

A. Teeuw, R. Dumas, Muhammad Haji Salleh, R. Tol, and M. J. van Yperen, eds. *A Merry Senhor in the Malay World: Four Texts of the Syair Sinyor Kosta*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004, 2 vol. x-467 pages. (Bibliotheca Indonesica, 30).

Julian Millie, ed. *Bidasari, Jewel of Malay Muslim Culture*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004. 310 pages. (Bibliotheca Indonesica, 31).

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Editions of Malay texts, at least those which care for the philological side of things, are not common. So, we are rather fortunate to see published in so short a time these two attractive books containing careful works on two Malay texts, or perhaps I should say on *six* different texts, since the question of what constitutes a Malay text is a major matter of discussion in these publications. Three important, related books were published simultaneously with these two: an edition by Amin Sweeney of Munsyi Abdullah's two famous travel narratives, a long and thorough discussion of Malay literary writing by Henk Maier, and the very impressive major opus of Vladimir Braginsky.¹ This is certainly not an ordinary crop, and the mere list of references shows that Leiden has kept its leading place in Nusantara philology.

The two texts under review here are in many ways close to each other, as they belong to the same genre and to the same place in time and space. Both of them are long narrative poems built on the same metric scheme (*syair*). Moreover, beside various extensions in time and space, the two texts are related to the area of the Straits of Malacca (Penang, Malacca, Singapore, Riau, Palembang) in the nineteenth century. They reflect the major changes that disrupted and enlivened Malay letters in that period.

These two Leiden publications are part of a famous scholarly series intended for a particular academic audience: students and educated people interested in Malay culture. This fact in itself might be expected to shape their philological options. Malay philology is such a restricted field of research one could surmise that its evolution would be a constant progression, each editor-to-be benefiting from his predecessors' experience. Evidence shows this is not the case, however. The theoretical discourse on Nusantara philology is far too scarce, virtually limited to the introductions to editions of specific texts such as these, and yet it is precisely the philological method used by the editors which makes the essential difference between these publications and the popular editions that continue to be published of the same texts—in Malaysia at least. I will raise this question again below. My discussion begins with the oldest of the two texts, the *Syair Bidasari*.

This text was well known in the Malay world in the nineteenth century. For linguistic reasons specialists tend to agree that it first originated from Palembang and became subsequently popular in a much larger area. A version of it in the Makasar

¹Munsyi Abdullah, *Karya Lengkap Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi, Jilid 1, Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah ke Kelantan, Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah ke Mekah*, ed. Amin Sweeney (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, with École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 2005). Henk Maier, *We Are Playing Relatives: A Survey of Malay Writing* (Leiden: KITLV, 2004). Vladimir Braginsky, *The Heritage of Traditional Malay Literature: A Historical Survey of Genres, Writings, and Literary Views* (Leiden: KITLV, 2004).

language was elaborated between 1830 and 1850 (Millie, p. 17). (It seems safer at this point to bypass discussion of the hypothetical existence of a Maranao version.) Exactly how and where the *Syair Bidasari* circulated has not yet been investigated, and we are no better informed about its age. The text was mentioned for the first time in 1807 (by John Leyden), which is very late. The oldest manuscript we have dates from 1814, and the one chosen by Millie as a basis for his edition from 1825. The first redaction of the text does not seem to be much older—the *Syair* does not appear on the famous old lists of Saint Martin, Werndly, and Valentyn. Among the various opinions expressed regarding its origins, the most reasonable assumption seems to be that of Vladimir Braginsky, namely that “the most probable time of composition for *Syair Bidasari* is the second half of the eighteenth century.”²

Among Westerners too, and quite early, the text had much success. The Dutch translation by Van Hoëvell (1843) was translated into French (by De Backer in 1875), and this into English (by Starkweather in 1901). It is true that Wilkinson had a poor idea of the *Syair*—“When I read Van Hoëvell’s magnificent edition of the *Shair Bidasari*, with his translation and notes, I could not help viewing it as a dull stone in a magnificent setting. It seemed a pity that the talent and power there displayed had not been devoted to a worthier literature” (quoted by Millie, p. 8)—but he seems to have been an exception, and this has to do with the history of Malay philology itself. We have to remember that by 1846, three years after the publication of Van Hoëvell’s edition, there were only eleven texts available in print,³ so that it does not seem so extraordinary that Wilkinson had a sense of priority in his days.

The *Syair Bidasari* is a tale of love and destiny, of a sleeping beauty and an evil queen. The story can be summarized very shortly as follows. As the king of Kembayat is being driven away from his kingdom by a *garuda*, the queen gives birth to a girl who is then abandoned on a river bank. She is found by a rich merchant from the country of Indra Pura. He gives her the name of Bidasari and, in order to prevent her from any harm, he has her life principle (*semangat*) locked in a box together with a fish at the bottom of a basin. Out of jealousy, the local queen, Putri Lela Sari, summons Bidasari, keeps her captive, and tortures her. Bidasari reveals to the queen the secret of her *semangat* box. When the queen takes possession of the box, Bidasari falls into catalepsy. She is returned to her adoptive parents, and she remains unconscious as long as the queen wears the box on her necklace, only regaining consciousness when the queen falls asleep. Her parents hide her in a house in the forest, with a parrot as her sole companion. Then one day it happens that the king of Indra Pura, Johan Mengindera, goes out hunting, finds Bidasari asleep, falls immediately in love with her, and desires to marry her. She tells him her misfortune. The king snatches the box and fish from his queen, so that Bidasari recovers her full life. Then the king has a palace built in the forest and marries Bidasari in spite of the queen’s fury.

Meanwhile, the king of Kembayat weeps, mourning his lost daughter. His son Raja Putra sets out to search for her and manages to find his sister. When he hears where his daughter is living, the king of Kembayat visits the country of Indra Pura. The emotion of the story reaches a climax when the main characters meet again. This happy end is

² Braginsky, *The Heritage of Traditional Malay Literature*, p. 512.

³ This according to E. U. Kratz, “The Editing of Malay Manuscripts and Textual Criticism,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* (BKI) 137,2-3 (1981): 229.

not an ending, however. The prince Raja Putra, engaged in a second quest, so to speak, discovers a princess, Putri Mandudari, locked up in a palace in the forest. She is the daughter of the king Maharaja Lela who has been defeated by the evil king, Afrit Raja Peri. Raja Putra kills the king, delivers the princess, and marries her. Then everybody goes home.

The earliest scholarly editions of this *Syair* were European (the first, in Jawi, published in 1843, was the work of Van Hoëvell; the second, also in Jawi, in 1886, the work of Klinkert), and then “Malay” (the third, in Rumi, in 1978, was the work of Tuti Munawar in Jakarta; the fourth—and last before Millie—also in Rumi, published in 1989, was the work of Jamilah Haji Ahmad in Kuala Lumpur). These four editions “are to a great extent similar.” (Millie, p. 295) However, there are enough (textual and narrative) variations to allow us to distinguish two versions: that of Van Hoëvell-Jamilah and that of Klinkert-Munawar. Klinkert’s and Munawar’s texts are “almost identical” (p. 293), while Van Hoëvell’s and Jamilah’s editions, on the contrary, are different enough to represent two distinct recensions of the Van Hoëvell-Jamilah version.

Among these editions, the first three are by now unavailable; the fourth is most probably out of print; besides, it only represents one specific text among a few recensions. A new edition is therefore much welcome. Millie has chosen not to provide a critical edition of the *Syair*; he limits himself to a strict transcription of one manuscript. The one chosen, Cod.Or. 1964, happens to be part of Van Hoëvell’s recension; it “follows the edition of Van Hoëvell almost word for word.” (p. 284) The reason for this choice is “the fact that, simply put, it contains the most material. This is not intended to imply that it is the most complete or ‘best’ text, but its diversity and richness of content make it an attractive choice for the purposes of research.” (pp. 295-6) This is a typically literary reason, not a philological one. Millie offers a cursory comparison of the four printed texts. Moreover, he mentions (p. 291) the existence of thirteen manuscripts kept in public libraries (plus one, inaccessible, in Sri Lanka). We also know that several popular editions appeared in the nineteenth century,⁴ but Millie does not say a word about these manuscripts and popular editions, so that the basic philological work remains to be done. Millie’s edition has no *apparatus criticus*—something rather surprising in the *Bibliotheca Indonesica*—but he mentions in endnotes a limited number of variants of the four previous editions.

This lack of interest in the philological aspects of the study is such that Millie gives no photographs of any manuscript and does not even describe “his” manuscript. This manuscript (which I was able to have a look at a year ago) shows a few interesting peculiarities: the first word of each stanza is written in red (with several errors); the word *anakanda* is most often spelled *anakda*; a reader, most probably European, has made remarks and corrections in it. This anonymous reader is responsible for some slight revisions that Millie adopted in his edited text, such as: *paduka* (1:4a; the manuscript has nothing); *nyata* (1:5d; the manuscript has *serta*); *seorang* (2:3b; the manuscript has *seo*); *desa* (3:5d; the manuscript has *dewa*), and so forth. This means that

⁴ See Ian Proudfoot, *Early Malay Printed Book: A Provisional Account of Materials Published in the Singapore-Malaysia Area up to 1920* (Kuala Lumpur: Academy of Malay Studies, The Library, University of Malaya, 1993).

Millie prevented himself from adding any corrections to the text of the manuscript but has incorporated emendations made by another, earlier European reader.

Millie states he has transcribed his manuscript without modification; he even talks of “unaltered transliteration” (p. 16) and gives precise details which lead the reader to conclude that his edition is indeed a diplomatic one, i.e. reproducing every single detail of the original, including errors. But it is far from being the case. Every transcription unavoidably involves major modifications and constant choices, and the editor who neglects to discuss her choices tends to ignore the relevant underlying problems and make decisions empirically in an inconsistent way. Millie’s edition actually shows many textual differences with the manuscript. Most are corrections, a few are misreadings (or mistypings). The corrections regard words or spellings: 2:6d, *ia* instead of *itu*; 3:1d, *kalbu* instead of *kablu*; 3:7b, *karangan* instead of *kampung*; etc. These corrections are generally justified but none is explicitly mentioned: Millie refers to some thirty of them in the endnotes but there are others. As for errors, they are of no consequence: for example, 11:6d, *dibawanya* instead of *dibawa*; 14:1a, *pakaian* instead of *pakaiannya*.

Millie’s book is no doubt valuable, and my insistence on what I personally regard as philological flaws is not meant to discredit it in any way; my questions stem from a general concern for the state of the art in the field of Malay studies. To start with, the basic decision to offer a diplomatic edition—if only such a thing could exist—is most questionable. When a manuscript shows obvious errors, what is the point of reproducing them? For instance, in 5:4a, the word *perempuan* at the end of the line (rhyming with *Mandudari, terperi, istri*) is clearly an error for *puteri*, which is Van Hoëvell’s reading; in 28:4a, *di seorang pun* (perfectly nonsensical) is an error for *disorong puan*, which is Jamilah’s reading; in 33:6d, *kuning* is an error for *Gunung*; in 47:4d, *raja* is an error for *durja*. There are some seventy errors of this type. Millie does not correct them in the Malay text, even though they are obvious. But in most cases he corrects them in the translation. In 40:3cd for instance, he transcribes two incorrect lines but translates Klinkert’s corresponding lines.

I personally cannot see any profit in publishing (in the text itself) nonsensical words that obviously resulted from mistakes by the scribe. But this is a strictly personal opinion, and many editors would have made the same choice as Millie; the debate on this issue has been going on since the eve of philology. If we want to take the performance of *syairs* into account, as Millie does, then perhaps we might ask about how the manuscripts were originally used. In fact, they were read aloud before an audience. What then did the reader do when confronted with an error such as *sukacita* (“joy”) instead of *dukacita* (“grief”) (213:4a)? We can be sure he did not pronounce an “s” and look foolish; surely, he saw the mistake and pronounced a “d.” To transcribe and print misspellings and other copying errors means immortalizing slips of the pen. Is that what an edition aims at?

Between the appearance of the first two editions of the *Syair* (Van Hoëvell 1843 and Klinkert 1886) and the following two (Munawar 1978 and Jamilah 1989), or more precisely between 1887 and 1915, ten other editions of the *Syair* were also published. These were not burdened by any scholarly ambitions, for they were “popular” so to speak, that is, merely intended for public reading. Eight are Jawi lithographies, two are Rumi typesettings. It is interesting to ask what differentiates a popular edition from a

scholarly one. Van Hoëvell reproduced one manuscript “with minor changes” (p. 292); Klinkert and Tuti Munawar did the same. It is only in Jamilah’s edition that we find an *apparatus criticus* and an analysis of the text. This means that the first three “scholarly” editions of the text mainly distinguished themselves from the Singapore “popular” editions by their physical presentation. Klinkert’s edition, for instance, without a single word of introduction, was published by Brill in Leiden and was clearly intended for Dutch students of Malay. As for Tuti Munawar’s edition, complete with an academic introduction, it was published in a series distributed by the Ministry of Education and was not available for sale; the pagination of the transcribed manuscript is indicated, and there are several footnotes. But if we set aside these technicalities, it transpires that the editor’s treatment of the text is much similar to that of the Singapore publisher Haji Muhammad Taib who published a transcription of the *Syair* in 1892. Millie, in his turn, transcribes one manuscript, supposedly “without alteration” (p. 294), but in fact quite freely and without *apparatus criticus*, as we have seen above.

Millie’s transcription is printed side-by-side with an English translation. This is quite an impressive achievement. The text of the *Syair* is long, its language is difficult, not to mention the problems inherent to the translation of poetry. Millie has chosen to give priority to meaning over form and to make use of a “romantic prose style.” (p. 19) This translation will not only be useful for readers who do not have access to the Malay text, it also functions as a commentary on that text, inasmuch as it represents an interpretation of the narrative and as such justifies the editor’s approach to problems raised by the transcription itself.

The analysis of the text occupies the second part of the book. It is short (sixty pages), but extremely interesting and important. Millie draws inspiration from the work of Robert Dumas on the *Teater Abdulmuluk* in South Sumatra, as well as, in a lesser way, the editions, by Tenas Effendy and William A. Collins, respectively, of two traditional, orally transmitted texts (*Bujang Tan Domang* and *The Guritan of Radin Suane*) in Malay dialects from South Sumatra. This is entirely new in the field of *syair* studies. It is even astounding that the numerous analyses of Malay individual *hikayat* and *syair* in scholarly literature so far have practically ignored the way in which these texts used to be performed, as narratives recited for an audience. Millie states from the beginning: “it has been a high priority in these chapters to steer the mode of interpretation away from the consumption habits I am most comfortable with (the silent reading typical of print culture), and address the text’s potential in the light of reciting, listening, and performance.” (p. 8)

Thus Millie examines the influence that the oral, or theatrical, dimension of the text may have had on its structure, its rhythm, its composition, and its language. This oral aspect seems indeed overwhelmingly important in the case of this *Syair*. Out of the thirteen manuscripts we know, twelve are kept in European libraries, so they may have had no life in any Malay setting. Therefore, the only evidence we have of the popularity of the *Syair* derives from reports of its usage as part of the repertoire of a popular theater in the town of Padang, as well as the rural Mendu theater. A Dutch observer writing near the end of the nineteenth century, Ch. E. P. van Kerckhoff, witnessed theatrical performances of Malay *syairs*, including the *Syair Bidasari*, in West Sumatra (Millie, p. 238). The actors knew the text by heart and recited it in fixed melodies with the accompaniment of a small orchestra, but from time to time actors

playing minor characters (for instance, a court lady or a champion) improvised comic scenes interspersed with rude jokes in the local language (in this case, Minangkabau). Robert Dumas observed a similar practice in the theatrical performance of the *Syair Abdul Muluk* in South Sumatra a hundred years later (in the 1990s); in this case, the interludes sometimes took the shape of *pantun* (monorhyme quatrains). (Millie, p. 232) However, the Malay manuscript that Millie uses, which dates from 1825, cannot have been written for the stage, as Malay theater only emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century.

This *Syair* has a strong didactic component. Millie shows that instructions about good behavior and proper values are mainly aimed at women and communicated both through positive and negative examples (the virtuous princess vs. the evil queen). Concerning this aspect of the *syair*, he quotes the judgment of Wilkinson: "The folklore and fairy tales that the people loved had to be committed to writing by pedantic scribes who never hesitated about interpolating moral reflections of their own." (p. 285) This remark actually illuminates a distinction between oral tales and written texts, which corresponds to the division between performance studies and philology. Written texts like the *Syair Bidasari* have a history in which scribes, pedantic or not, must have played a decisive role, notably when moral and social values were concerned. This is probably the case with the intriguing Islamic element present in the *Syair*. The love scene between Sultan Johan Mengindra and Bidasari is described in terms of a mystic union. If we combine this theme with the ongoing theme concerning Bidasari's soul (half-alive and half-dead, prisoner and freed), we may wonder whether the *Syair* originally contained a mystical message that progressively lost its structure and overall significance, or whether, on the contrary, individual Islamic elements were added to it over time.

One of the strongest points in Millie's analysis concerns the structure of the *Syair*. The manuscript chosen by Millie belongs to the recension that has an "additional" episode in which a secondary plot, with new protagonists, commences after the first plot has been concluded. A. Teeuw, in his 1966 edition of the *Syair Ken Tambuhan*, had noted the existence of a "long version" of the work showing the same characteristic. He had given preference to the short version, regarding the second plot as superfluous and without structural links with the first—in other words, as a clumsy addition. Millie remarks that one version of the *Syair Yatim Nestapa* also contains this double plot and draws the conclusion that this double structure (one plot followed by a quest), which he calls the "common plot," is authentic and should be granted serious attention instead of dismissed.

One of the merits of Millie's work is that it "rehabilitates" this "common plot." It is certainly possible that what looks today like the awkward juxtaposition of two narratives was inherited from a story in which this two-part text was more coherent. By citing Teeuw and the "Western traditions of scholarship," Millie implies that this preference for short, apparently more coherent, stories has been the choice of Westerners. This is an example of what this study could have gained from a philological approach. An examination of the manuscripts and ancient popular editions would have shown what choices the Malay scribes and performers made regarding the double plot.

If we now turn to the edition of the *Syair Sinyor Kosta*, prepared by Teeuw, Dumas, Muhammad Haji Salleh, Tol, and van Yperen, we cannot help but be struck by the contrast between the two poems. The first evident difference lies in the metrics and language, but no less patent is the difference in genres. *Bidasari* belongs to the old tradition incorporating fairy-like situations exemplifying social norms, while *Sinyor Kosta* shows real characters indulging in immoral behavior.

The *Syair Sinyor Kosta* has had an unusual status as it has long been included in the main handbooks on Malay literature, whereas its first academic edition (by Mohd Yusof Md. Nor) only dates from 1986. J. Pijnappel registered his severe judgment of the poem in 1870: "It is a worthless rag, though dressed up in fine garb" (in Dutch, p. 4); his comment was elegantly translated by Winstedt as "a trifle but pretty." Winstedt himself, in 1939, was more positive: "It is alive and vivid and novel in style and topic, being in fact one of the few genuinely Malay works ..." Much later, in 1994, V. I. Braginsky praised this *syair* enthusiastically. The editors of the *Syair Sinyor Kosta* have devoted a 467-page study to it, in which they aptly analyze and demonstrate its many qualities.

The plot of the *Syair Sinyor Kosta* is fairly simple, even though it becomes somewhat vague if one attempts to summarize the events common to the different versions. A European merchant pays a visit to a Malay town. While walking through it, he sees a young Burmese woman who is the wife (or concubine) of a Chinese trader, and he falls in love with her. Thanks to the patient labors of a Balinese go-between, she accepts his advances and agrees to elope with him. When the Chinese husband gives a farewell party for the departing European, and while most guests are drunk, the couple run away and set sail. The husband sails after them until they reach the land of Portugal and, with the help of Europeans, attacks them on sea. The endings are different in the various versions: in some, the young couple lives happily ever after, while in others the European merchant, or even both he and the young woman, die in the naval battle.

There are four different versions of this story. The first ("C") is found in one manuscript only, the oldest we know of the *Syair*, copied by Ibrahim ibn Fakir Kandu in Pulau Pinang in 1806. We know (mainly thanks to C. Skinner and A. Gallop) a few things about this Munsyi Ibrahim, who seems to have been an extremely interesting character. He was acquainted with Munsyi Abdullah and certainly deserves to be compared with him, if only we had more information about his life and deeds. If he produced the oldest, surviving manuscript of this narrative, could he be the author of the oldest version? It seems more probable that he wrote down a story already in existence, be it as a written text or an oral tale, for since he was closely associated with and admiring of the English in Pinang, he would not have spoken of Malacca as a town under Dutch control, since it was under the British during his time. In any case, according to the editors, his "manuscript never fulfilled any function or role in Malay society, as it passed into European hands immediately after its completion." (p. 339) The second version ("B") is also found in just a single manuscript, copied by a scribe originating from Riau. The third version ("D"), also recorded in a single manuscript, is signed by the ruler of Palembang, Sultan Badaruddin, who probably composed it before 1821 or even before 1811. (p. 407) The sultan seems to have made a deliberate effort to depart from the common versions, and he succeeded to such a degree that his poem is not literally comparable to the other versions. It is only with the fourth version

("T") that we have at our disposal various specimens of a particular narrative (four manuscripts and ten popular editions published between 1871 and 1908). "T" is close to "B" and seems to be "an embellished and expanded version" of it. (p. 345)

A stemma on p. 347 sums up the respective situations of these four versions. The story probably existed in oral form before being put into writing. Three versions came out of this original *syair*: "C" (Penang, 1806), "D" (Palembang, before 1820), and the prototype of "B" and "T," which gave birth to these two versions in the 1840s. These four versions are free reworkings of a given story. It is fascinating to see the diversity of shapes taken by the story; not only are the texts literally diverse, but the plot itself has undergone profound modifications: location, political context, nationality of the protagonists, and conclusions all vary from one version to the next. In "C" and "B," the story unfolds in Malacca under Dutch authority; the main character is a Portuguese; the Chinese merchant obtains help from the Dutch or the British, respectively. In "T," the context blurs: some internal evidence indicates the story is set in Malacca under the Dutch but every specific mention of location has been erased. Lastly in "D," Sultan Badaruddin has reshaped the story to accommodate the milieu of the Indies: the action is situated in Batavia, and Sinyor is a Dutch police clerk. As for the conclusions, they vary according to the authors' fancies: in "C," the Portuguese lover dies in the naval battle and the Chinese husband gets his wife back; in "B," a second battle costs both lovers their lives (Siti stabs herself after the death of Sinyor). In "D," on the contrary, the two lovers are safe, sound, and happy; they marry off their two servants, who engage in erotic games.⁵ In the most recent and common version ("T"), the two lovers escape from their enemies and end up living happily in Portugal. In this diversity of the different endings, the creativity of the individual authors is most evident, as it does not follow the stemma.

Up until now, the *Syair Sinyor Kosta* was only available in a recent edition published in Malaysia (Mohd Yusof Md. Nor, 1986) which was a "faithful transliteration" (p. 8) of one manuscript of "T." Facing this situation (four versions, one edition), the editors have adopted the most original and daring option—that of not only giving a definitive critical edition of the text but also reflecting all the variety of the story (besides various analyses, they give one facsimile, four editions, and two translations). This is an unprecedented enterprise.

Version "T" is given prominence; the editors give readers the facsimile of one manuscript, a critical edition of this version, and a translation of the latter. Moreover, this edition, based on eight textual witnesses (four manuscripts, two Jawi lithographies, and two printings of one ancient edition in Latin characters), follows the most unexpected principles. The editors have established the stemma of the textual witnesses (no detail is provided concerning its elaboration). It shows that there are three "subarchetypes" (x, y, z) of this version, one of them (y) being closer to the archetype than the other two. On this basis, most editors-to-be would certainly have chosen to edit this "y" subarchetype in one way or another, but here the editors have opted for an edition based on all three subarchetypes according to the following principle: "Wherever two of the three subarchetypes have a reading in common that is

⁵ Sultan Badaruddin is also believed to be the author of the *Syair Nuri*, the theme of which is similar to the theme of the *Syair Sinyor Kosta*, but in the *Syair Nuri* he was far more moralistic: the two young characters in this narrative suffer from the pangs of love but never succumb to them. (p. 21)

different from the third, this reading is included in our edited version." (p. 32) This looks very much like trying to reconstruct some kind of original text, of which the actual witnesses would only be faulty reproductions, something which has long been rejected by editors of Malay texts for the reason that there is nothing, in Malay literature, like an "original" work that one could try to reconstruct; various versions of one text are all equally authentic, and various manuscripts of one version all have a specific value. The editors of the *Syair Sinyor Kosta* are, of course, perfectly aware of this. One of their aims is precisely to show the value of all witnesses of this story. Yet they have chosen to produce "a hypothetical text that most probably never existed as such," "an ideal representative of this particular SSK version," (p. 34) because they were not trying to reconstruct "the" text of the *Syair* but merely to get as close as possible to the common ancestor of the eight witnesses of one version of the story.

Not everybody will agree that this approach is acceptable. One striking argument in favor of it is that whenever a variant reading could be said to be better than another, there is not a single case (in more than a hundred) where the rejected reading found in one subarchetype is superior to the reading presented in common by the other two (p. 34); moreover, this accepted common reading "frequently corresponds to the reading in "B." (p. 38) There is no reason to decide whether this edition is essentially "better" than, let's say, a critical edition of subarchetype "y." Its systematic method is, in itself, very attractive.

The three other texts, all existing in single manuscripts, are simply transcribed. The edition of "C," for instance, is referred to as a "transliteration" (p. viii). However, the endnotes to various stanzas (10, 19, 42, 63, 75, 93, 105) show that (fortunately) emendations have been made to the text and scribal errors are consigned to the *apparatus criticus*.

The editors include a facsimile of one manuscript that belongs to the "T" version. It is a copy made in 1865–66 by a scribe, Haji Ibrahim of Riau, who recently became famous thanks to the work of Jan van der Putten. Here again, thanks to the minute work of modern philologists, we see emerging the local erudites (Haji Ibrahim, Munsyi Ibrahim, Munsyi Abdullah, and their numerous colleagues) who contributed significantly to the survival of Malay literature but whose names have been overshadowed by those of their illustrious European patrons. Unfortunately, Haji Ibrahim's handwriting is far from being attractive (contrary to Munsyi Ibrahim's, which is handsome), and one wonders why his manuscript was selected, especially since it probably did not circulate in Malay circles any more than Munsyi Ibrahim's manuscript had sixty years earlier, since it was apparently copied for Klinkert.

There is a curious tradition regarding the proper names in this *Syair*. Among the numerous epithets attached to the protagonists, some would be considered names (Gilang, Dandi, Lela Bujang, Maya, Rangga) and others adjectives (*rawan*, *tuan*, *tuan jiwa*, *sakti*, *bujang*, *yang bangsawan*). Mohd Yusof Md. Nor followed this practice, and it goes back even farther in time, as some editions of the nineteenth century were entitled *Syair Sinyor Lela Bujang* or *Syair Sinyor Gilang*. In the Malay texts in this book, the difference is only a typographic matter: *bujang* is written with a small letter, Lela Bujang with capitals. But in the translation, it does make a difference when the Sinyor is called Gilang and Rangga instead of being qualified as "the radiant" and "the noble."

One of the most striking features of the *Syair* is its unusual metric structure: each line is made of four dissyllabic words. Exceptions are not rare, but this overall characteristic gives the text an exceptional rhythm and a regularity that are very attractive. Most lines have the same number of syllables (eight) according to the same structure (twice two). These dissyllabic lines make up only 59 percent of the total in "C," but 80 percent in "D," and 94 percent in "T" (and more or less the same in "B"), which means that this feature is part of the evolution of the poem through time. The editors have interesting comments on this topic. Among other things, they remark that even though the narrative is rather simple lexically, it is often ambiguous or obscure as a result of the exceptional simplicity of morphology and syntax. The almost systematic omission of affixes, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, and other grammatical elements leads to the juxtaposition of four word-bases, whose grammatical categories and relations to one another are not always clear.

The language of this *Syair* is unusual too. According to the editors, "In a way the language, in particular in version T, can be said to be a *lingua franca* or *pasar* kind of Malay." (p. 388) As for version "D" (supposed to be the work of a Sultan), Muhammad Haji Salleh states that: "It is interesting to note that the language used is a strange mixture of literary and bazaar Malay," some kind of "*peranakan* or bazaar form" of Malay. (p. 307) The editors even go so far as to describe this variety of the language as having a "babah Malay flavour" and suggest that the *Syair* might have been written by an author of Chinese origin. Mohd Yusof Md. Nor (1986: 18) had already argued that the *Syair* had been written by a non-Malay. This possibility should certainly not be neglected, but the various terms these editors use to characterize the language are surprising. Van der Tuuk had spoken of the "popular dialect of Malacca," and Winstedt of "colloquial Malay." (p. 388) One typical example quoted by the editors (p. 388) is the highly idiomatic line "*lihat Cina punya bini.*" But there seems to be some difference between "colloquial," on the one hand, and "pasar, bazaar," "*peranakan*," "babah," or "lingua franca," on the other. At the same time, the editors remark that the vocabulary, as well as comparisons and various literary references in the "T" text, show that "its author was certainly well versed in Malay literature." (p. 388) This suggests that the authors of the *Syair Sinyor Kosta* deliberately made use of an unusual linguistic register—that of everyday language and popular expressions—in the same way that they deliberately restricted themselves to four dissyllabic bases per line. This very metric, with the absence of affixes, prepositions, and conjunctions, contributes to the simplistic appearance of the language.

The book contains two translations. That of the "T" text aims at being literal rather than poetic: "the main objective was to give an idea of the content of the story for the benefit of readers who do not understand Malay. So maximal semantic equivalence was aimed at first and foremost." (p. 252) Indeed, the translators (mainly M. J. van Yperen) did not endeavor to reproduce rhymes, rhythm, or even semantic units: "The only original feature that has been preserved here, in fact, is the quatrain structure." (p. 252) The translation is actually more ambitious than one would guess from these statements; it is elegant and has its own esthetic quality. It is also an important complement to the edition. This translation is perfect as it is. I will only remark that, in the case of a poem like this one, where the form is so spectacularly normative, where referential elements are so elusive, and where the vocabulary is rather simple, it is not so evident that the semantic content was the most important element to transmit in a

translation. One might have considered sacrificing a bit of sense in order to keep more of the form.

The translation of "D," on the contrary, is purposely very free: "This is thus not a translation. It is emphatically a recreation, a recomposition from the work of the famous Sultan Badaruddin of Palembang." (p. 304) The translator (Muhammad Haji Salleh) is a well-known poet in both Malay and English, and I would not dare say a word about the quality of his translation. However, one wonders why so many rhymes are reduced to assonances or even totally left out.

The editors give a "mimetic" analysis of the four versions, seeking to determine "the extent to which they represent the socio-cultural reality of the nineteenth-century Malay world in which the poem is set." (p. 2) The result is somewhat frustrating; the poem is modern and realistic, but at the same time references to a given reality are rare. The most striking feature in this regard is the absence of any Malay character in the story; the Malay audience must have taken pleasure in the adventures and misadventures of these foreigners battling each other in a Malay harbor. One could even see in this *Syair* a prefiguration of the *Nyai* stories that would become so popular somewhat later in the nineteenth century. Lela Mayang is not the pure and innocent heroine of the stories of old, even though her virtue is more or less safe, as she only succumbs to the Sinyor's approaches after the go-between has used a magic charm. No character is a model of virtue in this narrative. The editors offer an original evaluation of this absence of morality:

... all four principal characters are seen to pursue their own goals and interests and to shun no method of achieving their objectives. This is probably the most conspicuous sign of the modernity of the text ... Literature is no longer concerned with values. It may provide entertainment irrespective of moral principles. (p. 397)

And yet they immediately adopt the opposite point of view when, proceeding "one step further," they consider the possibility that the ultimate (and highly moral) signification of this story could be that

... in an urban, modernizing society dominated by foreigners and economic values and interests, religion goes out of the window and morals are thrown overboard. It thus serves as a warning and a mirror to Malay readers. ... It is a dangerous world, of which they should steer clear. (p. 397)

These two volumes consider the *Syair Sinyor Kosta* from just about every angle, and it is impossible to review all the information and analyses contained in them. For instance, one finds an extremely detailed and precious study of rhymes here. This book is original in many ways, among other things because it is the result of a collective effort and because it gives two translations, totally different in their respective approaches, of two closely related texts. But probably its most remarkable achievements, which will carve this publication date in the history of Malay philology, are the kaleidoscopic presentation it offers of one Malay text in all its dimensions and its unprecedented editing approach, which shapes a new version "T" by adopting concurring readings in accordance with the stemma.

One of the questions raised by these two books concerns the nature of Malay texts. The *Syair Bidasari* has been mainly known through what seems to be a truncated version, and Millie “rehabilitates,” so to speak, what must have been its primary, more complete, form. In the case of the *Syair Sinyor Kosta*, on the other hand, its editors lavishly demonstrate that we are facing four different versions, all of which equally deserve to bear this title. To what extent, then, can we speak of “the” *Syair Bidasari* and “the” *Syair Sinyor Kosta*?

These two books are mines of information and studies of a rich legacy to which this review cannot fully do justice. It is interesting to know that, in addition to appearing in these printed texts, the two *Syairs* are recorded in the online Concordance Project initiated by Ian Proudfoot at the Australian National University some fifteen years ago. This is one of the most ambitious and useful projects ever launched in the field of Malay philology, and the benefit already drawn from it by researchers and students is invaluable. Thanks to this website (www.anu.edu.au/asianstudies/ahcen/proudfoot/MCP/), eighty-six titles can be searched lexically; most are Malay works in the fields of literature, history, and the law. Since we now have at our disposal the two *syairs* in these two forms—the printed texts and the Concordance version—we have all the tools required for studying their place in the broader context of Malay literature.