

## The Synonymy of the Story and the Message in Abdullah Hussain's Novel *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*

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### Abstract

When Abdullah Hussain's novel *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*, which won a consolation prize in an Islamic novel-writing competition in 1983, first met its reading public in the same year, there was no home-grown analytical framework, one dedicated to the Islamic worldview, to evaluate its literary merit and worthiness as an Islamic novel. But now there is the recently and locally-produced *Persuratan Baru* which, in consonant with Islamic precepts, prioritises true knowledge, and distinguishes between discourse and story, the former to articulate knowledge and the latter to develop and disseminate the knowledge so articulated. It also introduces, in ascending order of literary worthiness, the three categories of *persuratan*, *sastera* and *picisan* with *persuratan* and *picisan* occupying the highest and lowest strata respectively. With *Persuratan Baru* as its critical tool, the article examines the novel's objective, and the extent to and manner in which the objective realised has been put to the service of disseminating true knowledge. The article argues that *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* dismisses discourse as irrelevant, and presents the story and the message or knowledge as synonymous entities. In so doing, the novel prevails as a work of *sastera* for which story-making and the story serve as its main literary preoccupation.

### Keywords

*Persuratan Baru*, knowledge, story, discourse, *sastera*, main organising-principle

### Introduction

The novel *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*, by the National Laureate Abdullah Hussain, was published in 1983.<sup>2</sup> The Malay title is a phrase from the Qur'anic verse Al Baqarah, line 257 which, in the novel, serves as a kind of opening salutation, not quite part of the narrative proper but nonetheless prominently included in the text, albeit separated from the narrative by technical details of its publication.

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<sup>2</sup> It was translated by Fadillah Merican into English in 2009 as *Into the Light*.

That the author has chosen this Qur'anic phrase as the title of his novel is not to be wondered at. The novel was a product of a particular context – an Islamic novel-writing competition held in 1981 by the Islamic Council of Trengganu, a state which, besides Kelantan, is often associated with its close adherence to the tenets of Islam. As with competitions, rules and conditions for participation were spelt out, not the least of which was the celebration of Islam. Aside from this specific context, the 1980s, the decade in which the novel was written and published, is often regarded as the era of Islamic Literature (Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, “Sastera Islam”) which saw, among other things, the formulation of the Islamic literature discourse. Concomitant with this, Shahnnon Ahmad's definition of Islamic literature as creative works “produced in the name of Allah and for the benefit of humankind” (Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, “Sastera Islam” 240) held sway for quite some time and, widely accepted by the Malay literary public, thus served to colour many a creative work produced during the period. The fact that *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* won but a consolation prize did not in the least diminish its value in the eyes of its author for whom the writing of the novel, as admitted by Abdullah Hussain himself, earned him a far bigger and meaningful prize, namely that of faith (*iman*) (Abdullah Hussain, 1983, back jacket).

It is against this background that *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* must be viewed and understood. *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* was written with a well mapped-out objective, namely the celebration of Islam, an objective consciously spelt out and understood by all. It is thus not unreasonable to assume that *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* would bear the trademarks of what an Islamic literature is or ought to be, as it was understood by Abdullah Hussain and the Malay literary public at large. When *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* first met its audience in 1983, there was in the Malay literary world no home-grown analytical framework readily available to evaluate its worthiness as a creative piece of Islamic literature, and one that won a competition. The Malay literary world feels that Western literary theories, which have dominated and significantly coloured Malay literature and literary criticism for decades before and after independence, cannot possibly do justice to Malay literature which is the product of a different socio-religious context. Indeed, Western critical theories are often seen as at odds with Islam. This anomaly has spurred the growth of local critical methodologies, particularly in the last decade or two, among which *Persuratan Baru*, advanced by the creative writer, critic and scholar Mohd. Affandi Hassan, has distinguished itself as the most comprehensive and systematic critical framework since it is cognisant and sensitive not only to local cultural values and literary tradition, but more importantly, to the parameters and creative possibilities that Islam offers. And it is this *Persuratan Baru* that this article has availed itself as its analytical framework.

### Persuratan Baru as an Analytical Framework

As the only home-grown critical tool that has successfully gathered an impressive corpus of works, be they on Persuratan Baru itself as a theoretical and practical tool of analysis or on practical analyses of literary works based on Persuratan Baru as a workable critical tool, Persuratan Baru has grown in strength compared to other locally-produced “theories” whose existence has been either short-lived, untested, or no more than an academic exercise with no practical application to show for its workability.

Prior to the emergence of Persuratan Baru in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a critical tool to be reckoned with, the renowned scholar V.I. Braginsky (1993) mapped the system of classical Malay literature as being made up of three spheres in ascending order of importance, literary merit and worthiness. The highest is that of spiritual perfection, followed by the sphere of benefit, with the sphere of beauty at the bottom rank. The sphere of beauty is characterised by embellishments and preoccupation with making a story, whilst that of benefit is more concerned with disseminating true knowledge using the story as a vehicle for the purpose of dissemination. The sphere of spiritual perfection embraces religious and mystical works that target the “spiritual heart” to prepare it for the illumination that Allah (SWT) bestows.

Not unlike Braginsky’s categorisation which established a hierarchy of Malay writings, Mohd. Affandi Hassan likewise sees the need to organise Malay literature into recognisable categories based on an ascending order of literary merit and worthiness with *karya persuratan* occupying the topmost position followed by *karya sastra*, with *karya picisan/erotik/popular* at the bottom rung of the ladder. This categorisation is part of Persuratan Baru’s holistic approach to both production of literature and its criticism. In regard to this, much has been written on Persuratan Baru, ranging from its philosophical underpinnings to its operational procedures.<sup>3</sup> For the purpose at hand, suffice it to note a few salient points, especially as they pertain to this study’s stated objective of exploring the synonymy of the message and the story in Abdullah Hussain’s novel *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*.

Persuratan Baru is premised on the Islamic concept of *taklif* or responsibility and accountability towards God the Almighty, and this constitutes the basis upon which Persuratan Baru elaborates all its pronouncements. It draws attention to three crucial aspects that govern both the literary activity of creative production and evaluation: the nature of man, the nature of knowledge and action, and the nature and function of literature. The nature of man makes it incumbent upon him to worship none other than Him, to abide by His commands and to avoid His prohibitions, a trust and responsibility that earn

<sup>3</sup> See Mohd. Affandi Hassan 1992, 2010; Mohd. Affandi Hassan et al 2008; Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir 2007, 2009, and Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, 2010, 2011.

him the uniquely simultaneous status of God's servant as well as a vicegerent on earth. The nature of knowledge and action, the second aspect of the Persuratan Baru triangulation, refers to revealed knowledge as true knowledge that alone makes possible for man to know his Creator; on the reverse, knowledge that does not lead man to know his Creator is thus not true knowledge. Closely related to this is man's action which, based on true knowledge, becomes an *ibadah* or religious observance and devotion, whilst that which does not, renders it futile. Thus literary activity as man's action must necessarily be informed by true knowledge, which he, as a responsible writer, then assumes as his bounden duty to disseminate. This is consonant with the Qur'anic injunction that calls for the pen (*Qalam*) to be utilised for purposes of disseminating true knowledge. Literature that ignores or fails to convey true knowledge has thus shirked its responsibility. Rahmah sums up this concern succinctly:

In Islam, it is the purpose of literature to convey true knowledge... literature functions as an effective means to convey knowledge. Thus, knowledge occupies the exalted position... literature that is devoid of knowledge renders it of little use to society... literary aesthetics devoid of knowledge is similarly useless. ("Sejarah Tradisi Sastra Arab dan Islam" 77-78)

As part of its operational procedure, Persuratan Baru makes a distinction between the story and knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Attendant to this, Persuratan Baru accords a higher position to knowledge because, besides its exalted position in Islam, it has the potential to draw forth arguments, ideas, thoughts and viewpoints, all of which call for engaging the reader intellectually as opposed to titillating his senses. These intellectual pursuits are then articulated through a new concept that Mohd. Affandi Hassan introduces, namely *wacana* or discourse. It is important to emphasise that "discourse" does not refer to information that is tossed into a story, which then sticks out as a foreign addition because it is neither relevant to the story nor integrated into it. This pseudo-intellectual literary practice is no more than an attempt to pass off the creative piece as a "novel of ideas" or an "intellectual novel" – labels that are coveted. Persuratan Baru defines "discourse" as information that has gone through the rigour of intellectual cogitation and rumination in order to emerge as wholesome, full-bodied and thoroughly coherent ideas.

As for story, Persuratan Baru sees it as a means to pave the way for discourse to be foregrounded in as subtle and natural a manner as possible. Put in another way, story becomes a channel, and one that is creative, by which discourse is articulated throughout the narrative. In this role, story becomes not

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Mohd. Affandi Hassan et al, 2008; Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, 2009, and Mohd. Zariat, 2011.

knowledge or message but a vehicle through which knowledge or message is conveyed. With its function thus delineated, story is necessarily inferior to knowledge, which it serves.

Based on the above distinction, Persuratan Baru, not unlike Braginsky's system of classical Malay literature, allocates different categories for works that exhibit different preoccupations and inclinations. Thus *karya persuratan* are works that prioritise knowledge and knowledge-disseminating, and set their sights on the mind and intellect as their targets of appeal. *Karya sastra*, on the other hand, prioritise story and story-making that appeal to the emotions and senses. Mohd. Affandi Hassan also includes a third category that he labels *karya picisan/erotik/popular* to designate works that utilise sex and its exploitation as its principal thematic preoccupation. Mohd. Affandi Hassan explains the three categories as follows:

Persuratan Baru proposes three categories so as to facilitate evaluation and fair ranking of works. First, *karya persuratan*, works that comply with the principles laid down by Persuratan Baru; second, *karya sastra*, works produced by writers who exploit unlimited freedom and unbridled emotions; third, *karya picisan* or erotic and popular works that give undue focus to both base sexual relationships and the story *per se*. (*Gagasan Persuratan Baru* 65)

Thus from the perspective of Persuratan Baru, knowledge and story are not only distinct, but they also perform different functions and serve different objectives.

The brief explanation of Persuratan Baru above amply demonstrates that it is a comprehensive framework that addresses and then integrates, in a coherent manner, both the theoretical and practical aspects of creative writing and literary criticism as well as its evaluation. In synthesising the three components – the nature of man, the nature of knowledge and action, and the nature and function of literature – Persuratan Baru underscores in very clear terms a writer's responsibility towards his Creator, a point often ignored or treated as irrelevant, particularly in the post-modern context which is wont to deem literary activities as separate and unrelated to religious beliefs, observance and devotions. Persuratan Baru reintroduces this awareness of a writer's bounden duty to his Creator, one from which he may not shirk. At the practical level, it distinguishes between knowledge and story, thereby making it possible to objectively identify the main organising principle that underlies a piece of creative work – whether it is story-making or discourse-developing and knowledge-disseminating. Further, Persuratan Baru prioritises true knowledge, a concern that is consistent with the reality and practice of knowledge from the Islamic perspective. Thus, in applying this theory to *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*, a

novel that was specifically written for, and that won a prize, in an Islamic novel-writing competition, this article brings to bear upon its analysis criteria that are correct and relevant from the Islamic perspective.

### ***Masuk ke dalam Cahaya: A Critical Analysis***

As mentioned above, *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* was written for a competition whose objective was to celebrate Islam. The novel is thus informed by the desire to foreground Islam's truthfulness and beauty in creative terms. That this is the novel's purpose is easily identified in its English title, "Into the light" and the Qur'anic verse that opens its narrative. It is the aim of this article to examine how the novel achieves its objective and the extent to and the manner in which the objective realised has been put to the service of disseminating true knowledge. To that end, a synopsis of the novel is called for at this juncture.

*Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* tells the story of a young man, Zaman, who sets out on a journey in search of spiritual fulfilment. He finds himself in the Village of Light where Islam is practised and lived according to its precepts. The presence of this village angers The Prince of Darkness, the king of the devils, who then passes himself off as a human being named Datuk Silbi. Using his devilish spell, he then builds a mansion adjoining the village, which he then fills with nymph-like beauties for the purpose of leading the villagers astray. He succeeds to an extent and a few villagers venture to consume alcohol and engage in illicit sex, both of which Islam prohibits. These transgressions cause consternation among the villagers who, with their unwavering faith in God, confront the devils-in-disguise and defeat them. After the clash, the mansion turns to ashes, the beauties into ugly prostitutes and the fine structures that once graced the mansion into rotten tree trunks.

#### **i) Moral Clarity in *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya***

In celebrating Islam in fictive terms, Abdullah Hussain strives for moral clarity in his novel, seeing it as a fundamental characteristic of an Islamic work. That this is so is hardly surprising in that Shahnoun Ahmad, who advanced the definition of Islamic literature that held sway in the Malay literary world, emphasised in his Islamic literature discourse the importance of clarity or absence of ambiguity. Thus, moral clarity as a characteristic of Islamic literature was very much accepted as a prerequisite in Malay creative writing of the period. To this end, it must be stressed that Abdullah Hussain is very much cognisant of the conventions that encompass the understanding, perception and production of what is accepted as Islamic literature.

That moral clarity is the main organising principle of *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*, one that serves to structure the novel, is foreshadowed in the Qur'anic verse, Surah al-Baqarah (2: 257), that starts off the narrative as its opening salutation:

God is the Protector  
 Of those who have faith  
 From the depths of darkness  
 He will lead them forth  
 Into light. Of those  
 Who reject faith their patrons  
 Are the Evil Ones: from light  
 They will lead them forth  
 Into the depths of darkness  
 They will be companions  
 Of the fire, to dwell there in  
 (For ever)  
 (*The Holy Qur'an* 103-104)

The verse throws into sharp relief two antitheses – God as the protector of those with faith and Satan as the patron of those who reject faith. These two antitheses are again reinforced in the reference to light and darkness. There is a clear divide between the two with no ambiguity. Such stark moral clarity, strategically placed at the beginning of the narrative to serve as its take-off point, cannot but draw attention to the fundamental fact of Islam's clear distinction between right and wrong, good and evil. And it is this moral clarity that Abdullah Hussain chooses to showcase in no uncertain terms in his novel *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*. This he achieves through prioritising the story and story-telling.

The story, as stated above, revolves around Zaman and his search for and eventual attainment of spiritual fulfilment, a thematic preoccupation that makes moral clarity a necessary and inevitable prerequisite. To this end, Abdullah Hussain utilises the first two of the novel's four chapters to map out the parameters of adherence or transgressions to Islamic precepts. The first chapter is devoted to framing the Village of Light as a locus where Islam as a religion is lived and practised. The adherence to Islam is made manifest in the everyday activities of the villagers – economic, social, religious, moral and educational – all of which are undertaken in accordance with Islamic precepts. In short, the village is piety itself. In this way portrayal of Islam as a way of life is simultaneously shown to be relevant, practical and possible.

Equally important is that in the story's subsequent development when the portrayal of transgressions becomes necessary, Abdullah Hussain chooses to furnish his novel with what is seen as the three "usual fare," or, in the words of the panel of judges of Islamic novel-writing competitions, "obvious sins" known to all and sundry including non-Muslims, and routinely offered by Islamic literature, namely illicit sex and alcohol consumption (the third, not

evident in this novel, is gambling). In availing himself of these obvious sins, Abdullah Hussain leaves little room for ambiguity.

In sharp contrast to the Village of Light is the realm of the Prince of Darkness, which constitutes Chapter 2. To make clear the distinction delineated in the Qur'anic verse quoted at the beginning of the novel, the provenance of Iblis, the leader of the devils, is given. He was expelled from paradise because he refused to bow down before Adam, a mere human being made from hard clay, whereas he was created from fire and therefore superior. Iblis then asked, and was granted by God, the right to mislead, confuse, lure and lead humans astray. Indeed, to lead them into darkness and into hell is his avowed mission. Chapter 2 thus serves to make clear who are men's enemies, their avowed mission and the limits to which their success is guaranteed. The novel devotes some substantial story time to detailing the devils' work, the jubilation that accompanies success and the wrath of the Prince of Darkness when the missions fail. To reinforce this moral clarity, the army of devils is appropriately given names such as Envy, Deceit, Discord, Instigation, Greed and Vileness to reflect their stated task. It is at this Council of Devils that the reader is made aware of the Prince of Darkness's wrath at the Village of Light for choosing to obey God, and his scheme to destroy it. The story is thus set for a definitive confrontation, which materialises in Chapter 4.

In building up to this decisive confrontation, and in concert with the presence of devils as combatants, Abdullah Hussain envelops the Village of Light with a mystical-like aura, thereby underlying its role and position in the novel as a moral indicator. This is no ordinary village but one that has chosen to take on the Prince of Darkness himself and his diabolical army of devils. The encounter sees the villagers, steadfast in their faith in God, chanting Qur'anic verses and overcoming their evil neighbours and exposing them for the devils they truly are. The defeat of the devils sees *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* affirm in fictive terms the truth and correctness of Islam and its teachings. The Qur'anic verse, at the beginning of the narrative, is creatively established to be true. Indeed, in the manner of an allegorical representation, *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* pits evil against good in a very definitive clash, at the same time that it bears witness to the Qur'anic verse that opens the narrative. Presented in this way, moral clarity could hardly be better served.

## ii) The Story and Story-Making in *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*

Abdullah Hussain's craftsmanship in his *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* is reminiscent of E.M. Forster's (1968) adage regarding novel-writing. It is worth noting here that E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* has been a popular reference for both Malay creative writers and literary critics but more so during the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, its influence on Malay novel-writing cannot be underestimated considering that Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (hereafter DBP) deemed it worth

translating into Malay under the title *Aspek-aspek Novel* (first edition 1979). Together with Shahnnon Ahmad's *Gubahan Novel* (Writing a Novel), it was advertised in *Dewan Sastera*, a literary magazine put out by DBP, with the telling caption "Do you want to be a novelist? These two books will help cultivate and develop your talent in the field of novel-writing" ("Ingin Menjadi Novelis? Buku-buku ini akan membantu membajai dan mengembangkan bakat anda dalam bidang penulisan novel") (*Dewan Sastera*, 1982, 65). This is not to suggest that Abdullah Hussain, a veteran and prolific writer for whom *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* was his 21<sup>st</sup> novel, used Forster's book – the Malay translation or its English original, Abdullah Hussain being proficient in English – as reference for *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*. However, it is worthwhile pointing out that Forster's adage on novel and novel-writing was familiar in the Malay literary scene, and as a writer who worked for DBP, the publisher of Forster's Malay translation, it is not pushing the point to suggest that Abdullah Hussain was familiar with the adage and its influence and favourable reception among Malay writers and critics. According to Forster, "the basis of a novel is a story, and a story is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence" (37-38). In the same book, Forster reinforces the importance of the story with this emphatic assertion, "... the novel tells a story. That is the fundamental aspect without which it could not exist" (34). And it is upon a story and story-making that Abdullah Hussain chooses to develop his *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*.

In bodying forth *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*, Abdullah Hussain crafts his novel by utilising fully the elements of narration and story-making. For the purpose of this article, suffice it to highlight four narrative elements evident in the novel. As will be shown below, the manipulation of these four elements sufficiently point to the fact that the main organising principle of *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* is none other than the story and story-making. Or to put it differently, in *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* the story and story-making are prioritised.

In structuring his story, Abdullah Hussain avails himself of the model of linear progression upon which is superimposed the regular narrative prescription of introduction, rising action that builds up to a climax, which then concludes with a denouement. This is a conventional model, one generally associated with story-making. In applying it to *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*, Abdullah Hussain provides a long introduction in which the parameters of evil and good, so crucial to the story, are sharply delineated. Conflict, in the form of the Prince of Darkness's annoyance with the obvious piety of the villagers, leads to the various stratagems to ensnare and lead the villagers astray, all of which constitute the rising action in the story. The climax sees the clash of the titans, with the denouement, the villagers' victory, following shortly after. Plotted thus, *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* comes across as a simple but a well-crafted story in that it makes for easy accessibility and understanding. This fact cannot but exemplify the moral clarity explained above. In choosing this conventional model,

Abdullah Hussain has cause to be assured that his message, embedded in and made an integral part of the story, is understood.

Another narrative element that the author uses to bolster the story is the cause-and-effect formula that effectively propels the narrative and thence pilots it forward to its conclusion. Used in league with the model of linear progression and the introduction-rising-action-climax-denouement formula, the story is firmed up, thus allowing for an easy flow, buoyed along, as it were, by the sequential run of events based on cause-and-effect. Thus Zaman's quarrel with his fiancée, his sense of emptiness with life though born into a wealthy home, his disillusionment with his parents' disdain towards religion and their obsession with the glitter of life – all serve as a strong push factor for Zaman to embark upon what turns out to be a spiritual journey that takes him to the Village of Light. Likewise, on the part of the Prince of Darkness the existence of the village is excuse enough for him to wreak as much havoc as possible. It is precisely this cause-and-effect formula that enables Abdullah Hussain to initiate his story (good versus evil), develop it (Zaman's eagerness to learn more about Islam as a way of life, and live it), sustain it (the devils and their evil schemes bent on destroying the entire village) and conclude it irrefutably and unambiguously (the clash, with victory to the villagers). *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* clearly takes pains to give priority and prominence to the story because the self-same story that it assiduously builds up and for which it spares no effort, holds the message of good overcoming evil.

The story and its importance is buttressed further when the author manipulates the narrative element of suspense, another crucial link in the chain of story-making. When the novel pits the Village of Light against the Prince of Darkness, it promises no ordinary conflict in that Abdullah Hussain has pushed the boundaries of the novel beyond the domain of human beings. Likewise, the villagers of the Village of Light are similarly not ordinary, a characteristic the author carefully builds up by enveloping it with a mystical-like aura. This is a battle of titans. Notwithstanding the assurance given in the Qur'anic verse that victory is with the faithful, the element of suspense is not dissipated, for what begs the question would then be the manner in which the villagers overcome the devils and the diabolical magic at their disposal. Alongside the clash of the titans, and constituting a necessary part of it, are Zaman's own position in the story, in particular his romantic relationship with Salina that no longer sits well with his spiritual quest, his newly-found love with Murni that necessarily calls for staying at the village, his father's own re-awakening and repentance, the fate of Zaidi whom the devils have won over – all these questions await answers, which, in turn, call attention to the story and its conclusion. It must be pointed out that these questions are dangled throughout the narrative, thereby making clear the prioritisation of the story and story-making in *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*. In short, suspense serves to defer the conclusion, enabling the story to be

stretched to its full possibility. In doing so, *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* makes certain the full force of the outcome of the clash – the message of defeat of evil – is fully understood.

Another narrative element evident in *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* is embellishments or detailed descriptions whose ample use clearly points to Abdullah Hussain's awareness of the need to foreground the story as fully and richly as possible. Examples of the use of embellishments are plentiful in *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*, ranging from the description of the Village of Light and the mysteries that surround it to the devil's ostentatious mansion, the latter, for example, offering sufficient opportunity to pad the story with detailed and rich descriptions of the magnificent dwelling that only diabolical powers can conjure. Abdullah Hussain creatively manipulates the narrative element of embellishments in *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* to flesh out what is essentially a conflict, amplifying it to the point where the story becomes *the* crucial building block of the novel. Densely portrayed and padded, the story is easily elevated to a clash of an allegorical stature where evil, so malevolent, is made to succumb to good. Delineated in such vividness, the story cannot but flagrantly flaunt its message.

The creative use of various narrative elements as illustrated points to Abdullah Hussain's adoption of story-making as the main organising principle for his creative piece. This, in turn, makes crystal clear the prioritisation of the story in *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya*. It is thus not surprising that *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* comes across as an interesting and well-crafted novel that is full-bodied and focused on eliciting and sustaining interest in its story.

### **The Synonymy of the Story and the Message in *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya***

As a veteran and prolific novelist, Abdullah Hussain is very much aware of the importance of the story, for without it, as Forster points out, a novel does not exist. Thus in prioritising the story, Abdullah Hussain guarantees that *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* would be recognised and accepted as a novel, as proven by the fact that it was judged a winning entry in a novel-writing competition. Why does *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* prioritise and optimise the story and story-making? This is because the story *is* the message, and failure to ensure the story gets read from beginning till the end through creative manipulation of various narrative elements would diminish the message for which *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* has so laboriously worked to make clear. And as an entry for an Islamic novel-writing competition whose objective is to celebrate Islam, this failure would have been seen as a dismal letdown indeed. It is thus little wonder that *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* prioritises and optimises the story.

The analysis above makes clear the fact that Abdullah Hussain makes no distinction between the story and the message or knowledge, the two being seen as synonymous. In so doing, it makes discourse irrelevant, for the story, so it is

understood, has taken over and successfully discharged the duty to disseminate knowledge. This is a perception that holds sway even until today, not only for works touted as Islamic or incorporating Islamic values, but also those fictions where no such proclamation is made. In subscribing to this perception, a creative fiction is thus only charged with producing a story. This is precisely what Abdullah Hussain has done. Being an entry for an Islamic novel-writing competition, Abdullah Hussain, however, goes the extra mile to make moral clarity an added objective; indeed he incorporates it as a fundamental part of the story proper. In thus operating on the level of story-making, *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* occupies what Braginsky's system of classical Malay literature calls the sphere of beauty. In the context of Persuratan Baru, which makes a distinction between discourse and story, the glaring absence of discourse in *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* makes it a work of *sastera* as opposed to that of *persuratan*.

### Concluding Remarks

Informed by the perception that the story and the message are synonymous, *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* strives, and succeeds, in putting into place the full force and rigour of story-making in order to realise a story of good versus evil. In discounting discourse and its attendant potential to foreground knowledge, as Persuratan Baru is wont to do, *Masuk ke dalam Cahaya* passes up the opportunity to transform novel-writing into a vehicle for articulating and disseminating true knowledge, a pursuit that is intellectually challenging and rewarding, aesthetically pleasing, at the same time that it abides by the Qur'anic injunction to use the pen to disseminate true knowledge.

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