

In Search of Literary Love in Malay Literature: The Early Stages of Relationship

Muhammad Haji Salleh¹
University Sains Malaysia

Abstract

The culture of desire, passionate love and marriage is often a main plot in oral and written Malay literary works. However, the emotions that we categorise as love are extremely complex, with their different stages of development. A long list of words refers to this central emotion: “Berahi,” “asyik,” “asyik berahi,” “gila asmara,” “berangta,” “kendak,” “kasih,” “sayang,” “cinta” and “cinta asmara” (romantic love).

In his study of Victorian novels and paintings, *Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns*, Stephen Kern found a process of 18 steps and/ or elements in love. These are waiting, meeting, encounter, embodiment, desire, language, disclosure, kissing, gender, power, others, jealousy, selfhood, proposal, wedding, sex, sexual relations, marriage and ending. In my initial survey of the Malay oral and written *bikayats*, and poems I am able to fit in most of Kern’s categories. However, because of the differences in cultural and literary perceptions, some are blurred, and some others are absent, replaced still by others.

This paper explores the first four categories, i.e. the first news/ dream, the first peek, the meeting and the verbal lovemaking and illustrates the uniqueness of this concept in Malay literature.

Abstract in Malay

Budaya berahi, cinta asmara dan perkahwinan sering menjadi keasyikan utama karya sastera Melayu tradisional. Perasaan-perasaan yang dikategorikan sebagai kasih sayang sangatlah rumit, dengan tahap-tatap tertentu pula. Di antara istilah yang memerikannya ialah: “Berahi,” “asyik,” “asyik berahi,” “gila asmara,” “beranta,” “kendak,” “kasih,” “sayang,” “cinta” dan “cinta asmara.” Dalam sebuah kajian Stephen Kern, *Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns*, terdapat 18 tahap dalam pengalaman kasih sayang ini, di antaranya berita – imbasan/ maklumat awal, mengintai, pertemuan, cumbuan, merajuk, rindu, longing, penetapan perasaan, penjasadan, berahi, menyampaikan perasaan, expressing one’s emotions dll. Dalam esei ini saya akan cuba menelusuri empat kategori pertama, iaitu berita – imbasan /maklumat awal, mengintai, pertemuan, cumbuan untuk memperlihatkan keunikan konsepnya dalam kesusasteraan Melayu.

¹ Muhammad Haji Salleh is a poet, critic, editor and translator. He has published twelve collections of poetry and more than thirty books of criticism and translation. His major poetry collections include *Perjalanan Si Tenggang II*, *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu*, *Salju Shibuya*, *Setitik Darah di Bilik Bundar* and *Rowing Down Two Rivers*. His latest works of translation are *The Epic of Hang Tuah* and *Malay Literary Poetics*. He is now a Senior Fellow with the Centre for Policy Research and International Studies, University Sains Malaysia.

Keywords

Love, lovemaking, Malay literature, stages of love, *pantun*, *hikayat*

Keywords in Malay

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Literature is a profound document of a people's journey. Their deepest and most significant experiences, wisdom, thought, emotions, survival strategies and passions have been woven into many of the popular as well as the great works. Quite central to these collective experiences, are the processes, acts, expressions, ideals and the meaning of a significant part of human life, i.e. love itself. Though universal in their theme, important literary works have been able to provide spatially and culturally unique contexts and approaches. These in turn offer personal meanings to what we all consider as a common experience. The culture of desire, passionate love and marriage are narrated or explained in many poems and novels, perhaps more than in any other art form.

Tressidor correctly notes that, "Religion, philosophy and psychology often seem to distrust the irresponsible wildness of passionate love, placing a higher value on more temperate personal relations or on a more diffused love for humankind or for God" (10). However, it is this wildness and wilderness that is the jungle of human life, characterised by pleasures and sufferings. Malay literature written or composed in the Malay Archipelago seems to relish in both these aspects of the human condition.

While in European and Indian literatures love and its treatment have been quite well studied, in the literature written or spoken in the Malay language, however, there has been almost no serious work of this kind done as yet. Therefore, some research on this subject would help enlighten a very important and also a central experience of human life.

A body of direct or indirect statements that appear in poems such as *pantun* and *syair*, as well as in many oral and written stories, speak of a reality where feelings of love are among the most fertile. Consequently, they describe an emotion of extraordinary intensity in their lines. Perhaps there is no other aspect of living that is felt or described more intensely in these literary works than amorous relationship.

The emotions that we categorise as love are extremely complex, with their different stages, developments and shades of intensity, which number in the tens if not hundreds. Much of this owes to the very nature of love itself, which is at once mysterious and secretive, and strangely, always avoiding interpretation. What we usually get is a handful of images and descriptions, given in metaphors and riddles, and these are our only resources to seek out their real core.

As these emotions are extremely complex, they are, therefore, not easily categorised, and combination of feelings and their intensity may differ from one couple to the next. *Lain padang lain belalang*, says a Malay proverb – “other fields, other grasshoppers!”

In the meantime, place, time and language give different facades and therefore different sets of perspectives, and one set may not be a legal tender to all couples, however universal love is in its experience and however popular it has come to be in literature. And literature in the Malay language is no exception; in fact, in its themes, love is among the most widely present.

Kern finds that love is “one of life’s deepest mysteries and most powerful emotions” (1), while Megan Tresidder notes that:

Love is the most complex and important of all human emotions. It defies adequate definition, but in its grandeur and its imaginative power over our lives it can be both creative and destructive, beautiful and terrifying. It has many sides and often dons different hats. (9)

In their book, *Erotic Love in Literature: From Medieval Legend to Romantic Illusion*, Donald Furber and Anne Callahan summarise the impact of romantic love as follows:

Of all the possible experiences that life can offer two people who are passionately attracted to each other, erotic love may well be the most rewarding. The union it produces between men and women in love is so complete that two finite individuals can interrelate almost as if they were one individual being. Erotic love involves every aspect of human sexual nature, spiritual as well as physical. For those who believe that profane love does not have to be subordinated to social or religious concerns, erotic love can provide the ultimate experience in the quest to transcend a state of isolation and separateness. (1)

In the Malay Archipelago, the theme of love is sought in the poems and stories for the excitement and ecstasy it offers. And the author, even though he has to describe his own experiences or his own desire, does not avoid this theme; on the contrary, in most cases he seems to relish in it. Many are the evidence that point to this.

In both oral and written works – in the shadow plays, the *mak yong*, poetry and the tales – are embedded the instruments of the expressions of this experience and the description of its related predicaments and joys – waiting, pining, regret, longing, bliss and other aspects of this experience. It is understandable that as this group of emotions is an important part of human existence, so it in turn becomes a central part of a fuller arc of a description of life itself.

Terminologies

A concept and description comes with its own terminologies, and the terminologies reveal the hidden approaches and perspectives. In Malay we have quite a long list of words that refer to this central emotion: “berahi,” “asyik,” “asyik berahi,” “gila asmara,” “berangta,” “kendak,” “kasih,” “sayang,” “cinta” and “cinta asmara” (romantic love). Often the state of being passionately in love was considered as having connotations of an illness, as in *sakit cinta* (to suffer the disease of love), “gila nian” (excessive lust), “gila ekor” and “gila urat” (pronounced eccentricity of conduct). Related words are “rindu” (longing), “dendam” (pining), “perpisahan” (separation), “perceraian” (divorce) and “merana” (suffering).

Each word stresses a certain field of meaning, and often with a certain leaning towards a particular concept, i.e. of physical desire and/ or “purer” love itself. For example, *berahi* and *berangta* lean heavily towards the physical, while *kasih sayang* towards the purer and familial kind.

Of these, some are used more often than others. Perhaps the most common expression that we can trace from the older literary texts but which is seldom used now is *berahi*. It appears in hundreds of places, and in this excerpt from *Sejarah Melayu*, “Ertinya, ini sirih, buat olehmu akan penglipur rasa *berahi*; sehari dilihat sungguh, demikian pun rindu juga” [Take these betel leaves to sooth this feeling of being passionately in love, in which though the beloved is seen yet there is still a sense of longing] (88).¹

If we consider another early text, *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, we find the expression *berahi* in the following context: “Ya tuanku inilah rupa Tun Abdul Jalil namanya, anak raja di benua Pasai.’ Maka Tuan Puteri Gemerengang pun terlalu amat ia *berahi* akan dia, daripada sebab ia melihat rupa gambarnya itu. Maka Radin Galuh Gemerengang pun tiadalah lagi tertahan hatinya, seperti orang gilalah lakunya, makan minum pun tiada” [Then Tun Perpatih Jena raised his hands and paid obeisance, “My, lord, so this is how Tun Abdul Jalil looks, the prince of Pasai.” The Princess Gemerengang instantly fell passionately in love with him as she had already seen a painting of him. Radin Galuh Gemerengang could not contain her feelings, as a person overcome by her emotions, she was not able to drink or consume any morsel of food] (Jones 61).

In another early work, a Malay version of *Ramayana*, entitled *Hikayat Seri Rama*, we find this confession by Rama, the hero, “dan hati kakanda pun tiadalah karar, terlalu *berahi* hendak bertemu dengan adinda” [and my own heart is no longer peaceful, craving to meet you] (http://mcp.anu.edu.au/cgi-bin/tapis_w.pl).

In a later 19th century historical work by Raja Ali Haji, *Salasilah Melayu dan Bugis*, this word appears thus:

Sehari-hari bertambah dendam,

berahi bernyala tidak padam,
hancur hati bagaikan digodam,
sebab *berahi* sudah terpendam. (50)

[Each day my longing grows,
My passion never dying,
My heart is broken, as though smashed,
For passionate love has come to roost.]

While in *Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang China*, a poem tracing the exploits of Siti Zubaidah, a noble lady, saving her husband, the king, and also their country, we find the following context for the term:

Lemah lembut bunyi suara,
Merdunya tidak lagi terkira,
Manis seperti madu sakar,
Lidahnya fasih hurufnya sejahtera.

Terlalu hairan raja bangsawan,
Ghairah berahi bercampur rawan,
Mendengar suaranya rasanya hairan,
Kalbunya gundah tiada ketahuan.
(Abdul Rahman al-Ahmadi 136)

[Softly gentle is her voice,
Mellifluous without compare,
Sweet as the sugar of honey,
Her tongue eloquent, her words peaceful.

The noble raja was extremely surprised,
Passion and love mixed with sadness,
Listening to her voice full of wonder,
Her heart melancholic without any direction.]

The second term, “*cinta*,” most popularly used for love in contemporary Malay literature, in fact denotes worry, sadness and unhappiness in traditional Malay texts:

Adapun baginda raja bestari
Gila dan mabuk akan Bidasari
Setelah menengar suaranya menteri
Baharu baginda ingatkan diri.

Sangatlah pilu rasanya *cinta*
Dipeluk dicium seraya berkata

Tangkai hati cahaya mata
Tinggallah tuan emas juita.

[Meanwhile, the righteous king was smitten,
insane with passion for Bidasari,
It was only when he heard his chief's voice
that the king returned to his senses.

The king felt a painful yearning,
Then embraced and kissed Bidasari,
“Delight of my heart, light of my life,
farewell, my beloved jewel.”] (Millie 99)

However, only once in a while, there emerges the amorous meaning of the word as in:

Tiada tertanggung mabuk berangti,
Cinta berahi tiada berhenti.
(*Syair Kumbang dan Melati*)

[I may not survive this intoxicating love,
Love's longings would not retreat.]

On the other hand, the phrase *kasih dan sayang*, love and affection, a purer and rarefied variety of familial kind, is likewise quite widely used to denote its special qualities, for example in the following extract:

Pesan saudagar malam dan siang,
Ayuh anakda segala dayang-dayang,
Jikalau ada *kasih dan sayang*,
Akan Bidasari jangan dibuang. (Millie 54)

And in *Syair Kumbang dan Melati*, *kasih* stands next to *belas*, pity:

Serta ada belas dan kasih,
Mohonkan obat kalbu yang persih.

[Accompanied with both pity and affection,
Let me have a potion to cleanse heart in pain.]

The stories of Seri Rama and Sita Dewi, Raden Inu and Galuh Cendera Kirana, Putera Raja Pati and Cendera Nurlela, Siti Zubaidah and Sultan Zainal Abidin are frames for the literary imagination of the authors where, besides a few constraints of the literary culture, they are free to explore relationships between

couples enamoured of each other. For tens, or in fact even hundreds of years, these works were the choice of audiences in the Peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak, and in the villages and towns of Sumatra. They were (and in some places like Western and Eastern Sumatra) the main literary staple for the local audiences before the coming of the new novel or the modern poem. They provide the most passionate descriptions of people in love for the readers and audiences, and it is their characters who reflect the feelings of their audiences.

Love is a profoundly unstable territory, neither level nor even real, but it promises beauty as well as both physical and emotional bliss. And therefore, it is an extremely attractive area for literature and the arts. Young men and women in the audience are often transformed into explorers of the new realm in which they may also discover tremendous emotions difficult to ignore or avoid. There is beauty in the female or the male protagonists; there is desire, imagined touch and kisses, sexual intercourse and a life with the partner.

The Pantuns

Besides the narrative stories, the pantuns are perhaps the richest resources bestowed to the student of literature. It is a collection of verses incredibly varied and widespread, growing and developing in so many areas of the region – in hamlets, villages, states and nations, and composed and used not only by Malays but also other non-Malay groups, including the Melanau, Iban, Bidayuh, Kadazan, Chinese Peranakan, Melaka City and not least the Aslian. With such a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and multicultural settings these verses describe thousands of situations, conditions, shades of feelings, both the rough and the fine, the bliss of first meeting, touch etc., and also the emotional suffering, despair, longing and uncertainty, especially when love is unrequited. Often the future of the lovers hangs like a suspended story, still working out its plot – only the present is foregrounded, the future belongs to fate that is yet indecipherable.

Almost all the pantuns are now anonymous, but what is true is that they were composed by thousands of poets, so their approach to this theme would be equally varied and therefore extremely interesting, not least in their special choice of situations and cultural uniqueness.

Many are the risks and also the benefits of being in love. There are as many joys as there are sorrows, described by life or literature, but strangely our instincts relentlessly drag us into this dangerous territory. When we arrive there nothing else seems more important, because it is so present and totally engulfs the person – his or her action, thought and feelings.

The clearest themes and images of love in literature have their own special characteristics and leanings, colours and variations. So popular were they that they provided inspiration and themes for other branches of the arts – music, songs, visual arts, carvings and dances. But literature is arguably its very

roots and core. Furthermore, in the cases of the lyrics in pantuns and syairs, their accompanying music is often inspired by the *hikayat* and *ceritera*.

Love, more often than not, is for *penglipur lara*, the narrator, to “soothe woes,” and therefore to entertain the audience, but as Malay literature is heavily moral in its function its stories are consequently deeply interwoven into the task of instructing and educating its audience. In their tales are to be found, on the one hand, sources of entertainment, and, on the other, moral examples. They bring about *faedah* – benefit, in its widest sense.

Thus the process and development of love is a long journey into the human mind and heart; it wanders and also procrastinates through several different steps and undergoes fine or drastic changes. All these come from a series of stages that mutually influence each other and have a radical impact on the outcome of the narrative.

In his study of Victorian novels and paintings, *Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns*, Stephen Kern found a process of 18 steps and/ or elements in the sentiment/ experience of love. These are waiting, meeting, encounter, embodiment, desire, language, disclosure, kissing, gender, power, others, jealousy, selfhood, proposal, wedding, sex, sexual relations, marriage and ending. In my initial survey of the Malay oral tales – hikayat, ceritera, pantun and syair in the Nusantara – I am able to fit in most of the categories and elements put forward by Kern. However, because of the differences in cultural and literary perceptions, some are blurred, and some others are absent, replaced by still others.

The Categories

These are the initial categories I am able to retrieve from selected texts, from both the oral and written works in Malay in the Nusantara region:

1. Berita-imbasan/maklumat awal-mimpi (premonition, early news/ dream)
2. Mengintai (first peek)
3. Pertemuan (meeting)
4. Cumbuan-merajuk (verbal love-making)
5. Rindu (longing)
6. Penetapan perasaan (pen) (confirmation of emotions)
7. Penjasadan (embodiment)
8. Berahi (desire)
9. Menyampaikan perasaan (expressing one's emotions)
10. Bahasa sebagai alat percintaan (language as instrument)
11. Sentuhan pertama (touch)
12. Ciuman (kiss)
13. Perpisahan (parting)
14. Takdir/nasib/ guna-guna (fate/ magic)
15. Orang ketiga/ lain (others)

16. Cemburu (jealousy)
17. Meminang (proposal)
18. Bersanding (wedding)
19. Perkahwinan (marriage)
20. Senggama/ hubungan fizikal (physical relations)
21. Perceraian – hidup – mati (divorce)

In this paper I would like to explore the first four categories, i.e. the first news/dream, the first peek, the first meeting and the verbal lovemaking.²

1. News, Premonition and Dream

In many stories and episodes of fictional and historical Malay texts one finds that meeting between prospective lovers is often preceded by a certain news spoken by a minor character in a story or through a dream of the beauty of the prince or princess. Beauty seems to be the initial attraction and passion. The protagonist seems to be between 12-17 years old, when the hormones are raging and violent like the tropical storms at sea, and at a time when they are in search of their life partners, and many almost in love with love itself. This condition may also be inspired by stories of love itself in literature and general prattle and gossip in and around the court. When the news comes, it causes a small emotional chaos in the hearts and minds of the characters. Thus in *Hikayat Raja Kulawandar*:

Adapun akan sifatnya Tuan Puteri itu tiadalah dapat dibandingkan pada zaman itu. Maka segala raja-raja dari masyrik datang ke maghrib sekaliannya pun gilalah akan tuan puteri itu, beratus-ratus anak raja menjadi gila.... (74-75)

[The Princess was without compare during these times. All the kings, east and west became uncontrollably enamoured of the Princess, hundreds of princes went mad.]

Hundreds of princes *menjadi gila*, went mad, stricken by her beauty. All this just from the news of her beauty, without anyone really seeing her in person, which was not so easily possible in those days.

In another popular tale, *Hikayat Inderaputera*, a beautiful princess is kept away from prying eyes so that she may avoid calumny and possible complications and problems. She is placed by her father in an isolated palace on Biram Dewa Island, but is accompanied and cared for by forty knights, who guard around the palace, and several maids,

Puteri disimpan ayahnya di mahligai empat belas pangkat serta perhiasan keemasan. Maka tiap-tiap malam empat puluh hulubalang yang duduk berkawal berkeliling mahligai itu.... (Mulyadi 114)

The story hurtles along when a golden peacock is caught by the princess, Puteri Talela Madu Rakna. This magical bird can not only speak Malay but can also sing a pantun and foretell of her husband to be:

Gedung Puri di serambi,
Bunga dikarang di atas para:
Sedangkan puteri bersuami. (Mulyadi 99)

He is named in the verse as Prince Inderaputera, an extremely handsome young man, and without compare in all the lands that the bird has flown over. She immediately falls for this description of the prince, which she has subsequently recreated in her mind.

In the meantime, *Hikayat Malim Dewa*, an oral story, re-edited for a literate audience, traces how Prince Malim Dewa searches for his Queen to be (wife). One night he dreams that he meets a saint of God who instructs him in the ways of how to win a wife of unrivalled exquisiteness, i.e. through the medium of a *bayan*, parakeet, another busy bird in the service of human happiness. But first he must first seek out this bayan.

The bird turns out to be a magical creature, which is also fluent in the human language and able to play various musical instruments. It becomes the intermediary that leads Malim Dewa to his future Queen, though on his journey he meets several other women.

2. The First Peek

In a famous pantun, a girl invites a boy to take a peek at her so that he would later not be longing too much for her:

Tuailah padi antara masak,
Esok jangan layu-layuan,
Intailah kami sementara nampak,
Esok jangan rindu-rinduan.

[Garner the rice crop at its height,
Lest it be withered ere the morn!
Look well on me whilst in your sight!
Don't lovelorn be at tomorrow's dawn.]
(Hamilton 82-83)

In this verse, the relationship has already developed and the lovers are about to part for the day or the month. However, the context of this verse is the first peek of the boy or the girl. It provides the early suspense in the story where the readers/ audience are fed by information about two young people who we

expect to meet and share a life.³ In this section we are relieved by the episode of the peeking itself, when the images described by an old lady or maids and the dream itself are joined to a face and person.

In the *Hikayat Raja Kulawandu*, this episode is arranged by Malik Indera, who has taken Putera Jaya Pati as his adopted son. The prince was asked to hide behind a wall in the royal gardens, while the princess was about to take a bath in the pool:

Maka dilihat oleh Putera Jaya Pati akan rupa tuan puteri itu bahawa sesungguhnya seperti kata Malik Indera, tiada bersalahan dan barang kelakuannya pun sedap manis dipandang oleh PJP itu. Maka Putera Jaya Pati pun khayallah, maka segera ia mengucap kebesaran Allah swt. Maka Malik Indera pun hairanlah melihat Putera Jaya Pati itu, terlalulah berahinya akan tuan puteri itu. Daripada ia orang bijaksana maka boleh disamakan dengan makan sirih pinang. (85-86)

[As soon as Prince Jaya Pati sets his eyes on the Princess he realises she was as described by Malik Indera's words, there was no difference at all. Each of her behaviour was sweet and pleasing to Jaya Pati's eyes. He becomes immediately intoxicated and praises Allah's greatness. Malik Indera was surprised to see how passionate the prince's feelings were for the princess.]

In *Hikayat Inderaputera*, the first peek was made possible by the Malik Zahab, a noble who knows the Princess. From the Princess' apartment on the topmost level of the palace:

Maka dilihat oleh Tuan puteri Talela Madu Ratna seorang muda terlalu baik sikapnya dan jejaknya sederhana lalu pada tepi kolam itu. (118)

[Princess Talela Madu Ratna sees a young man extremely fine in his deportment and his steps light, passing by the pond.]

Therefore, she presently instructs her maids to inquire who the young man is. In reply he says, "I am a stranger from faraway" (patik dagang yang gharib) (120). The first sighting is further helped along by the peacock and the princess' maids. When they brought his words to her, she quickly responded and asked them to say:

Embuh kami mengenali dia
Kalau setia tiada sungguh? (121)

[I do want to know him,
What if his words are not in earnest?]

Responding to her doubt he sends his ring as a symbol and representative of his person. She replies:

Kalau setia tiadakan sungguh
Bukanlah kita anak raja besar. (121)

[If I am not truly loyal
I am no son of a great king.]

And sends her fragrances and verses:

Jika sungguh bagai di kata
Apatah lagi akan salahnya? (122)

[If words are as true as their meanings
What else can go amiss?]

Inderaputera now recognises that their very bodies and souls are looking into each other's. So the realisation of a dream turns to a romantic meeting, heavily sprinkled with praises and teasing, *cumbuan*. This early episode comes to a dramatic end with him being found out and surrounded, be cared for her, finally asking that she sits in his lap (*pangkuan*) – archaic way of accepting endearment and showing affection.

So the pantuns fly back and forth carrying feelings that are slowly developing into recognisable steps towards a relationship between a young man and a young woman. Along with the pantuns are seen the early evidence of teasing, that is fragrant with verbal lovemaking. Eventually he is invited to her palace and taken there by Janggi Gerdana. They end the episode by consuming a quid of betel each. This is a culturally specific way of accepting a person's invitation.

The peacock points the way to the future, saying that in its opinion she will be Inderapura's wife:

Ke padang rimba raya,
Kumbang menyeri pakan sutera:
Kepada pemandangan saya,
Sedang akan isteri Inderapura. (124)

[To the green jungles and meadows,
The bees fly over the silk woofs,
In my eyes I see a picture glows,
Your highness shall become Inderputera's wife.]

In a rare poem, the *Syair Buah-buahan*, Syairs of Fruits, Delima, the Pomegranate, the hero, goes in circles (physically and emotionally) in his search for Anggur, the Grape, the heroine, who is also a beauty beyond the ordinary, and finally takes a peek from behind the fences:

Hati Delima jadi tertegar,
 Jasad gagah jadi bertukar,
 Kuliling ruma[h] berputar-putar,
 Delima mengintai di sela pagar.
 (<http://mcp.anu.edu.au/cgi-bin/tapis.pl> 5)

[Pomegranates' heart is all a flutter,
 His strong body is now to alter,
 He goes round and round the shelter,
 And peeks behind the hedges, from afar.]

At the point, when he sets his eyes on her, an amazing emotion is born within himself. His heart flies into the clouds, but then turns sad and already feels a longing for her. He sighs in sorrow:

Delima melihat sekalian perempuan,
 Ia melihat hal kelakuan,
 Dilihat pada Lela rupawan,
 Bagaikan hati terbang mengawan

Akan terpandang pada Anggur rupawan,
 Hati Delima menjadi rawan,
 Datang rindu suda[h] ketahuan,
 Menarik napas kepilu-piluan.
 (<http://mcp.anu.edu.au/cgi-bin/tapis.pl> 5)

[Pomegranate looks at all the women,
 Looks at them and their mien,
 And then at Lela her beauty
 His heart soars to the heavens.]

It is interesting to note that once Delima sets his eyes on Anggur, his emotions become immediately unstable. While his heart does soar in the beginning, however, a few moments later it soon turns to *rawan*, grief and longing. He begins to sigh as a reaction to this turn in his fate.

The following example of *mengintai* or peeking, is excerpted from the *Epic of Hang Tuah*. It describes how Hang Jebat, the companion of the hero, was reading a hikayat for the king. So beautiful is his sonorous voice that all the maids in the palace rush to peek at him from behind the wall.

Hang Jebat began to read a *bikayat* as he was ordered, his voice was clear and honeyed, arousing emotions in all the maids, court ladies, attendants and concubines of the Raja so that they hurried to peek from behind the wall, to catch a glimpse of the handsome Hang Jebat narrating his *bikayat*. All the Raja's concubines were assailed by pangs of desire for him. The Raja greatly enjoyed himself as he listened to Jebat telling the story in his sweet voice, as melodious as the susurrations of the magical bamboo, for every time the talented Hang Jebat narrated his audience grew melancholic and were cast into the slough of despond; whoever listened to him would be smitten. So the Raja fell asleep in his lap. Hang Jebat paused and began to sing, his voice was extraordinarily melodious. Soon the Raja fell into a deep slumber.

When the maids, the ladies-in-waiting and the royal concubines saw that the Raja had fallen asleep in Hang Jebat's lap, they prepared quids of ripe betel and cast them at Hang Jebat, some threw them along with containers of fragrances, some with metal-lidded betel caskets containing spikenard. Hang Jebat was in good spirits and his voice rang with laughter; he picked the offerings of betel leaf and the fragrances up, chewed the betel and applied the sweet smelling unguents to his clothes. (*Epic of Hang Tuah* 321-22)

His voice, exquisite talent in performing his hikayat and a uniquely romantic style cause the hearts of the maids to flutter and "desire" for him, i.e. to fall in love with him.

In *Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang China*, Zubaidah, the heroine, first sees Sultan Zainal Abidin from afar, when he is in Pulau Feringgi, through a pair of binoculars. He is like the moon behind the clouds, yet shining gloriously:

Diteropong Zubaidah yang syuhada,
orang yang duduk di atas beranda,
di bawah khemah kain Wilanda,
Lalu terpanchang kepada baginda.

Dilihat oleh Zubaidah bangsawan
parasnya elok sukar dilawan,
Cahayanya elok kilau-kilauan,
Seperti bulan di celahnya awan. (119)

On the other hand, Zainal Abidin sees the images of a lady in a dream which closely parallel what he now sees in Zubaidah:

Tersedarlah ia akan mimpinya,
tiada bersalahan rupa parasnya,
habis tilik pandang nazarnya,

bangkit berahi kepada hatinya.

Ia berfikir di dalam hati ,
 “Seperti mimpiku adalah pasti,
 parasnya elok sempurna bakti,
 inilah kelak timbalku mati.” (146).

[She remembers her dream,
 It is the same face that she now sees,
 She observes hard and long,
 Passions wakes in her own heart.

She thinks in her heart
 “It’s certain, like in my dream,
 His face is handsome, his ways unblemished,
 It’s he who will be my companion to the end.”]

In another work, the early modern novel that retains heavy traces of the classical tradition, *Hikayat Kasih Cinta Kemudaan* (The Narrative of Youth’s Love), Ahmad Kotot, the author, describes how a young man, stricken by the sight of a girl, would come under the raised floor of her house, and through the chink steal a long look at her. She becomes a picture in a story, a mere image. In his case he has stolen a look at her, but not met her in person yet. At the end of the episode, we are again suspended in our readers’ emotions, not knowing how the story will develop or end, how the two protagonists will take the threads of their fate into the future.

3. Meeting

The path between dreaming of a person and of meeting him or her may be a long and troubled road, but truly an emotional one. It is uncertain; the characters are on the brink of a new phase of their lives. A meeting between them would be the climax of an early stage of suspense, expectation and hoping. Sometimes this is the point of real love. Berahi is given a face and a meeting, dream is transformed into reality. A meeting of two people begins with a physical encounter, and may end with a new web of tangled emotions.

Though for the first two stages we are not offered many pantuns, however, for first meeting between lovers there are hundreds of verses to describe this wonderful moment. In their lines are charades, songs, verbal love-making, teasing and testing of the emotions – almost all of them employ metaphors for them and us, readers/ listeners, to savour and unravel the contents of their hearts.

A famous pantun describes what may happen when a man or a woman sees another from the opposite sex who catches his or her fancy:

Dari mana punai melayang,
 Dari sawah turun ke padi;
Dari mana datangnya sayang,
 Dari mata turun ke hati. (Winstedt, *Pantun Melayu* 1)

[From whence fly the dove,
 From the field to the hut;
From whence comes love,
 From the eyes, down to the heart.]

This mysterious process is illustrated by an episode when Ken Sumirat, the beautiful daughter of Patih Kerma Wijaya, a Minister of the state of Lasem in Java, was travelling in an enclosed wagon. When the king of Lasem happened to pass by her carriage, a storm lifted her curtain and for a few seconds he caught sight of her, fell in love with her and ordered that she be taken to the palace.

Meanwhile, the King of Lasem was out hunting, accompanied by his ministers and chiefs. Ken Sumirat was travelling with a great deal of cheer and amusement, as though walking and riding in a ceremonial procession. From afar the King of Lasem could hear the music coming from the direction of Ken Sumirat's procession.

His Majesty ordered Barit Ketika, "Go and investigate that noise." Barit Ketika bowed in obeisance and departed to locate the commotion. When he had come upon it he asked, "Whence come you and who is your chief? Where are you heading?"

The man replied, "We are the kinsmen of Patih Kerma Wijaya; Our Lord has asked that we escort his daughter, Ken Sumirat, for Our Lord is ill, and desires to see her. We would like to return, but we are not sure that our country has been properly restored."

After Barit Ketika heard Kebiri's words, he departed quickly to report to the King. The King of Lasem said, "In that case we would like word be carried to the Patih." So the King of Lasem galloped towards where Kebiri was standing; he said, "When everything is settled you must return swiftly, for we are threatened with an attack by Raden Inu; we hear that they are already on the move."

While he was speaking with Kebiri, by the Will of Allah, a storm began to blow, very hard. The curtain of Ken Sumirat's wagon was lifted. For the space of an instant the King of Lasem glimpsed her, and their eyes met. He saw how fair of face she was, and fell passionately in love with her. Try as he might, he could not restrain himself.

So he said to Kebiri, "I shall take the daughter of Patih Kerma Wijaya to be my wife. I shall pay whatever bride wealth is demanded of me." (*Epic of Hang Tuah* 44-45)

In another episode, the Sultan of Melaka, Mahmud Syah, once set his eyes on the daughter of Bendahara (Vizier), Tun Fatimah, a married noble woman, and became completely enamoured of her; so he obliged her to divorce her husband and marry him.

It is the extraordinary countenance, the glow of the lady's skin and the glint in her eyes and her general physical beauty that cause the confusion in the mind and heart of the sultan. We know this as love at first sight, but of course it can be desire at the first glance. In both these cases there was neither dream nor premonition to incite their hopes or imagination. But at the back of their mind, they know that the most beautiful belongs to the rajas and the nobles.

There is not much that the lady can do, but accept her fate. One does not go against a deva-raja, who stands over the laws of the land, and has been known to be extremely cruel to those who contradict his words or desires. However, in the latter case, Tun Fatimah tries to squeeze as much benefit out of the difficult situation and asks him to promise that if she bore him a son, it is him who shall inherit the throne of Melaka.

Now a question of place and location of the meeting. Where did the prospective lovers meet? In the above cases, as is evident, even along the road and in the house during a party to which the sultan was invited. However, in *Hikayat Kulawandu* and *Hikayat Inderaputera* it is in the royal gardens, a backdrop to a romantic rendezvous, which can easily influence the feelings of the protagonists. However, if we turn to the common pantuns which are the expression of the man and woman in the kampong, we see lovers meeting on the river bank, by the well and in the paddy or sugar fields. In *Syair Bidasari*, for example, this accidental meeting takes place during her exile, i.e. in the forest, where the hero and heroine chance upon each other.

In this episode Raja Johan Syah Alam, the hero, approaches a building in the middle of the forest, where he sees a young lady, Bidasari, who seems to him to be asleep. In fact, she is on the brink of death because her soul is kept elsewhere by a jealous queen, and she has no control over her own life.

Sangatlah heran raja pestari
 Seketika lenyap seekor nun
 Di manakah juga ia nan lari
 Maka tak dapat kita mencari?

Dibuka baginda kelambu dewangga
 Dilihatnya ada seorang juga
 Tidur mati beratur naga
 Memeluk sebuah bantal suraga.

[The noble king was, by now amazed,
 and when the bird vanished, he asked,

“Where has the bird fled to?
I cannot find him anywhere!”

The king pulled aside the alcove’s curtain
and saw a solitary figure,
sound asleep, one hand gently on thigh,
clutching an embroidered pillow.] (Millie 96)

She was as sweet as an ocean of honey, a magnificent portrait, and he was full of wonder. Words fail him:

Demilah terpancang kepada mata
Heran tiada terkata-kata
Parasnya seperti tulisan peta
Hilanglah roh di dalam cita.

[As his eyes took in what he saw,
he was too astonished to speak.
A gorgeous face like a painting;
his spirit abandoned his feelings!] (Millie, 98)

This is the moment of love that overcomes his whole being. His soul escapes from his body. He lifts the maiden and kisses her (Malay style, i.e. with his nose on her cheek) and confesses, though she is almost lifeless:

Lenyap bicara kepada baginda
‘Bangunlah tuan bangun adinda’
Lalu diangkatnya akan Encik Bida
Dipeluk dicium sambil bersabda.

Janganlah tuan malukan beta
Kakanda hendak menengar kata
Emas merah ratna juita
Jiwaku terikat di hati beta.

....
‘Mabukku tak dapat dikatakan’
Dipeluk dicium serta diletakkan
Sirih di puan baginda makan
Sepahnya itu baginda taruhkan

Baginda menilik kepada Bidasari
Cinta berahi tiada terperi
‘Aduh tuanku anak-anakan peri .
Menghabisi manis seluruh negeri’

[Reason deserted the king,
 “Wake up, wake up, oh sister!”
 He lifted Bidasari from the platform
 And spoke while embracing and kissing.

“Oh sister, do not be afraid of me,
 I wish only to hear you speak,
 Oh golden child, most precious of jewels,
 My love, you are bound to my heart.”

....

Words cannot express my rupture!
 With embraces and kisses he set her down,
 And chewed on sirih from the bowl.
 He placed the quid on the tray.] (Millie 98)

He is intoxicated with love and confesses that his soul is bonded to hers. In another tale, *Hikayat Raja Kulawandu*, the meeting between Kulawandu and Candra Nurlela, while giving flight to the princess' feelings, suddenly seem to darken with worries about the future. She worries if after sealing her feelings for him he now must return to his homeland: “Di dalam tuan puteri duduk berkata-kata itu sambil tersenyum, serta berdebar-debar hatinya kalau-kalau Putera Jaya Pati itu pulang ke negerinya” (“Hikayat Raja Kulawandu” 95).

The initiative to meet often comes from the man, but in the case of Tun Teja, in *The Epic of Hang Tuah*, it is the love-stricken lady who requests that he comes to her residence. Her house is a great stage for human drama and emotions:

Tun Tuah was standing there. To Tun Teja his countenance appeared as that of a god; it was the same faithful image which had appeared in her dream.

Tun Teja then put her hand out to Tun Tuah, who straightway unwound his sleeve and using it as a polite wrap he received her hand, then led her to the seven layers of nets and curtains, and sat her on a dais made for Princesses and royalty.

Tun Tuah sat below the dais facing her; numerous times did Tun Teja invite him to sit by her side, but Tun Tuah declined. In his heart he said, “Ya rabbi, ya saiyidi, ya maulaya, ya Tuhanku, my God, only You know, really know, and are almighty, and only You know what is in my heart, and that this lady is my mother. Please distance me from any desire for this woman.”

Tun Teja gently pushed her betel container to Tun Tuah in a symbolic invitation. Tun Tuah duly received it with extreme decorum, and Tun Teja stepped down from the dais to sit close to him. Great was Tun Teja's desire for him.

Tun Tuah signalled her to be quiet and began to compose beautiful poems in the quatrains of the *syairs* and the *pantuns* and sang them. The Princess swooned in a delirium of delight listening to the verses, for she

understood the meaning of the lines which advised patience. His voice was extraordinarily melodious and sweet; like that of a person reading the Quran.

When Tun Teja and the maids heard him in song, they were full of wonder and their hearts reached out to him in desire.

As he sang the dawn clouds began to appear. Tun Teja sought leave and returned home to her residence. (*The Epic of Hang Tuah* 213-14)

4. Verbal Lovemaking/ Cumbu-Cumbuan

Sudah gaharu cendana pula
Tetumbu di dalam puan;
Sudah tahu bertanya pula,
Hendak bercumbu gerangan tuan. (*Hikayat Inderaputra* 110)

[First the agila then sandalwood,
The *tetumbu* in the betel grove;
Though you knew, ask you would,
Are you teasing or making love?]

Cumbuan, according to *Kamus Dewan*, is sweet speech or words, or *bujukan/pujukan* (254). Meanwhile, Wilkinson defines it as “mutual lovemaking” (123), also with sweet words or endearments to soften the heart. I would add to these qualities of mutual lovemaking that it is uttered in the music of spoken and sung language. Within it one finds beautiful and heady praises and gracious teasing. Language is the strategic instrument, usually with the assistance from the art of poetry.

In most cases this lovemaking is initiated by the young man, and if the maiden is responsive she would quickly answer him, often in secret codes. It is not words that she answers but his emotions, metaphors and gestures, created with wit and a linguistic elegance.

The character of the male lover is often sketched as a *pencumbu*, seducer, someone who is conversant in the art of verbal seduction. He comes from a literary tradition of hikayat and pantun seducers.

To make love verbally is to praise the beauty and the refined manners of the maiden. But his words may be answered, which may expand it into a dialogue, partly directed by the maiden herself. The eventual target of this verbal seduction is to praise the woman till she surrenders her heart, and in some cases also her body. This seduction is like a bouquet – a poetic bouquet for her, accompanied by suitable graceful gestures that complement the human language and may count as an initial step of sexual love through the medium of language.

These are indeed well-trodden paths (exemplified in literature) that the young man may take – to praise her to the clouds, avoid any negative nuance

and compose the most beautiful pantun or syair. In such a manner he praises her countenance, complexion, her grace and her femininity. They naturally create good feelings in her heart, which in turn initiate positive responses to the man.

Verbal lovemaking thus is a complex and artful game of words, a charade that eventually develops into a contest of emotions. It is therefore not surprising if one reads of situations in which the woman pretends not to believe the man:

Hujung sirih berkedut-kedut,
Susun sampai di kedai Cina;
Kasih tuan membujuk-bujuk,
Kasih tidak kekal lama. (Mohd Thani Ahmad et al 455)

[Betel leaves crinkle at the edges,
Arrange them for the Chinese shop;
Your love is merely of persuasion,
Without passion it may not last for long.]

She retorts that a game of mere seductive words would never lead to a meaningful and lasting love.

At this critical moment it is the most adorned and graceful language (assisted by poetic devices) that win the day and his or her heart. This language is value-added with a beautiful music of the soft sounds of Malay, witty phrases and well-placed metaphors.

In this parley one of the strategies of the woman is to *merajuk*, “sweet sulking,” in which she withdraws into her feelings as a result of being slighted (real or imaginary) because the young man has not been sensitive enough to her needs or feelings. The solution to this predicament is to attempt to *pujuk*, i.e. to flatter the lady with compliments, and to caress her with tender words, says Marsden (52). But *merajuk* has clear connotations of soothing someone’s feelings after they have been ruffled or hurt.

Gurauan, jesting in a gentle manner, becomes a paramount ingredient in *memujuk*, this fine sport of feelings. As it belongs to humour, it is often allowed to transgress (slightly) borders of emotions. But we are warned at the outset that these words should not be taken to heart, for they are composed for sport (Mohd Thani Ahmad et al):

Hendak ke pulau, ke pulau saja,
Ke pulau jangan berdagang ubi;
Hendak bergurau, bergurau saja,
Gurau jangan mengambil hati. (598)

In *Syair Ken Tambuhan* the princess is praised:

Ken Tambuhan tunduk sambil menangis,
rasanya hati bagai dihiris,
dibujuk dengan kata yang manis,
ia menyahut sambil memalis. (Teeuw 280)

[Ken Tambuhan bends to weep,
Her heart felt as though sliced,
She is consoled in words sweet,
But eventually answers, turning her head.]

Ken Tambuhan weeps, for she feels as though her heart is hurt. However, when she is wooed and soothed with the honey of her lover's words, she turns and answers him. Part of the answer is to be read in the glance from the corner of her eye.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Malay to English in this article are by the author.
2. These four early stages of love are the initial and painful steps in the description of love in Malay literature. They are extremely unstable, made more so by protagonists who are quite young (in their early and mid-teen years) and seem to live by their hearts alone. The premonitions and dreams help paint for the young and naive protagonists a path forward, for them to seek out. The next stage is to take a peek at the reality, which is always a beautiful one, deserving of the handsome hero and the exquisitely magnificent heroine.
3. After an image of the real, then they are assisted in their desire to meet. It is this meeting that has become the grand literary stage of the drama of emotions. The scene is acted out in charades, wonderful poetry of praises, and fine subconscious game of feelings. It culminates in verbal lovemaking, a prelude to the binding of the souls.

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