnal appetites. These categories are not confined to creative writings only but are also applicable to critical writings, with *picisan* demonstrating confusion of knowledge, superficial argument, and bombastic rhetoric.

Whilst the Malay literary scene may boast several local methodologies, all of which claim to ensure fair and correct reading of Malay texts, PB stands as the only framework that addresses both philosophical underpinnings as well as the analytical tools necessary for practical usage. Further, it identifies problems

that beset Malay literature and addresses them in terms of both the local Malay context as well as that of the larger Islamic frame of reference, in line with the Islamic *taṣawwūr* that informed Malay written literature from its beginning until it adopted western constructs and paradigms. In short, it is a systematic and holistic framework that can hold its own as well as serve as a counter discourse to western theories, models, and assumptions.

In appreciating PB's position as a local framework that takes to task western theories, orientations and models, it comes as no surprise that it is sometimes mistaken for yet *another* post-colonial reading and writing strategy. PB, some critics argue, comes across as a project to jettison once and for all the colonial legacy that contemporary Malay literary writers choose to sustain and perpetuate at the expense of their very own heritage. PB, the critics continue, thus takes upon itself to bring to centre stage the Malay-Islamic heritage that the colonial literary tradition has pushed to the periphery and rendered mute, an order of business that is after post-colonialism's own heart. Against this claim, PB's presence must be viewed and understood from its crucial philosophical premise of *tawḥīd* or the unity of Allah (SWT). This is PB's stand *irrespective* of the provenance of the literary legacy that it chooses to debunk or problematise. That the theories and models are of colonial origin is a happenstance that historical circumstances brought into being; however, as far as PB is concerned, its stated objective, which is clear for all to see, is to bring back to Malay literature the Islamic *taṣawwūr* from which it has strayed. This philosophical basis shapes and colours PB's purpose, aims, and goals, which are clearly in contrast to the secular world-view that post-colonialism celebrates. Concomitant with this, it is also important to note that PB is not intransigent to other models or orientations; however, whilst it does not close its doors to other options, the latter must be found suitable rather than antagonistic to Islam before they may be absorbed into the Malay literary repertoire. In this sense, then, PB clearly does not fit in the mould of a post-colonial agenda.

Concluding Remarks

Western domination of the Malay literary scene especially in terms of theories and paradigms used causes grave concerns among local scholars who see their Malay-Islamic heritage marginalised and local works interpreted and evaluated according to an alien frame of reference. Initiatives towards arresting this very disturbing trend set in motion the making of several local methodological frameworks with varying degrees of success as well as failure. PB stands apart as the only framework that is systematic and comprehensive, and whose analytical tools are specifically fashioned to help realise the demands of its philosophical underpinnings. The fundamental axis of *tawḥīd*, crystallised in the concept of *taklīf*, finds its expression in *adab* or propriety in both imputing true knowledge as the most appropriate literary content, on the one hand, and the

beautiful style by which it is clothed, on the other. Discourse, stylisation of ideas, hierarchy of works, and the attendant three categories of letters, literature, and pulp writings thus take on the significance of tools that are instrumental in executing work that is not just a literary piece but also one that is at the same time an act of piety and devotion. This effectively rules out PB as just *another* post-colonial reading and writing strategy or some similar literary agenda. Rather, and more importantly, it is a means by which an author affirms himself in creative terms as His servant and vicegerent on earth.

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