
MODERNITY AND DECADENCE IN *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* FICTION OF THE DUTCH EMPIRE

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Can we afford to leave anxiety out of the story of the empire?
Ranjit Guha²

The family isn't what it was. It is a *grandeur déchue*, child, a regular *grandeur déchue*. The Van Lowes were something once. There was never much money, but we didn't care about money and we always managed. But the family used to count ... in India [the Indies], at the Hague. Which of you will ever have a career like your Grandpapa's, like your Papa's? No, we shall never see another governor-general in the family, nor yet a cabinet minister. It's a *grandeur déchue*, a *grandeur déchue* ...

Louis Couperus³

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² Ranjit Guha, "Not at Home in Empire," *Critical Inquiry* 23 (Spring 1997): 486.

³ *The Books of the Small Souls*, vol. III, p. 71. In this quotation, India (D *Indië*) refers to the Dutch Indies and *grandeur déchue* can be translated from the French as "fallen splendor." The ellipses are in the original. The use of French phrases was common in Couperus's, and other writers', fiction depicting Holland's upper bourgeoisie. For this essay, I use the Dutch edition: Louis Couperus, *De boeken der kleine zielen*, 7th ed. (Amsterdam: P. N. Van Kampen & Zoon N. V., n. d.). This edition contains all four volumes, including *De Kleine Zielen* [*The Small Souls*], which was written in Nice, France, from February–May 1901; *Het Late Leven* [*The Later Life*], written from May–June 1901; *Zielenschemering* [*Twilight of the Souls*], written from July–November 1901; and *Het Heilige Weten* [*The Sacred Knowledge*], written from January–August 1902. The English translation of all four volumes that I use is: Louis Couperus, *The Books of the Small Souls*, trans.

This essay compares Dutch metropolitan culture as portrayed in Louis Couperus's *fin-de-siècle* novels of Den Haag with Dutch Indies colonial culture as depicted in the novellas and short fiction of Tirta Adhi Soerjo, upper-class Javanese journalist, editor, and fiction writer of the early twentieth century. Both Couperus and Tirta turned away from careers in the civil service of the colonial Indies, which their families wanted them to pursue, and both became prolific writers of fiction and nonfiction. Themes of imperial modernity and sexual degeneracy permeate the works of both, producing dread (*D angst*) and melancholia in the work of Couperus and haunting anxiety in Tirta's fiction, too, despite the author's enchantment with capital, desire, and fashion.⁴ After being called upon for information and protected by the Dutch Governor-General J. B. van Heutsz (r. 1904–09) in the first decade of the twentieth-century, Tirta was rejected by the new colonial administration, attacked by his enemies, and exiled from Java after van Heutsz left office. In Couperus's novels discussed in this essay, melancholic repetitions obscured the connections between the decadence of both Dutch and Indies colonial bureaucracies and phantasies and phantoms of empire.⁵ Tirta's outspoken stories published in newspapers he both owned and edited veiled his recognition of his own complicity with colonialism, even as they sutured Indies subjects into Tirta's visions for the future of *Hindia Belanda*, the Dutch Indies. Tirta's great disappointment lay in the Indies government's failure to recognize his nobility, his modernity, and his cogent understanding of Java's backwardness. This essay traces the transnational movement of bodies, fashions, phantasies, and memories between colony and metropole by analyzing the novels and novellas of Tirta and Couperus as "situated testimonies" in *fin-de-siècle* Dutch and Dutch Indies literary archives.⁶

Despite his colonial background, Louis Couperus (1863–1923), an author of almost forty Dutch novels, stands arguably within the mainstream of Dutch literature (*D literatuur*). Couperus spent five-and-a-half years of his adolescence in the Indies, years that had a lasting effect on his life and literary work. In 1899, at the age of thirty-six, he spent another year in the Indies—where he began his celebrated and only novel about the Dutch Indies, *The Hidden Force* (*D De stille kracht*) of 1900—and he returned once again as a travel writer for several months near the end of his life.⁷ Thus, Couperus is

Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1932 [1914]). Mattos, Couperus's main translator, changed the title of the fourth book to *Dr. Adriaan*.

⁴ Melancholia is a psychoanalytical term for clinical depression. In the late nineteenth century, Elizabeth of Austria, wife of the Habsburg Emperor Franz Joseph, remained the famous melancholic icon of the age, especially after the suicide/murder of the crown prince, Rudolf, and his lover. See Frederic Morton, *A Nervous Splendor: Vienna 1888–1889* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1980); and Edward Crankshaw, *The Fall of the House of Habsburg* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1983). The idea of melancholia is investigated in this essay.

⁵ I use the spelling "phantasy" as opposed to the English "fantasy," the French *fantaisie*, or the German *phantasie* to distinguish a psychoanalytic use of the term. The French, German, and English spellings and definitions of this word have more benign connotations, referring to imagination and daydreams. For more on this question of spelling, as well as a Freudian definition of "phantasy," see the entry on phantasy (fantasy) in J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York, NY, and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1973 [1967]), pp. 314–19. As Laplanche and Pontalis point out, there is no consistency in the variant spellings of these terms.

⁶ For more on the idea of literary archives and novels as situated testimonies, see Laurie J. Sears, "Reading Ayu Utami: Notes toward a Study of Trauma and the Archive in Indonesia," *Indonesia* 83 (April 2007): 17–40; and Laurie J. Sears, *Dread and Enchantment in Indonesian Literary Archives*, forthcoming.

⁷ Danilyn Rutherford, "Unpacking a National Heroine," *Indonesia* 55 (April 1993): 40, fn. 62, draws attention to Louis Couperus's own translation of *stille kracht* as "quiet strength." This translation appears

only tangentially a writer of *Indische Letteren* (Indies letters), novels that describe Dutch habitual life in the colonial Indies. Couperus came from a prominent family of upper-class colonial bureaucrats, old Indies hands who retired to Den Haag, after either a few years or a lifetime spent in the Indies.⁸ Many scholars and critics cite Couperus's *Haagsche romans* (Den Haag novels), which captured habitual life in and around Den Haag at the turn of the last century, among his best works. These works include the naturalist early novel *Eline Vere* (1889), and the psychological novels *The Books of Small Souls* (four volumes, 1901–02), as well as the 1906 novel with a truly untranslatable title, *Old People and Things that Pass By* (*Van oude mensen, de dingen, die voorbij gaan*). Before Couperus, the Dutch literary scene had been centered in Amsterdam, and some critics credit Couperus with putting Den Haag on the literary map.⁹ In addition to being a celebrated author of Dutch literature and *Indische Letteren*, Couperus is also included in the small circle of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century writers of “decadent” literature, as it was called at the time.¹⁰ Married to a close cousin and considered a dandy, Couperus was known as an effeminate writer. Because decadence and effeminacy were dangerous attributes to display in his day, especially if equated with homosexuality, Couperus kept his personal life hidden.

Trauma, Hypnosis, and Phantasies

At the same time that Couperus and Tirto were writing their literary works, new discourses regarding memory and trauma and their treatment by hypnosis and catharsis were developing in France, Germany, and Austro-Hungary. Sigmund Freud was one of the neurologists working in this field in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Newer evaluations of Freud's *oeuvre* see psychoanalysis as both a colonizing

in his “Introduction” to the first English translation by Agnes Louise Symmers of Raden Adjeng Kartini, *Voor duisternis tot licht: gedachten over en voor het Javaansche volk* ('s-Gravenhage: “Luctor et Emergo,” 1912). See Raden Adjeng Kartini, *Letters of a Javanese Princess*, trans. Agnes Louise Symmers (New York, NY: A. A. Knopf, 1920). *De stille kracht* is the only one of his novels that allows Couperus to be included among the writers of the Dutch *Indische Letteren* (Indies letters). For surveys of this literature, see Rob Nieuwenhuys, *Mirror of the Indies: A History of Dutch Colonial Literature* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), which is a selective translation of *Oost-Indische Spiegel: Wat Nederlandse schrijvers en dichters over Indonesië hebben geschreven, vanaf de eerste jaren der Compagnie tot op heden* (Amsterdam: Em. Querido, 1972); and E. M. Beekman, *Troubled Pleasures: Dutch Colonial Literature from the East Indies, 1600–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). See also the Dutch journal *Indische Letteren*, published in Leiden.

⁸ For biographical information about Couperus in English, see Beekman, *Troubled Pleasures*, pp. 253–91; and for discussions in Dutch see, among others, Frédéric Bastet's lengthy and detailed *Louis Couperus: Een biografie* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1987). See also the Dutch website <http://www.louiscouperus.nl/> for listings of novels, correspondences, reviews in both Dutch and English, and works by and about Couperus.

⁹ Top Naeff et al., “Bij de Verzamelde Werken van Louis Couperus,” *Over Louis Couperus* (Amsterdam: De Samenwerkende Uitgevers, 1952), pp. 5–9.

¹⁰ Beekman, *Troubled Pleasures*, p. 255. See also p. 258, where Beekman notes: “He [Couperus] was caricatured by his numerous detractors as an effeminate fop who was neurotically obsessed with ‘unwholesome’ aspects of life, ranging from erotic debauchery to effete snobbery.” See also George C. Schoolfield, *A Baedeker of Decadence: Charting a Literary Fashion, 1884–1927* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2003). In this book, Schoolfield devotes a chapter on Holland to Couperus, one on England to Oscar Wilde, one on Sweden to August Strindberg, and one on Austria to Rainier Maria Rilke, among others. Baudelaire was perhaps the classic “decadent” writer of the nineteenth century.

discourse and a postcolonial method of literary analysis.¹¹ Yet late-nineteenth-century debates over connections between trauma and hysteria can be useful in tracing the hysterical behaviors and the return of traumas experienced by Couperus's characters in his novels of Den Haag and the Indies. Freud commented on the need to distinguish traumatic neuroses from traumatic hysteria in his work with Josef Breuer in 1895.¹² But Couperus's ideas about hysteria and hypnosis seem more similar to French ideas on these topics, as represented in the work of Jean-Martin Charcot, in Paris, and in that of Charcot's rival Hippolyte Bernheim, in Nancy, in their debates of the late 1880s and early 1890s. The young hero of Couperus's *Small Souls* quartet is a physician who uses hypnosis and treats patients who are afflicted with hysteria and traumatic neuroses. Couperus and Tirta Adhi Soerjo were writing their essays, novels, and novellas at the same time that these discourses of trauma and neurosis were coming into focus in the emerging European "science" of psychoanalysis.

I am not arguing that either Couperus or Tirta read Freud's works, but I am suggesting that Couperus's work, in particular, both drew on and depicted the emerging discourses of trauma and hypnosis that were circulating in turn-of-the-century Europe.¹³ At a time when Freud's world—the Austro-Hungarian Empire—was falling apart, questions of empire were intertwined in these emerging discourses in France and Holland.¹⁴ In Holland, colonial questions were debated in government and nongovernment forums, and appeared in turn-of-the-century literary works. I discuss the phantasies, or hallucinations, that characterized the victims of trauma and neuroses in Freud and Josef Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria*. In these *fin de siècle* literary works, family secrets escaped and blossomed into colonial phantasies. These phantasies included ideas of Dutch racial degeneration in the Indies, the early sexual maturation believed to be prevalent in the Indies, and the connections between phantasies and melancholia.¹⁵ I return to these ideas often in this essay and discuss, at the end, how

¹¹ Classic texts in the field of psychoanalysis and colonialism include the works of Frantz Fanon, a trained psychiatrist, and Albert Memmi. Several of the essays in Homi K. Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) are key works. See also Ashis Nandy, *The Savage Freud and other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); and Ranjana Khanna's important *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

¹² Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, ed. and trans. James Strachey with Anna Freud (New York: Basic Books, 1957 [1895], reprinted 2000), pp. 4–6.

¹³ See Keith Foulcher, "Bumi Manusia and Anak Semua Bangsa: Pramoedya Ananta Toer enters the 1980s," *Indonesia* 32 (October 1981): 1–15 at page 4, where he comments on the psychoanalytical side of the character Dr. Martinet, Nyai Ontosoroh's family doctor in *Bumi Manusia*. Speaking of Minke's relationship with Nyai's daughter Annalies in the novel, Foulcher notes: "Through his own relationship with her [Annalies], and his discussions with her doctor, Martinet, who is exploring the new world of psychoanalysis, Minke begins to understand that the fragility of Annalies' personality relates to Nyai Ontosoroh's attempt to express through her daughter a part of herself, and keep it protected from the world." I suggest this supports the idea that Tirta was familiar with the emerging field of psychoanalysis and that Pramoedya probably found articles on psychoanalysis in the newspapers of the first decade of the twentieth century. I myself found essays referring to Freud's ego psychology in the newspapers of the second decade of the twentieth century. See Laurie J. Sears, *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1996), chapter three.

¹⁴ For one of the most respected books on "Freud's world," see Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1980 [1961]).

¹⁵ For more on the phantasm and its associations with melancholia, see Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis, MN, and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993 [1977]), especially pp. 22–25, 38–39, 74–77. See also the classic essay by Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," *The International Journal of Psycho-*

they extend the work of Ann L. Stoler on the “education of desire.”¹⁶ The colonial bureaucrats and cosmopolitan characters, educated and mobile inhabitants of Batavia and Den Haag, who appeared in Tirtó’s and Couperus’s works suggest a cross-fertilization of languages and ideas, as Couperus’s novels were peppered with Indies words and phrases, and Tirtó’s use of popular or *lingua franca* Malay absorbed Dutch words and phrases, as well as French and English—languages Tirtó would have studied in school—as well as Arabic words common in Batavian Malay.

Tirtó Adhi Soerjo

Tirtó Adhi Soerjo (1875?–1918) was one of the first Javanese, as opposed to Chinese or Eurasian, writers to take the popular Malay language of the streets and of journalism, and use it to write short stories and novellas in the first decade of the twentieth century. From the middle of the nineteenth century, Dutch scholars had advocated and nurtured a different literary form of Malay with little success; this was the so-called Riau-style Malay promoted by the Dutch colonial publishing house, the Balai Poestaka (Bureau of Popular Literature, *D Commissie voor de Volkslectuur*), in the early decades of the twentieth century.¹⁷ The Malay preferred by Dutch colonial bureaucracy, by Dutch schools, and by the Balai Poestaka at first had to cede popularity to *lingua franca* Malay. By the 1930s, pressures from the Balai Poestaka, and its publication and celebration of Sumatran writers, for whom Malay was often a first language, finally succeeded in representing Riau-style Malay as the most appropriate literary language for the nationalist movement; by this time, all the non-cooperating nationalists had died or been exiled. The spoken language was always more informal than the written one, however, and Javanese, Chinese, Dutch, and Sundanese influences made Indonesian Malay continue to develop as a heteroglossic language. In Tirtó’s day, a hybrid language, made from a blending of various forms of Malay, was

Analysis 49/1 (1968), originally published in French as “Fantasme originaire, fantasmes des origines, origine du fantasme” in *Les Temps Modernes* 19,215 (1964); and, for a lighter look, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), chapter one.

¹⁶ Ann L. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1995).

¹⁷ The *Commissie voor de Volkslectuur* was established in 1908 and was succeeded by the Balai Poestaka in 1917. See Hendrik M. J. Maier, “From Heteroglossia to Polyglossia: The Creation of Malay and Dutch in the Indies,” *Indonesia* 56 (1993): 37–66, for more on these developments. For more on Malay literature in the Indies, see, among others, Haji Moekti, *Hikayat Siti Mariah*, ed. Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1987), especially Pramoedya’s Introduction, and his edited collection of early Malay literature in the Indies: *Tempo Doeloe: Antologi Sastra Pra-Indonesia* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1982); Hendrik M. J. Maier, *We are Playing Relatives: A Survey of Malay Writing* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004); Hendrik M. J. Maier, *In the Center of Authority: The Malay Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1988); Amin Sweeney, *A Full Hearing: Orality and Literacy in the Malay World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); Claudine Salmon, *Literature in Malay by the Chinese of Indonesia: A Provisional Annotated Bibliography* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1981); J. Francisco B. Benitez, “*Awit and Syair*: Alternative Subjectivities and Multiple Modernities in Nineteenth Century Insular Southeast Asia” (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2004); Sylvia Tiwon, *Breaking the Spell: Colonialism and Literary Renaissance in Indonesia* (Leiden: Semaian 18, 1999); James Sneddon, *The Indonesian Language: Its History and Role in Modern Society* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, Ltd., 2003); A. Wahab Ali, *The Emergence of the Novel in Modern Indonesian and Malaysian Literature: A Comparative Study* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1991); and, of course, A. Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature I*, KITLV Translation Series 10,1 (Dordrecht: Foris, 1986 [1967]), pp. 1–7.

circulating in the Indies, and Tirto's literary and journalistic language was a form of resistance to Dutch, Dutch-sponsored literary Malay, and the long-lived Malay of Dutch colonial command.

Tirto was born in Blora, central Java, into a family of Javanese regents, those elites who cooperated with the colonial government and, in return for their cooperation, received salaries, honor, and prestige in the colonial Indies.¹⁸ For these rewards, the Javanese bureaucracy had to perform obsequious rituals of deference (J/M *hormat*) to those Dutch bureaucrats above them. They, in turn, demanded similar behavior from their inferiors. Tirto's family background is obscure, his date of birth—sometime between 1875 and 1880—is debated, and his parents seem to have died early. Either because he was not well-treated by his relatives after the death of his parents or because of the disgraceful dismissal by the colonial government of his grandfather, a Javanese regent in the late nineteenth century, Tirto turned vehemently against the civil service and saw it as an obstacle to Indonesian modernity.¹⁹ Tirto spent almost six years studying at the Dutch language medical school in Batavia (School tot Opleiding van Indische Artsen, or STOVIA), often the school of choice for poorer young men, but never completed his degree and turned to journalism in 1894 to support himself.²⁰ Tirto believed that his decision not to enter the colonial bureaucracy enabled him to socialize on a more equal level with Dutch, Eurasian, and Native elites in the Indies.²¹ He was the first Native in the Indies to edit and own newspapers, allowing him more journalistic license, and he was protected by the so-called ethicist Governor-General

¹⁸ The Samin Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was also located in Blora. See H. Benda and L. Castles, "The Samin Movement," *Bijdragen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* (hereafter *BKI*) 125,2 (1969): 207–40. The Samin Movement was a peasant movement involving mostly uneducated villagers. Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, one of Tirto's followers, wrote an essay about the movement in 1918. See Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, *Het Saminisme: Rapport uitgebracht aan de Vereeniging "Insulinde"* (Semarang: 1918).

¹⁹ For the most complete biographical information about Tirto, see Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Sang Pemula* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1985). For additional information, see Takashi Shiraishi, "Reading Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Sang Pemula* [The Pioneer]," *Indonesia* 44 (October 1987): 129–39, and his *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Ahmat B. Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness (1855–1913)* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1995); Ahmat Adam, "Pramoedya Ananta Toer dalam Rumah Kaca," *Dewan Sastera* (Jun [sic] 1989): 30–33; Heather Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite: The Colonial Transformation of the Javanese Priyayi* (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books [Asia] Ltd., 1979); and Joost Coté, "Tirto Adhi Soerjo and the Narration of Indonesian Modernity, 1909–1912: An Introduction to Two Stories," *RIMA* 32,2 (Summer 1998): 1–43. For an important analysis of Tirto's role in the formations of Indonesian modernity, see James Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 80–93.

²⁰ Savitri Prastiti Scherer, "Harmony and Dissonance: Early Nationalist Thought in Java (MA thesis, Cornell University, 1975), p. 32, explains that STOVIA was considered by many *priyayi* at the turn of the century to be a school for the poor since students' costs were paid by the colonial government. Compared to the OSVIA (Opleidingschool voor Inlandsche Ambtenaaren, the Training School for Native Officials) or the *Kweekschool* (teacher training school), both of which taught in Malay and charged money, STOVIA required excellent Dutch and taught its curriculum in Dutch.

²¹ The term Native or *Inlander* (D) was a legal term in the Dutch Indies, in use from the very end of the nineteenth century until the end of colonial rule. The term separated the local inhabitants of the Indies from the Europeans, the highest status category, which included Europeans and Eurasians, as well as Japanese, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, and from the middle-status "foreign orientals" (D *vreemde oosterlingen*), a group that included Chinese, Arabs, non-European Jews, Indians, and certain mixed-race peoples. I will use the term with a capital "N" throughout this essay when it refers to this legal status. Tirto himself used the words *priboemi* and *anak negeri*, both of which translate as "native," interchangeably with the Dutch word *inlander*.

van Heutsz. Heutsz was celebrated for having ended the disastrous Dutch war with the Sultanate of Aceh by using a range of strategies: military violence, his acceptance of scholarly advice from the Dutch Islamicist C. Snouck Hurgronje, and his successful efforts to split the local *ulama* (Islamic leaders) from the secular leaders, or *uleëbalang*. Aceh was finally brought under Dutch control by 1903, although the resistance to the Dutch continued into the independence period and beyond.²² It was during van Heutsz's time as governor-general that Tirta was able to attack and satirize corrupt officials, Dutch, Eurasian, and Native, whose behavior, he believed, was detrimental to the development of the colonial state. Tirta's life has been lifted out of obscurity and celebrated in fiction and nonfiction by Indonesia's famous writer and scholar Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925–2006). Pramoedya's construction of a small archive of Tirta's writings has enabled scholars to read and appreciate Tirta Adhi Soerjo's contributions to the study and enrichment of the Malay language, its press, and the emergence of an Indies nation. But Pramoedya's phantasies about Tirta's traumatic last years may be more a reflection of his own life than a record of Tirta's.²³

Turn-of-the-Century Life in Batavia (Betawi)

The city of Betawi had been thoroughly transformed by beautiful decorations. The house of the Governor General had been decorated with flowers and a gleaming new gate had been constructed to the right of the house, in front of the office of the Secretary General. In the middle of the intersection, in front of the house, a water fountain had been built. The park on either side of the fountain had been replanted and some red, blue, and green coloured electric lights had been put up. People loved seeing the spectacle these lights made at night when they were switched on ... In Pasarbaru, people were inspecting a new Chinese style archway. It was very beautiful and inscribed with the words: *Hulde aan hare Majesteit Koningin Wilhelmina, Keizerin Van Insulinde*. Further along, past the house of the captain of the Chinese community, there was another archway which displayed the symbol of Betawi, a blade surrounded by a garland of flowers, with nymphs on either side blowing trumpets.²⁴

They had been living for five years in Den Haag, after Papa had been governor-general for five years ... She [Constance] recalled that time of the governor generalship—she then a young girl of twelve to seventeen—the grandeur of it all: the palaces at Batavia and Buitenzorg; their country house at Tjipanas; the balls she attended, young as she was; the races; the aides-de-camp; the gold of the

²² See M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1300*, 2nd. edition (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 144–46.

²³ For a discussion of Pramoedya's traumatic phantasies of Tirta's last years, see Sears, *Dread and Enchantment*, chapter five.

²⁴ Tirta Adhi Soerjo, *The Story of Njai Ratna: Or, How a Faithful Wife Did Wrong. A Story that Really Happened in West Java*, trans. Elisabeth Riharti, Joost Coté, and Markus Soema, *RIMA* 32,2 (Summer 1998): 45–95. My ellipsis. The Dutch sentence reads: "Honor to her Majesty Queen Wilhelmina, Empress of Insulinde." Translation of the passage has been slightly modified. *Tjerita Njai Ratna* was found and republished by Pramoedya Ananta Toer in *Sang Pemula*; see pp. 293–99 for a discussion of Tirta's fiction that no longer exists, especially his lost novella *Nji Permana*, which is discussed in Pramoedya's fourth novel of his Buru Quartet, *Rumah Kaca: Sebuah roman sejarah* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1988).

royal parasol: all the tropical grandeur and semi-royalty of a sovereignty over grand colonies ...²⁵

Tirto's and Couperus's literary descriptions of Batavia at the turn of the last century capture the ways in which Dutch and Indies upper-class writers endowed the colonial government with authority and glamour, ironically in Tirto's case, and nostalgically in Couperus's. In both visions, what goes on in the palaces is hidden from the people and, in Couperus's novels, the "people" are hidden from the "semi-royal" activities of the Dutch rulers. Tirto's novella *Tjerita Njai Ratna* (Story of Njai Ratna), published as a feuilleton, or serialized story, in his own newspaper *Medan Prijaji* (Upper-Class World) during 1909, told a tongue-in-cheek tale of a figure well-known to Indonesian audiences: the immoral—but not necessarily uneducated—Native woman, or *njai*, who served as a mistress to rich, often unmarried, men in the European, Eurasian, and, occasionally, Foreign Oriental communities of the Indies. In Tirto's story, the faithful and beautiful Ratna is abandoned by her first husband, a Sundanese engineer, for a wealthy woman, and Ratna, then a divorcée, has little choice but to become a *njai* to a European or enter into a polygamous relationship with a Native.²⁶

Ratna's family forces her to become the *njai* of a Dutch sea captain who offered them a substantial payment for her. Ratna feels entitled to cheat on her Dutch master because of his racial difference, his long physical absences, and because she falls in love with the Native medical student Sambodo. At the end of this tale of illicit sex, murder, and punishment, Ratna is finally sent to jail. She manages to escape, and the novella ends with her visit to the now-married Dr. Sambodo, during which they lament over their lost love and lost ideals. In his fine introductory essay to translations of *Njai Ratna* and Tirto's other novella, *Busono*, Joost Coté comments on the movement of capital in Ratna's morality tale.

Indonesian [*sic*] men are shown to be unable to emerge from under colonial tutelage. Indonesian women, in contrast, act in, and interact with this colonial structure. They conspire with Indonesian men, or act on their own account, to provide a conduit for the transfer of European wealth to Indonesian society. They clearly suffer most, and although they are not witless victims, they continue to be manipulated by deeply inscribed colonial traditions.²⁷

Ratna's rationale for her treatment of her Dutch lovers echoes the sort of logic that would mark the budding of Indonesian women's contributions to both the

²⁵ Couperus, *Small Souls*, p. 37. Ellipsis in original. Translation modified.

²⁶ For further discussions of the character of the *njai* in early Malay literature, see, among others, Chris GoGwilt, "The Vanishing Genre of the *Nyai* Narrative: Reading Genealogies of English and Indonesian Modernism," *Comparative Literature Studies* 44,4 (2007): 409–33; Tineke Hellwig, *Adjustment and Discontent: Representations of Women in the Dutch Indies* (Windsor, Ontario: Netherlandic Press, 1994); Hadji Moekti, *Hikajat Siti Mariah*, ed. Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Jakarta: Lentera Dipantara, 2003 [1910-1912]); James Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*; Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); "Nyai Dasima: Portrait of a Mistress in Literature and Film," in *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia*, ed. Laurie J. Sears (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 223–48; Gerard Termorshuizen, "Van hoer tot heldin. Het nyai-motief in enkele romans van Pramoedya Ananta Toer en P. A. Daum," *Indische Letteren* IX (1994): 103; Pramoedya, *Sang Pemula*, pp. 296 ff.; C. W. Watson, "Some Preliminary Remarks on the Antecedents of Modern Indonesian Literature," *BKI* 127,4 (1971): 417–33; and Tirto Adhi Soerjo's fiction discussed in this chapter.

²⁷ Joost Coté, "Tirto Adhi Soerjo and the Narration of Indonesian Modernity, 1909–1912: An Introduction to Two Stories," *RIMA* 32,2 (Summer 1998): 26.

development of a Native-run economy and an anticolonial attitude that culminated in nationalist sentiment a decade or so later. Ratna, and other Indies *njai* in Tirta's stories, are able to establish patterns of sexual freedom and mobility because they furthered the development of the proto-nationalist economy through their willingness to cheat on their lovers and pursue capital through illegal means. Their loyalties to their Dutch, Eurasian, or Native lovers transgressed the racial boundaries of the colonial state and put in place new codes of morality. As Coté observes: "In their actions, it is women who reveal the racial chasms in the apparently seamless modern urban society. They reveal both the racial boundaries within colonial society and define the contours of a new morality."²⁸

Because Tirta's story *Njai Ratna* was serialized in his most successful newspaper, *Medan Prijaji*, and because parts of the novella may be missing, the narrative is choppy, but it is still able to sew the reader into a particular ideological position.²⁹ The virtues of capital and its mobility, the delights of commodities in the form of clothing, electric lights, and travel, and immorality and its consequences for women, at least, are clear.³⁰ What may be more subtle are the ways in which Tirta accepts women's rights to their own sexual choices while condemning Ratna and other *njai* in this and other of his stories to bleak futures for their excess of sexual desire. In the same vein, Tirta condemns greed, but not the benefits of capital. Tirta was among the first generation of Indies peoples who saw the political ties that bound the various parts of the Indies together. Although he never used the hybrid Malay word *nasion* (D *natie*, *nationalisme*), he saw how the Indies peoples (M *bangsa-bangsa*) were bound together by ties that went beyond those of culture and blood (*kebudayaan dan darah*).³¹ The phrase he used was "*bangsa-bangsa yang terperintah*" or "subjected peoples." Pramoedya emphasizes that Tirta was the first to use the press as a tool or instrument of struggle and one of the first to see the Indies as "Hindia," one nation made up of different ethnic groups. Tirta enjoyed dropping references to himself and his journalism into his fiction. In *Njai Ratna*, he has the character Njai Parmi note: "'Once in a while we need a taste of hot and fresh *gado-gado* like the *gado-gado* Raden Mas Tirta serves up in *Pantjaran Warta* [Broadcast News],'" said Parmi firmly, shifting her position in the chair."³²

Phantasies of Sexual Desire

Although *njai* characters appear in Tirta's three other surviving fictional works, men and their desires and phantasies are the main subjects of these stories.³³ The

²⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁹ Pramoedya Ananta Toer suspected that early parts of the story may be missing. See Pramoedya, *Sang Pemula*, p. 301. As noted, Tirta's most successful newspaper was *Medan Prijaji*, published from 1907–12, although he had launched several earlier papers and a journal for women.

³⁰ For more on clothing in the colonial and postcolonial Indies, see the essays in Henk Schulte Nordholt, ed., *Outward Appearances: Dressing State and Society in Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1997).

³¹ Pramoedya, *Sang Pemula*, p. 146.

³² See Coté et al., *Njai Ratna*, p. 64. *Gado-gado* is a Javanese dish of mixed vegetables and spicy peanut sauce. The term also connotes a mixture of heterogeneous things.

³³ Joost Coté, Elizabeth Riharti, and Markus Soema translated *Busono* in *RIMA* 32,2 (Summer 1998): 97–141. The other two surviving fictional works by Tirta are "Membeli Bini Orang: Sebuah Cerita Yang Sungguh Sudah Terjadi Di Perianggan" [Buying Another Man's Wife: A Story that Really Happened in the Priangan], published in Pramoedya, *Sang Pemula*, pp. 353–69; and *Doenia-Pertjintaan: 101 tjerita jang*

longest of these fictional works is entitled *Busono*, the name of the main character, which Pramoedya read as an autobiographical tale about Tirta. Pramoedya argued that, compared with the two other stories of Tirta's reprinted in *Sang Pemula*: "... *Busono* may be called literature. One can find in it Tirta Adhi Soerjo's struggle to find validation for his behavior at that time, an interesting struggle between 'das Sollen' and 'das Sein,' between fact and illusion, permeated by regrets and self-blame."³⁴ It is in *Busono* that Tirta's anxieties surface, in contrast to the comedic excesses of his shorter fiction. Tirta's other two stories of love portray the consequences of excess desire for money and sex and bring into focus Tirta's sharp critiques of the habits of both the Dutch and his own countrymen. "The Yellow Devil" was written during Tirta's first period of banishment from Java as a result of a *persdelict*, or press offense, a common charge against Natives, and occasionally Eurasians, in the last decades of Dutch colonial rule. By comparing the original version of this short text—which is available in Leiden, but which Pramoedya was unable to find—with the stories published by Pramoedya in *Sang Pemula*, we can see how much work Pramoedya undertook to make Tirta's writings accessible to contemporary audiences. Pramoedya apologizes for what he calls his "translating" (*terjemahkan*) of the fictional and nonfictional works included in his biography of Tirta. Although Pramoedya felt these spelling and grammatical changes were necessary for his rehabilitation of Tirta's reputation, and the recognition of this author as one of the earliest founders of Indonesian nationalism, the loss of Tirta's original texts means that readers only have access to Pramoedya's "translations," making Tirta's work seem more coherent and possibly more in tune with Pramoedya's ideological preferences than it may actually have been.³⁵

Tirta reserved special criticism of life in the Indies at the turn of the last century for corrupt Dutch, Eurasian, and Javanese administrators in his nonfiction work, but in his fiction he also took aim at those who professed to be devout Muslims, the *Hadji* (one who has returned from the pilgrimage to Mecca) and *Sjech* (an Islamic scholar and, in the Indies, usually of Arab ancestry), as well as moneylenders, Dutch or Native, whom he called *lintah darat*, leeches or profiteers. "The Yellow Devil" is the story of Sjech Ali, who wishes to let a Dutchman's *njai*, who owes him money, pay off her debt by having sex with him. *Njai* Mina leads Ali to believe that he will get what he desires before she and her Dutchman swindle him out of hundreds of guilders and send him home half-naked and painted with yellow powder, thus producing the "yellow devil" of the

soenggoe soedah terdjadi di Tanah Priangan, Tjerita Jang Ke Doea, "Seitang-Koening" [The World of Love: 101 stories that really happened in the Priangan, Story Number Two, "The Yellow Devil"] (Makassar: Brouwer & Co., 1906). In *Sang Pemula*, Pramoedya notes on the first page of the story that "Membeli Bini Orang" was originally published as a serialized story in *Medan Prijaji* in 1909.

³⁴ "... *Busono*, termasuk jenis sastra. Di dalamnya orang dapat melihat pergulatan Tirta Adhi Soerjo dalam mencari pembenaran atas tindak-lakunya selama itu, suatu pertarungan yang cukup memikat antara 'das Sollen' dengan 'das Sein'nya, antara kenyataan dan illusi, bertaburan dengan penyesalan dan gugatan nurani." Pramoedya, *Sang Pemula*, p. 299. Pramoedya considers *Njai Ratna* and "Membeli Bini Orang" to be "cerita pop," or popular fiction.

³⁵ See Pramoedya, *Sang Pemula*, p. xiii. "Walhasil dengan minta beribu maaf semua kutipan terlebih dahulu saya 'terjemahkan', bahkan kadang sampai terpaksa melakukan perombakan struktur kalimat. Ejaan kutipan adalah EYD." As one example of Tirta's original spellings, here is a sentence from page one of "The Yellow Devil": "—Alam sjadah! Joealan tida dafat sabeser, orang oetan sjoema amfat roebiah bajar! ... Karto pasan grobak, ajo kita foelan." Ellipsis in original.

title.³⁶ Mina tells Ali that, since she slept with a Dutchman, why wouldn't she want to sleep with a Muslim (*bangsa slam*) "who is a descendant of our prophet" (*I sama anak tjoetjoe nabi kita*). Tirta skilfully builds the reader's anticipation of the sexual delights to come. He shows Ali, excited by the suspense, speeding up his prayers (*I dia tjepetin sembajangnja*) in the midst of his phantasies. His portrait of Ali is both engaged and edged sharply to delineate a hypocritical character. The author describes how the wall of the room where Ali waits for his tryst to occur is decorated with pictures from *Bintang Hindia* (Indies Star), one of the early Malay-language proto-nationalist newspapers, published in Amsterdam from 1902–07.³⁷ The *Bintang Hindia* was very patriotic and respectful towards the Dutch and the colonial civil service, which is perhaps what led Tirta to use it to paper the wall of the seduction room in his story. In a scene where Ali's house is described, Tirta presents the supposedly devout Islamic scholar living in filth as he propositions Njai Mina.

After Mina sat down in the middle of Ali's room on a bench thick with dust, she looked around and didn't see any knick-knacks at all, everything was dirty and it stank! In the middle of the room was a round marble table, but the marble looked yellow and dirty with oily butter stains everywhere and leftover dates on the filthy table. On one wall was [a copy of] an Islamic prayer that looked as though it hadn't been cleaned in ten years, it was so thick with dust ...³⁸

At the end of this story, after the *Sjeh* is humiliated and swindled, and the Dutchman and his loyal Njai Mina move to Bandung with the money, Tirta includes a note saying that this was one of three stories and that the third one would be called "'Ratna Memboektikan Impiannja,' satoe tjerita jang soenggoe soedah terdjadi di Bandoeng" ('Ratna Reveals her Dreams,' a story that really happened in Bandoeng).

The three stories—*Njai Ratna*, "Sjeh Ali," and "Buying Another Man's Wife" all appear to be part of the *World of Love: 101 Stories that Really Happened* series that Tirta had begun during his first period of exile in the Moluccas. "Buying Another Man's Wife" also tells a story of a religious Muslim, Hadji Idris, who tries to get rid of his wife, whom a *dukun* said was not good for him. Since he has been married to this new wife, following the sudden death of his previous wife, all his business efforts have turned into failures. But Hadji Idris is only a bit player in this story and is even rewarded in the end, when he agrees to give or sell his wife to a greedy Eurasian

³⁶ C. W. Watson, "Some Preliminary Remarks on the Antecedents of Modern Indonesian Literature," gives a brief summary of this story. It has been translated into Dutch by Maya Sutedja Liem, *De Njai, moeder van alle volken* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007).

³⁷ See Michael Francis Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma below the Winds* (London: Routledge–Curzon, 2003), pp. 95–102, for more on *Bintang Hindia* and its role in the early Indonesian nationalist movement. Laffan explains how the paper promoted the ideas of the liberal Dutch *Ethici* and their allies in the Indies. Abdul Rivai was the Indies co-publisher of the paper, who was living in Amsterdam at the time. Laffan suggests that Lt. H. C. C. Clockener, the Eurasian co-publisher in the Indies, was a convert to Islam. See also Ahmat Adam, *The Vernacular Press*, pp. 93–107, on *Bintang Hindia*, its predecessors, and its role in the promotion of early pan-Indies nationalism.

³⁸ Tirta, "Seitang Koening," p. 2. "Satelah Mina doedoek dipetengahan roemah Ali, pada satoe bangkoe jang deboenja sadim tebelnja melengket, liat liat petengahan itoe tida sedikit poen ada perhiasannja, kotor mesoem, bae! Di tengah ada satoe medja marmer boender tapi marmernja soedah kliatan koening dan kotor, disana sini ada bekas minjak samin dan koerma, tjepel dan kotor sekali medja itoe, pada dinding tembok ada tergantoe satoe pigora rafal, jang sanget kotornja, roepa roepanja soedah sepoeloeh taoen deboe jang melengket pada pigora itoe tida perna di keboetin ... " My ellipsis.

(=Indo) moneylender who has fallen in love with her. Tirto describes the Indo and his way of life. "The inhabitant [of the house] was an Indo [I *Belanda peranakan*] who no longer worked. His work was only to put money in circulation by collecting interest."³⁹ Hadji Idris's wife is a very promiscuous woman, easily impressed with money and fashionable clothing, and the Eurasian ends up feeling more than punished for his pursuit and purchase of another man's wife. Tirto's stories often depicted male phantasies of love and sexual promiscuity, for which the men, too, were punished. There are descriptions of the *Sjech* phantasizing about having sex with Mina, the Indo in "Membeli Bini Orang" phantasizing about the beautiful wife of Haji Idris, and, in *Busono*, the autobiographical novella that Pramoedya says is "really literature," there is the description of Busono phantasizing about his beautiful fiancée. It is difficult to make a clear racist argument from Tirto's fiction, since he critiques the Dutch, the Indos, and the Natives as well. Couperus's novels, to which I now turn, also include phantasies of sex and desire, but they are darker tales of trauma and melancholy.

Late Imperial Den Haag

And the melancholy of bygone things seemed to swell on the loud moaning of the wind during the following days, when the rain poured down; the house these days seemed full of the melancholy of bygone things. They were days of shadow and half-light reflected around the old doting woman in the conservatory; Adeline, the silent, mournful mother; Emilie, a young woman, but broken ... like all the greyness exuding from human souls that are always living in the past and in the melancholy of that past ...⁴⁰

De boeken der kleine zielen, or *The Books of Small Souls*, the quartet of novels that Couperus began to write and publish soon after his year-long visit to the Indies in 1899, described the life of the Van Lowe family living in Den Haag.⁴¹ The Van Lows are a colonial family—that is, a family deeply involved in trade with the Indies or in the service of the colonial government—modeled on Couperus's own family, and the late, fictional Papa van Lowe had been governor-general of the Indies for a time, moving up the colonial hierarchy over his long career.⁴² The eight surviving Van Lowe children—two had died in the Indies while young—spent a good period of their youth living an extravagant life at the height of colonial society in the Indies. The family is still connected to the Indies through marriages, business investments, and memories, but none of the children has followed in their father's diplomatic footsteps. The one who came closest to that world is the eldest daughter, Bertha, whose husband, Van Naghel, was Secretary of the Colonies. Constance, the heroine of the four books, was headed towards the diplomatic heights of her father's world when he married her off at twenty-two to the highly placed Dutch ambassador in Rome, forty years her senior, but she soon created the scandal that forms the core of the quartet when she was

³⁹ Pramoedya, *Sang Pemula*, p. 355. "Penghuninya seorang Belanda peranakan yang sudah tidak bekerja. Pekerjaannya hanya menjalankan uang dengan memungut bunga."

⁴⁰ Couperus, *Dr. Adriaan*, p. 174. First ellipsis is in original; the second one indicates a broken-off sentence.

⁴¹ Please see note 2 for a list of the editions of the four novels of his quartet.

⁴² For an extensive discussion of Couperus's family and the connections among the characters in the novels and Couperus's relatives and friends, see Bastet, *Louis Couperus*, pp. 268–316.

caught cheating on her husband, who then divorced her. Exiled from Holland by both of their families, her younger lover Baron van der Welcke, a hot-headed, up-and-coming young statesman, follows his parent's stern Calvinist wishes and marries Constance, even though the marriage means that the parents would no longer receive or see their only son. Constance and Van der Welcke live in exile from their families and friends for twenty years, nursing their wounds, isolated, and blaming each other for their unhappiness. Both of them, however, dote on the love of their precocious and endearing son, Addy or Adriaan, who becomes the Dr. Adriaan of the fourth and last novel of the quartet.

The weather is a constant trope in Couperus's *Haagsche romans*, a topic to which I return below, and this atmosphere produces a melancholic ambiance that is echoed in the psychological development of the characters.

The rawness of the March evening bore down on the deserted Javastraat with a shudder of dripping fog. It had rained all day; and now the heavy grey sky was blotted from sight in a mist that clung in masses of woolly dampness to the roofs and tree-tops; the wind whistled from the north-west and skimmed over the rippling puddles; the trees dripped as heavily as though it were still raining; and the pale-yellow light upon the clouded street-lamps shimmered down upon the street.⁴³

Wind and rain, ominous clouds, and flooded streets bathe the characters of the novel in a bleakness that mirrors the bleakness of their "small souls," the pettiness of the Dutch upper bourgeoisie, whom Couperus captured by portraying in detail their narrow-minded, self-centered, and often spiteful ways. For these are novels of class differences and class decline. Comparable to Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, also a novel of class and family decline written in the same period, *Small Souls* distinguishes itself because of the imperial phantasies and phantoms that haunt the work. Paul, the youngest son of the family, lives the life of an unemployed would-be intellectual.⁴⁴ Paul comments on the shallowness and weaknesses of his family's class to his sister Constance early in the first novel when he accompanies her shopping.

Nature, nature, Connie: there is no such thing as nature among people like ourselves! We have not a gesture, not a word, not even a thought that is natural. It's all pose and humbug with every one of us; and nobody is taken in by it. Really, it's a disgusting business, a society like ours, what one calls good society. Can't you understand an anarchist loving to fling a bomb into the midst of us: for instance, at Uncle Ruyvenaer's stomach? No anarchist likes a stomach: the stomach is the trademark of the bourgeois ...⁴⁵

For Constance, the return to Den Haag, into the bosom of her family, is supposed to be the fulfillment of the desires she has harbored for the past twenty years, since her disgrace. The first two novels of the quartet are designed to show the pettiness of the people and the society that she has fantasized about for decades. The quartet serves as

⁴³ Couperus, *Small Souls*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Bastet, *Louis Couperus*, p. 271, calls Paul one of Couperus's alter egos: "Een alter ego van Couperus ..."

⁴⁵ Couperus, *Small Souls*, p. 152.

an extended *bildungsroman* for Constance, who starts out in the first novel not so differently from the rest of her family.

She was not interested in the larger questions, did not understand feminism, was a little afraid of socialism, especially because the poor were so dirty and smelt so horribly. Still, she was charitable, though she was not at all well-off, and often gave money to the poor and dirty, hoping above all that they would wash themselves.⁴⁶

By the end of the four novels, however, Constance has found peace and developed patience, with her husband, her son, and all the rest of the family, for whom she has taken her mother's place at the center. Even Constance's would-be lover, Brauws, reappears and is welcomed on a regular basis into the large and somewhat haunted family house inherited from Constance's father-in-law, and the family narrative ends, after four books, with the death of Mamma van Lowe.

The third novel in the quartet, *The Twilight of the Souls* (*Zielenschemering*), provides the most interesting contrast with Tirto's fiction and its depiction of the enchantments of modernity because Couperus's work is so filled with modernity's underside of trauma, melancholia, and dread. *Twilight of the Souls* also serves as a contrast with Couperus's famous *Indische* novel, *The Hidden Force* (*De stille kracht*), and as a forerunner to Couperus's other macabre novel of empire, *Old People and Things that Pass By* (*Van oude mensen, de dingen, die voorbij gaan*).⁴⁷ Couperus began to write *The Hidden Force* while he was still in the Indies in 1899, and it was published in 1900. His trip to the Indies seems to have inspired his fiction in two ways: although haunting is evident in his earlier novels, the concern with ghosts becomes more pronounced in this work. Second, the four novels of the quartet, *The Hidden Force*, and *Old People* highlight the effects of empire on those Dutch with colonial connections. *The Hidden Force* is celebrated, especially by those interested in the Dutch Indies Empire, for its evocation of the uncanny quality of the "East," its presentation of Javanese superstitions and miscegenous liaisons and how they penetrated and undermined the colonial bureaucracy, and for its most decadent creole heroine, Leonie, the epitome of colonial debauchery. *The Hidden Force* was a turning point in Couperus's literary style, allowing him to integrate the mysteries and mysticism that he rediscovered in Java into the five *Haagsche romans* that he wrote after his return to Europe in early 1900. *Twilight of the Souls* is the most tragic volume of Couperus's *Small Souls* quartet. The narrative concerns death, haunting, melancholia, and hysteria. The characters who are most prominent in the novel include Constance's brothers, Gerrit and Ernst, and her sister

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 360–61.

⁴⁷ Some commentators, both Dutch and English-speaking, considered *Twilight of the Souls* to be the most brilliant book of the quartet. See Bastet, *Louis Couperus*, p. 272, for a report of Couperus's own opinion that the last two novels of the quartet were the best. Katherine Mansfield noted "This is an amazing, masterly study in pity and terror. It is the flaming intolerable core of the book ..." See Katherine Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists by Katherine Mansfield*, ed. J. Middleton Murray (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1959 [1930]), a collection of Mansfield's (1888–1923) reviews, written between 1919–1920, for *The Athenaeum*, and discussing various works of literature. Among Dutch authors and intellectuals, Menno ter Braak praises *Twilight of the Souls* as the most brilliant novel of the quartet. He says Couperus must have had "bijna zonder ontbrekingen het bewijs van een ontzaglijke inspiratie" ("a demonstration almost without interruption of enormous inspiration."). See Menno ter Braak, "Tachtiger, Meer dan Tachtiger," in *Over Louis Couperus*, ed. Top Naeff et al. (Amsterdam: De Samenwerkende Uitgevers, 1952), p. 25. For an analysis of Couperus's *Van oude mensen*, see Sears, *Dread and Enchantment*, chapter two.

Bertha's divorced daughter, Emilie, who lives in Paris with her brother Henri. Gerrit commits suicide, Ernst suffers from psychotic delusions and hallucinations, young Henri is killed by Emilie's jealous ex-husband, and Emilie is badly traumatized by the murder. Constance's son, Addy, decides to become a doctor instead of entering the diplomatic service, and Mamma van Lowe, the matriarch of the family, falls into senility.

After two novels showing the pettiness and shallowness of life in Den Haag at the turn of the last century, *Twilight* delves much deeper to depict the fragility, decadence, and haunted mental states of members of the colonial upper bourgeoisie in Den Haag. The melancholia of the novel is not gender specific: women turn into hysterical invalids after the death of a loved one, men are haunted, deluded, and unable to face their lives. Constance's older brother Gerrit, a great tall man and a captain in the cavalry (*D ritmeester*), is haunted by a demon, a "great fat worm" with legs, that is eating him up inside. He fears the worm will destroy him and his children will be abandoned, and he becomes devastated by emptiness. The worm is a beastly crawling thing, eating his large and muscular carcass.⁴⁸ Gerrit's younger brother Ernst, always lonely and eccentric and thus avoided by his siblings, begins to see "souls" (*D zielen*) all around him, chained to his own soul. These souls, which take the place of people in his life, are in pain and crying. Ernst sees them everywhere, and they are connected to his passion for his collection of old jars and pots, to his books, and to his family. He says that the souls have been hiding in the jars, the books, and the charts he has collected over the years. He worries that his landlord and her brother are tampering with them, walking on them.⁴⁹ When Constance comes to convince Ernst that he must go to a discreet mental facility in the countryside, he explains to her about the souls.

"Sometimes they are magnificently dressed and sing with exquisite voices. But latterly," mournfully shaking his head, "latterly they have not been like that. They are all grey, like ghosts; they no longer sing their beautiful tunes; they weep and wail and gnash their teeth. They used to come out into the middle of the room ... and laugh and sing and glitter. But now, oh, Constance, I don't know what they suffer, but they suffer something terrible ... a purgatory! They crowd around me, they suffocate me, till I can't draw my breath ... Hush, there they are, waking again!"⁵⁰

These souls, hallucinations connected to material objects of Ernst's past and linked by ghostly chains to Ernst's own soul, are in marked contrast to the mean-spirited and frivolous small souls of the first two books of the quartet. Couperus suggests that such hallucinations have depth and meaning, unlike the "small souls" of Den Haag's colonial elite.

In a passage quoted at the beginning of this essay, Mamma van Lowe despairs over the growing number of tragedies in the family that she has been forced to accept, and she complains to her granddaughter Emilie, whose father, the colonial secretary, had suddenly died, about how low the family has sunk. This is where she calls the fate of

⁴⁸ Couperus, *Twilight of the Souls*, p. 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53. Ellipses in original.

the family one of *grandeur déchue*, or fallen splendor. References to the Van Lowe family as an Indies family, a creole family with Indies manners, are scattered throughout the novels. Even though the *nonnas*, the Indo women who married into the family, are set apart and their speech patterns are mimicked and mocked all the time, there is also a sense that the Van Lowes' Indies upbringing provides them with a sense of comfort: the occasional Indies meal cooked by one of the *nonnas* is savored, the memories of the Indies evoke a time of greatness. Couperus was writing at the waning of the *tempo doeloe*, the time past when Dutchmen married Indies women or at least lived with a *njai*—as depicted in Tirtto's fiction—until their official marriage to a Dutch woman. Although this miscegenation was unremarkable in the colonies, it was looked down upon in Holland. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the tolerance for such racial mixing waned even in the colony, and this changing attitude is depicted in Couperus's novels.⁵¹

Of Mamma van Lowe's children, Gerrit, the captain of the cavalry and Constance's older brother by a year, is most influenced by the Indies. Gerrit was lustful in his youth, and his lust originated in the Indies. He phantasizes about the sexually precocious *nonnas*, who matured early, and he remembers his first sexual experience at age fifteen with a married woman in the Indies. This portrait of young Gerrit again reinforces the idea of the decadence of the colonies and the dangerous women there, who leave their marks on the Dutch. Gerrit is haunted by incestuous images of his sister Constance as an adolescent, when she would tell his brother Karel and him stories and play with them in the woods behind the great palace in Buitenzorg. He longs for that past, a past that seems a time of sanity and safety compared with his current paranoid and anxious state. When the family returns from the Indies, Gerrit attends the military academy at Breda and continues a life punctuated by sexual trysts until, at thirty-five, he finally marries a woman picked by his mother. Gerrit is big, strong, muscular, and appears healthy, but he suffers from fits of depression. He suffers from an emptiness and loneliness that he tries to fill with children. He and his wife have nine children, and he loves being in the midst of the noise and bustle of his family. But secretly the worm—or is it a centipede?—is eating away inside of him. In the novel, Couperus connects Gerrit's sexual awakening in the Indies with his lustful nature, and this lust becomes connected to the gnawing worm. The constant presence of this hallucinated worm, a chance encounter with a former lover, Pauline, and a brief affair with her set his life on a downward spiral. Gerrit speaks to Constance after cheating on his wife with Pauline. He feels very guilty about it, but no one notices, no one sees what he is really like inside.

Oh, his children, how he loved them! ... Certainly, all that existed, it was no phantasm, it was most certainly the truth; but behind that truth lay hidden another truth; and that was why it seemed a phantasm, his outward life as an officer, a husband, a father, while the real truth was what he always kept to himself: his strange gloom; the great worm that gnawed at him; his hot, racing

⁵¹ See Taylor, *Social World*; Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*; and Ann L. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002) for more on this theme of miscegenation and the promiscuity of Indies women.

blood; his sentimental and melancholy soul; that wriggling horror in his marrow; that recrudescence of sensuality in his blood ...⁵²

Gerrit's weaknesses, the "thing" inside him, existed since his youth, long before he begins his tragic affair with Pauline. For Gerrit, the phantasm is both his pretence of living his life as a normal, respected Dutchman and the worm inside of him. The worm, which enables him to pretend to be a good husband, good father, and good soldier, also symbolizes his lust, his longing for Java, and his lost childhood and youth.⁵³ The worm is thus his desire for life, his lust, his vitality, and his decadence. Its destruction will destroy Gerrit too.

Why are Gerrit and Ernst mentally unhinged? Why do most of the women in the family fall into melancholia in the face of tragedy? Couperus is suggesting that the colonial upbringing and their Indies connections damaged them all, and the author presses this point despite his attachment to, his love for, the Indies. Gerrit's darkness, the worm eating away at him, his inability to see the misery and desperation of his lover Pauline, continue to grow. Pauline finally sends Gerrit away, back to his family, and then commits suicide. Unaware of his lover's death, Gerrit, ill from his depression, wanders out in the rain, delirious and feverish, finally sees the dead body of Pauline in the morgue, stumbles home, and is diagnosed with a bad case of typhoid. He is sick for a long time, isolated from his children, until the fever finally recedes and he begins to recognize his family once again. As he regains his health, he realizes the worm has disappeared. The worm has eaten all his marrow and left only his carcass. His lust and his ability to pretend to be happy and convivial, both connected to the worm, have also vanished. He fought the worm all his life, and it has finally conquered him. Darkness closes in on him. He, too, finally commits suicide, leaving his wife grieving and traumatized, and one of his sons, who saw his father's bloody body and the fatal gun, also becomes traumatized.⁵⁴ In contrast, Gerrit's brother Ernst, who hallucinates the souls, slowly recovers from his darkness, with the help of medical intervention, and is able to live on his own again. *The Twilight of the Souls* ends after the murder of young Henri in Paris—a tragedy that leaves his sister/lover, Emilie, shattered—after the suicide of Gerrit and the devastation of his wife, and as a cloud of senility descends upon Mamma van Lowe, leaving her trapped in delusions of her former life in Java. Emilie, Gerrit's wife Adeline, and Mamma van Lowe become three broken women, as depicted in the quote that opened this section.

They were days of shadow and half-light reflected around the old doting woman in the conservatory; Adeline, the silent, mournful mother; Emilie, a young woman, but broken ...

⁵² Ibid., pp. 197–98. Ellipses are in original. The translation of the Dutch word *schijn* by the English word "phantasm" is the choice of the translator, A. Teixeira de Mattos, the major translator of most of Couperus's works into English, who completed this translation in 1914. In K. ten Bruggencate, *Engels Woordenboek*, the word *schijn* is translated as "glimmer, shadow, ghost, sham, or pretense." *Schijn-beeld* is translated as "phantom or illusion." See K. ten Bruggencate, *Engels Woordenboek*, 19th ed., ed. J. Gerritsen and N. E. Osselton, with R.W. Zandvoort (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1986 [1896]), p. 679.

⁵³ See Agamben, *Stanzas*, p. 25: "The imaginary loss that so obsessively occupies the melancholic dependency has no real object, because its funereal strategy is directed to the impossible capture of the phantasm. The lost object is but the appearance that desire creates for its own courting of the phantasm..."

⁵⁴ In *Old People and Things that Pass By*, Couperus's last *Haagsche roman*, the haunting worm returns as just a "Thing" that haunts one of the central characters in the novel.

Melancholia, Psychoanalysis, and Hypnosis

Couperus's study of melancholia and darkness poses interesting questions for scholars of psychoanalysis, colonialism, and Freud.⁵⁵ Couperus admitted that, although he knew of Freud, he never read his work, but Couperus lived in a time when the ideas of the new "science" of psychoanalysis were prominent in the intellectual circles in which the Dutch author lived.⁵⁶ Couperus himself could not bear to live in Holland, and he spent much of his adult life, when he was not traveling, in southern Italy. He wrote the *Books of Small Souls* in Nice, in the south of France. He claimed that his adolescence spent in the hot sun of the Indies had made it impossible for him to live in the wind and rain, the gloom and stuffiness of Holland. But several of the characters whom Couperus portrays in the *Books of Small Souls* could fit easily into Freud and Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria*. Rather than suffering from the "racial" trauma that afflicted Jews in Austro-Hungary, Couperus's characters suffer from the ills of their class, their colonial contaminations, and the depressing Dutch weather.

The gale outside was like a living immensity, a vast soul raging with world-suffering, thousand-voiced and thousand-winged, and under its raging agony, which filled all the air above the land, the house that contained the life of them all was a small casket.⁵⁷

The wind was pitiless. The wind lashed through the air like one possessed, like a madman that had no feeling: strong in his might and blind in his heartlessness.⁵⁸

It had rained steadily for days upon the dreary, wintry trees, out of a sky that hung low but tremendously wide and heavy, as oppressive as a pitiless darkness. Drearly the wintry roads shot forward as the carriage rattled along them.⁵⁹

Round the house the thaw wept; and in the night the sinewed grain of the ice broke and melted in weeping melancholy, with the added melancholy of the west wind blowing up heavy clouds, the west wind which came from very far and

⁵⁵ "Melancholia," as the term is used by Freud and Freud's followers, is a condition of clinical depression caused by a person's inability to mourn the loss of loved ones or loved objects. See Freud's classic essay "Mourning and Melancholia" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey et al., vol. 14 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–1974), pp. 243–58. For a different perspective on Freud's idea of melancholia as abnormal and mourning as normative, see Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), especially chapter four.

⁵⁶ For the comment about Couperus and Freud, see Bastet, *Louis Couperus: Een Biografie*, pp. 361–62, 463. Bastet seems surprised that Couperus claimed he had never read Freud, since Freudian ideas were prominent at that time. Menno ter Braak, "Tachtiger," pp. 23–24, commented: "Couperus wrote this work [*The Books of Small Souls*] long before the Freudian sickness broke loose in the arts. There is no pretense in his relation to his characters, with which authors who know their Freud so willingly mask a lack of style." ("Couperus schreef dit werk lang voor de Freudiaanse ziekte in de kunst losbrak. In zijn verhouding tot zijn personages is niets van het overbluffen, waarmee de auteurs, die hun Freud kennen, zo gaarne een gebrek aan stijl maskeren.")

⁵⁷ Couperus, *Dr. Adriaan*, pp. 56–57.

⁵⁸ Couperus, *Small Souls*, p. 228.

⁵⁹ Couperus, *Twilight of the Souls*, p. 237.

moaned softly along the walls and over the roof, rattling the tight-closed windows of the night ...⁶⁰

[A]nd it was no longer the strong boisterous winds, but the angry winds, the winds that brought with them the clouds of grey melancholy, in eternal steady-blowing sadness, as though in the west, yonder, there were a dark realm of mysterious sorrow, whence blew huge howling cohorts of gigantic woes, titanic griefs, overshadowing the small country and the small people.⁶¹

As in his earlier, more naturalistic novels, Couperus used weather as a rhetorical device to emphasize the melancholic side of Dutch life, but also as a form of repetition that leaves an echo. The summers rush by and the fall, winter, and spring each offer their bone-chilling version of wind, rain, and melancholy. Couperus made even the Dutch summer miserable.

The oppressive [*drukkende*], sultry, rainless summer days followed one after the other; and the night also waited in oppressive expectation of oppressive things, which were to happen and never happened, as though what we expected to happen immediately withdrew and withdrew farther and only hung over houses and people with heavy stormy skies: skies of blazing morning blue, until great grey-white clouds blew up from a mysterious cloudland and drifted past on high ...⁶²

Melancholia constantly surrounds and invades the characters: outside of them, inside of them, in their bones, and in their psyches. For those characters who do not succumb to the melancholia completely, there is still a perpetual feeling of dread and premonitions of disaster. In *Twilight of the Souls*, premonitions repeat or foreshadow every disaster as it unfolds. Of all the characters, Mamma van Lowe sees the premonitions most clearly, until the pain of it encloses her in a world of darkness. Mamma van Lowe was born and raised in the Indies, and she feels a sense of responsibility for the decline of the family. Her uncanny ability to see what has unfolded before it is told to her, to hear the echoes of what has happened as it unfolds—however troubling and sexually charged—may be linked to her years in the Indies, her proximity to the mysticism, decadence, and magic that Couperus associates with life in the Indies.

The fourth novel of the quartet features Constance's son, Addy, now the twenty-six-year-old Dr. Adriaan, married with two children. Constance's husband's father and mother have died, and Addy and his father move the family into the large, dreary house they have inherited in the countryside of Driebergen, in the center of Holland. Addy, his wife, and their two children live in the big house. They take Gerrit's wife and nine children with them because Gerrit left the care of the children to Addy and the care of his wife to Constance. They also take old Mamma van Lowe, the traumatized young Emilie, and, eventually, another neurotic niece who needs Addy's care. Addy is a physician, a nerve-specialist, who had even spent a year in Vienna—birthplace of psychoanalysis—during his medical training. He already has a reputation

⁶⁰ Couperus, *Dr. Adriaan*, p. 156. Ellipsis in original.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 273. Ellipsis here indicates a broken-off sentence.

as one of the leading specialists in nervous illnesses, despite his young age. He uses the latest techniques—in this case, hypnotism—to cure his patients, as I discuss below. Couperus explores class differences in this last novel of his quartet.⁶³ He pits the decadence, culture, and neuroses of the upper bourgeoisie against the so-called simplicity and materialism that typifies the lower. Addy's choice of a wife from the lower bourgeoisie represents a rebellion against his class and its refined decadence. Addy chooses her because of her vibrant health and because she is unlike the Van Lowes and their neurotic colonial circle.

And he saw that, in marrying this woman, who was not quite of their class, he had wanted to display pride in particular against the arbitrariness of those whom he called his people—his parents, his family—he had wanted to show that there was no longer any distinction of class, especially no distinction in those minor shades of class. If they were going to think about distinctions, she had the distinction of health ... while his own people were all sick, in body and soul, not, it might be, suffering severely, but all affected or tainted with those “nerves” of their time ...⁶⁴

After Addy and his wife, Mathilde, move out of the family house to Den Haag, as Mathilde has long desired, the omniscient narrator suggests that Mathilde's character, which has become more refined through contact with “finer natures than her own,” now begins to grow coarse and shallow again. But Mathilde has acquired, or “caught,” the melancholia of the family. The colonial decadence that has been passed on through the generations is infectious. Mathilde feels more and more keenly that she is too far below Addy, that he should go back to Driebergen and she should stay in Den Haag. Mathilde is oppressed, suffocating from Addy's sacrifices, alienated because he is not frivolous and she does not share his altruistic feelings, sensing only their oppression.⁶⁵ She is also troubled by Addy's use of hypnotism; she does not understand it, and it frightens her.

Addy's use of hypnotism shows that Couperus was aware of the latest psychoanalytical techniques that were being used in France at the turn of the century. As Freud is closely associated with the discourse of psychic trauma, in part because he combined the work being done in France with contemporary work in Vienna, Couperus can be seen as a writer who makes the Dutch intellectual world aware of the psychoanalytical work being done in France.⁶⁶ Rather than being grounded in the

⁶³ Couperus's critique of class or, at least, his exposure of class tensions and decadence, could be compared, as I noted above, to Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* of 1901 or John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga* (1906–21), but the questions concerning empire at the heart of Couperus's work make it unique. I thank Wolfgang Linser for bringing these other novels of family decline to my attention.

⁶⁴ Couperus, *Dr. Adiaan*, p. 65. Ellipses are in original.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 245–46.

⁶⁶ Freud is credited with popularizing the discourse of trauma, first in Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, and then in his later works. Freud's idea of trauma was connected to his famous “seduction theory,” which he abandoned in 1897, and the concept of deferred action or *nachträglichkeit*. For the latter term, never clearly defined by Freud, see Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psycho-analysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887–1902*, ed. Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, and Ernst Kris, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1954). In the process of *nachträglichkeit*, something that happens during or after adolescence can trigger a memory of something that happened in early childhood, which was not perceived as traumatic at the time. This relationship between past, present, and future, and a re-translation of *nachträglichkeit* as “afterwardsness,” has been usefully discussed by Jean Laplanche. See

works of Freud and other Austrian and German psychoanalysts, Couperus would have been more familiar with the ideas of French physicians like the neurologists J.-M. Charcot, Hippolyte Bernheim, and Charcot's student, the psychologist Pierre Janet, who were working in France at the time Couperus was writing his quartet in Nice, just as Couperus's literary style was influenced by the French styles of Gustave Flaubert and Émile Zola. Freud first studied with Charcot, who was experimenting with hysteria, trauma, and hypnosis at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris in the 1880s, and he translated two volumes of Charcot's lectures. Freud visited the French hypnotism specialist Bernheim in Nancy in 1889 and translated Bernheim's paper on hypnotism and suggestion into German in 1888 or 1889.⁶⁷ Freud brought those French ideas to Vienna and published them in collaboration with his longtime mentor and colleague Josef Breuer, who had been trying out the cathartic method, or the "talking cure," in his work with the famous Anna O. since 1880.⁶⁸ Couperus has his character Addy study medicine in Vienna—the center of Freud's ongoing work—for a year.

Addy's use of hypnotism to treat the trauma of his cousin Emilie demonstrates Couperus's familiarity with contemporary psychoanalytic techniques. Emilie, whose brother/lover has been murdered in Paris, has a classical case of what would later be associated with the Freudian idea of the "compulsion to repeat." Freud and Breuer's early work on trauma and hypnosis, published in 1895, is useful in explaining the repetitive return of the trauma experienced by Emilie after she finds the dead body of her beloved brother Henri. Couperus describes Emilie's traumatic neurosis in the last book of the quartet, finished in 1902: in *Dr. Adriaan*, every summer after Henri's murder, Emilie becomes hysterical and is compelled to repeat the secret story of Henri's murder to Addy, and only to Addy.

She was like a madwoman; in the sultry summer heat she was overmastered by the day-long vision that loomed up regularly with the first balmy warmth of spring. She was like a madwoman; she saw everything before her eyes; she lived the past over again.⁶⁹

In the novel, two sorts of repetition are linked: Emilie's need to repeat the story and the return every year of the hysteria that accompanies her tragic memory, repressed during the dark winter but resurrected with the summer. The family does not know that it was Emilie's ex-husband who stabbed Henri and that Emilie witnessed the

Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, ed. and trans. John Fletcher (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), chapter ten.

⁶⁷ See the essays "Hypnotism and Suggestion," Freud's introduction to his translation of Bernheim's work published in 1888 or 1889, and "A Case of Successful Treatment by Hypnotism," published in 1893, in Sigmund Freud, *Sigmund Freud, Therapy and Technique*, ed. Philip Rieff, trans. James Strachey (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1963), pp. 27–54. For the note on the dating of the first essay, see p. 27, n. 1, in this volume. Freud translated two volumes of Charcot's lectures. See Ernst Kris's "Introduction to Sigmund Freud," *Letters to Wilhelm Fliess*, p. 17. Freud used hypnosis in his treatment of patients from 1887 until 1896, when he abandoned the technique.

⁶⁸ Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*. See also Peter Gay's useful chronology in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York, NY, and London: W. W. Norton, 1989), pp. xxxi–xlvi. For more on the work of Charcot and Janet on hypnosis and hysteria, see Michael Roth, "Hysterical Remembering," *Modernism/Modernity* 3,2 (1996): 1–30; and Leys, *Trauma*, pp. 18–19. For a very different take on Freud's work, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobson, *Remembering Anna O.: A Century of Mystification* (New York, NY, and London: Routledge, 1996).

⁶⁹ Couperus, *Dr. Adriaan*, p. 288.

murder, nor that the ex-husband stalked Emilie and Henri while they were living in Paris. Addy is the one who must listen to the story every summer, the only one who can calm Emilie and assuage her pain. When he does this, Addy needs to get Emilie to look into his eyes so that he can hypnotize her with his healing gaze. Ruth Leys has noted a key point in the evolution of trauma theory:

What is less understood is that hypnosis was not just an instrument of research and treatment but played a major theoretical role in the conceptualization of trauma. This is because the tendency of the hypnotized persons to imitate or repeat whatever they were told to say or do provided a basic model for the traumatic experience.⁷⁰

Leys is suggesting that techniques of hypnosis shaped the way that trauma was defined, thus giving the medical hypnotists a role in creating their clinical descriptions of trauma. Couperus's *The Books of Small Souls* can be seen as part of the transnational discourse of trauma theory as it evolved in the twentieth century.

In Freud's introduction to his translation into German of Bernheim's *De la suggestion et de ses applications à la thérapeutique*, published in two parts in 1888 and 1889, Freud discussed Bernheim's ideas concerning suggestion and hypnosis, which Freud thought were important for ongoing work in Vienna in the field that would come to be called psychoanalysis. The methods of hypnosis and suggestion that Addy uses on his patients—in particular, the haunted and melancholic Marie, Addy's cousin, who has come to live with the family in Driebergen so that Addy can treat her, and Emilie, as described above—resemble Bernheim's techniques, as they are described by Freud, as well as Bernheim's own descriptions of his methods. In Freud's 1893 paper on a successful treatment by hypnotism, Freud notes: "I at once attempted to induce hypnosis by ocular fixation, at the same time making constant suggestions of the symptoms of sleep."⁷¹ These were the techniques used by Bernheim, as opposed to the grander and more theatrical types of hypnosis used by Charcot in his work on hysteria in Paris. Couperus's familiarity with turn-of-the-century work on hypnosis and cathartic treatment is evidenced by his decision to make the hero of his family quartet a doctor skilled in the specific techniques of hypnosis that were used at the time to treat the traumatic neuroses. In the conclusion of the fourth book, old Mamma van Lowe dies, and Addy, after officially separating from his wife, Mathilde, returns from several months of travel to the warm embrace of his large neurotic family, whose members have felt abandoned and lost without him. Thus, the doctor becomes the new patriarch, who takes over from the old colonial one, Papa van Lowe. Addy, the psychoanalyst, replaces the colonial governor-general and tries to heal the colonial phantoms and phantasms that haunt his family, phantoms that derive from the harsh treatment by Dutch colonial servants of Indies Natives whom Couperus sees as children, albeit dangerous children.

⁷⁰ Leys, *Trauma*, p. 8. This model came to be called the mimetic theory of trauma, as contrasted with the anti-mimetic theory. Leys's book takes the theoretical vacillations between the mimetic and anti-mimetic theories of trauma as its central core. I discuss this important distinction in *Dread and Enchantment*, chapter five.

⁷¹ Freud, *Sigmund Freud, Therapy and Technique*, p. 44. See also H. Bernheim, *Hypnosis and Suggestion in Psychotherapy: A Treatise on the Nature and Uses of Hypnotism*, trans. Christian A. Herter (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1964), chapter one.

Colonial Phantoms and Phantasies

Whereas Freud found the origins of neuroses and hysteria in infantile sexuality and sexual phantasies—in desire, rather than actual events—once he abandoned the seduction theory in 1897, Couperus's site of neurotic origins was located in the degenerative effects of empire. Couperus's characters' neuroses are also connected with sexual phantasies, but those sexual phantasies have roots in the contagions of the Indies. In a collection of travel essays that Couperus was asked to write as a special correspondent for the liberal Dutch newspaper the *Haagsche Post* in 1921, a year and a half before he died, he spoke frankly of the Indies people.

These men's desires are quite different from those of a European workman at the present time; they remain childlike and traditional, and are born to serve and to honor the descendants of their ancient races ... And in this childlike and traditionally minded soul there is something slumbering and occasionally awaking, which will always remain a mystery to the Westerner, which he denies, if he has no finer perceptions—an occult Force ... Where the native believes in various "*elmoes*" (Arabic—*ilm*—knowledge), such magic "*elmoes*" must exist in his mind. He cannot have invented them; as a matter of fact, he cannot invent anything; of what he calls "invention" there is somewhere, without a doubt, a prototype. An *elmoe* is the science of how to make use of a higher power in order to attain a certain object ... I believe the native attaches more value to being conscious of having an *elmoe* than to the thought of having the vote or other modern rights. With his childlike nature, he will scarcely know how to use such rights.⁷²

It is at the end of this essay that Couperus's much cited admission appears, announcing his own belief in the ability of the "Malay" or "Javanese" to possess and use these *elmoes* (M/I *ilmu*) either to benefit or trouble the Westerner, and that the Westerner who makes light of these powers does so at his or her own risk. It is clear from the quote that Couperus did not see the Indies people as capable of inventing the *elmoes* themselves, and he located the source of this spiritual concept in Islamic knowledge by providing the Arabic root '*ilm*, knowledge, for the Javanese and Malay word *elmoe*. Although he believed most Javanese or Malay peoples were not inventive, Couperus was aware that the upper classes of the Indies, the regents and others of their class, were becoming educated and that they would soon want their independence from the Dutch. Like many of the scholars of the Indies in the first decades of the twentieth century, Couperus believed these upper-class regents to be descendants of the Indians, Indo-Aryans who were believed at that time to have once colonized the Indies.⁷³ He observed that the elites were supposedly Indic, while the lower classes were influenced by the Arabic *elmoes*. Thus the regents were capable of

⁷² Couperus, *Eastward*, trans. J. Menzies-Wilson and C. C. Crispin (New York, NY: George H. Doran Company, 1924 [1923]), pp. 270–72. The ellipses in these passages are mine, as I have strung together sentences from several paragraphs of one essay. The italics have also been added. See also the opening page of this book for Couperus's description of his colonial family and his great-grandfather Abraham Couperus who was governor of Malacca, as well as his grandfather, who was governor-general of the Indies.

⁷³ See Laurie J. Sears, *Shadows of Empire*, pp. 88 ff., for a discussion of these scholars.

development despite the continuing superstitions that surrounded the Sunan of Solo and Sultan of Jogjakarta, the emasculated Javanese monarchs who, Couperus said, were worshipped in their ornate palaces in the principalities of central Java.⁷⁴

Couperus felt patriarchal toward, but also fond of, the lower classes of Java and Sumatra, and he was aware of the increasingly educated upper classes. His novels suggested that the neurotic diseases of the Dutch colonial classes did not come only from their physical contact with the peoples of the Indies. In fact, in the *Small Souls* quartet, there is very little contact between the Van Lowe family and Indies Natives at all, apart from contact with the *nonnas* married to family members. Only in *The Hidden Force* did Javanese regent families and servants figure prominently.⁷⁵ In his *Small Souls* quartet, Couperus celebrated the fallen grandeur of the Van Lowe family, whose members are both sustained and haunted by memories and phantasies of their life in the Indies. In the novels, the neuroses of the Van Lowe family are caused by events that happened to the Dutch in the Indies. Stoler has attributed the perceived degeneration of the Dutch in the Indies to racism and empire in her important work on the contagions and contaminations that were believed to afflict Dutch children in the Indies who were raised by Native or Eurasian women. As Stoler notes, the discourse regarding contagions carried by lower-class women in Europe preceded the discourse on race and contagion in the Indies. Stoler suggests that Freud may have been influenced by reports of events in the colonies when he isolated similar behavior in the nursemaids of Habsburg Austro-Hungary in the late nineteenth century.⁷⁶ Couperus, too, saw the Dutch degenerating in the Indies, sinking into patterns of sexual deviance and even driven to murder in his last *Haagsche* novel, *Old People and Things that Pass By*. But Couperus's novels suggest there was a complex Dutch relationship with the Indies that caused these disorders: the Dutch lost their self-control if they spent too long in the Indies. Creoles born in the Indies were typical examples of racial degeneration, and even Holland-born Dutch citizens who visited could fall victim to the *elmoes* of the Malays and Javanese, could adopt Indies manners and lifestyles, and become decadent and degenerate. Couperus thought that interracial marriages and sexual dalliances

⁷⁴ Couperus was surprised that the heart of the "revolution" that he saw emerging in Java should be traced to these very principalities, and he cited Dr. Tjipto Mangoon Koesomo [*sic*], Hadji Misbach, and Douwes Dekker as three of the individuals then leading this revolution. He agreed with the banishment of Dr. Tjipto from central Java and the jailing of Hadji Misbach, and was sorry that Douwes Dekker had not been given a stiffer punishment for being one of these agitators.

⁷⁵ On *The Hidden Force*, see the excellent essays by Margaret Weiner, "Hidden Forces: Colonialism and the Politics of Magic in the Netherlands Indies," in *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment*, ed. Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 129–58; Pamela Pattynama, "Secrets and Danger: Interracial Sexuality in Louis Couperus's *The Hidden Force* and Dutch Colonial Culture around 1900," in *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, ed. Julia Clancy-Smith and Francis Gouda (Charlottesville, VA, and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp. 84–107; Henri Chambert-Loir, "Menace sur Java: *La Force silencieuse* de Louis Couperus (1900)," in *Rêver l'Asie: Exotisme et littérature coloniale aux Indes, en Indochine et en Insulinde*, ed. Denys Lombard, Catherine Champion, and Henri Chambert-Loir (Paris: Editions de L'École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1993), pp. 413–22; Beekman, *Troubled Pleasures*, pp. 253–91; Nieuwenhuys, *Mirror of the Indies*, pp. 123–33; and various essays in the Dutch journal *Indische Letteren*.

⁷⁶ See Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, especially chapters five and six and p. 147; and Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*. Cf. "Draft A," in Freud, *The Origins of Psycho-analysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887–1902*, p. 65, where Freud poses the question: "Is there an innate neurasthenia with innate sexual weakness or is it always acquired in youth? (From nurses, from being masturbated by another person.)"

were also at fault because Indies women might also possess the dreaded *elmoes*; the author's attitude in this case is more grim than one might expect, given the fact that his portrayals of the Indies *nonnas* who were present in his family and his novels tend to be benign.⁷⁷ According to the author, the Dutch did not thrive and become better people in the Indies and, when they returned to Holland, Dutch colonials often suffered from melancholia, hallucinations, and incestuous phantasies and desires. Couperus offered his readers phantasies of colonial abandon and sexuality. And, like the phantoms of the past that can be passed from generation to generation, these phantasies or phantasms, which caused trauma and melancholia, were also passed to succeeding generations.⁷⁸ In his family novels, like the *Small Souls* quartet discussed in this essay, even children who have never been in the Indies are susceptible to these colonial phantoms. The colonial experience was a traumatic one, one from which, Couperus suggests, many Dutch colonial families could not recover.

Couperus mixed ideas of trauma, sexuality, and hypnosis circulating in Europe in the *fin-de-siècle* period with influences from the Indies and the colonial relationship. Although Couperus identified the *elmoes* as the source of European degeneration in the tropics, not everyone was affected by *elmoes* in the same way. Native women could use their magical *elmoes* to destabilize European men, but creole men and women and mixed-race children might also find themselves vulnerable to the debilitating effects of the *elmoes* because of jealousies, gossip, and sexual desires. The *elmoes* had an uncanny effect on Europeans in the Indies, producing an echo in many of Couperus's characters that came from a form of magic rooted in Native powers. These echoes can be heard in Couperus's constant repetitions, and they were the echoes of colonial anxiety, sexuality, and trauma. Couperus's repetitions occur both at the word level, as shown in this essay, and at the image level: the dripping rain and blowing wind are constant reminders of melancholic life in Holland and the loss of the sunshine-filled Indies world and its sexual license.

These echoes, which originated in memories of the Indies, disturbed people's sense of time in the era of colonial modernity. The time differential created by these echoes produced aporias, sources of hesitation or doubt, which arose in the temporal and spatial gaps between life in modern colonial Indies and life in the metropole.⁷⁹ The time differential encompasses memory—the plain fact that those who had visited the Indies sensed a gap between now, in Holland, and then—but it also refers to a sense that the Indies, for many Dutch who had been born or lived for a long period of time there,

⁷⁷ Pamela Pattynama, "Secrets and Danger," discusses the important role of miscegenation in *The Hidden Force*.

⁷⁸ The notion of transgenerational phantoms comes from Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chapter six.

⁷⁹ Other works have suggested a time lag or a gap between colony and metropole and between colonizer and colonized. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2008); and Homi Bhabha's idea of mimicry in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2005 [1994]), pp. 121–30, as well as Bhabha's distinction between the pedagogical and the performative in the constitution of the postcolonial nation, *ibid.*, pp. 199–244. On the idea of colonial modernity in East Asia, see Tani Barlow's "Introduction" to *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 6: "'Colonial modernity' can be grasped as a speculative framework for investigating the infinitely pervasive discursive powers that increasingly connect at key points to the globalizing impulses of capitalism."

actually existed in a different stratum of time ... a chaotic, subconscious phantasy time that had become an irretrievable historical past. For certain members of the Dutch bureaucratic class, the doubt raised questions about the morality of the colonial regime that was the source of the decadent and cruel behavior, according to Couperus. And this very doubt created a weakness, a susceptibility to the *elmoes*, that fatally destabilized some Dutch people who had contact with the Indies, such as the resident in *The Hidden Force*, and not others. In Couperus's *Small Souls* quartet, Gerrit and his lover Pauline, Emilie, and Henri all share in sexual degeneracy, while figures like Mama Van Lowe, Addy, and Constance experience an excess of desire for love, sex, or recognition. Sexual degeneracy, as defined in that period, and an excess of desire were rooted in weakness and doubt; it was the weakness and doubt that produced the gap, or time differential, from which the phantasms arose. This doubt was felt in Holland by those who had lived in the Indies, and in the Indies by those Indies people educated in Dutch, where the language and the access it provided to the thought-world of the colonizer caused doubt and desire to arise in colonial subjects like Tirto. The aporia caused the experiences of colonial modernity as expressed in these literary works to become sites of phantasies. As Laplanche and Pontalis have pointed out in their argument that phantasies should not be placed within the false dichotomy of reality and illusion: "Fantasy, however, is not the object of desire, but its setting."⁸⁰ In creating the space/time of Den Haag, Batavia, and Java, Tirto and Couperus captured the disorientations of time and the hauntings of memory through the sexually phantasmic scenes portrayed in their works.

The Times of Colonial Modernity

Tirto's fiction blends elements of the past and the present in his stories: sexual phantasies, guns, fortune-tellers, black magic (*guna-guna*), gambling, electricity, the press, commodities, capital, slander, and censorship all coexist in the same space. Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued: "Thus the writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself."⁸¹ Chakrabarty suggests that when people in the past consulted and believed in mystics and shamans, they nonetheless continued other practices that unmistakably marked them as modern. When Busono visits a *dukun* (healer or sorcerer) in Tirto's autobiographical novella, *Busono*, he is aware of the disjuncture between his usual behaviors and his visit to the *dukun*, which he undertook to please Njai Siti Ningrum, his friend. He recognizes both the modern and the unmodern. Although Busono's friend Siti Ningrum did not see these visits in the same way, she felt nostalgia for the time when everyone believed in the power of the *dukun*. By Chakrabarty's logic, the *njai's* nostalgia unmistakably marks her as modern. Her nostalgia for the past allows her to see the plurality of time and the disjuncture of the present with itself. Chakrabarty also maintains: "The moment we think of the world as disenchanting, however, we set limits to the ways the past can be narrated."⁸² The struggle between

⁸⁰ Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," p. 17.

⁸¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 109–10.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

disenchantment and enchantment, and that between the time of modernity and something that preceded it, took place on the pages of Tirta's fiction, just as melancholia filled the pages of Couperus's novels. The figure of the *njai* is associated with modernity in Tirta's writings, as Njai Siti Ningrum spoke Dutch, read the newspapers, asserted her rights to sexual and economic freedom, and felt nostalgia for time past. The figures of the *sjech* or the *hadji* were not necessarily modern, but they became modern in Tirta's writings through their entry into the circulations of economic, sexual, religious, and linguistic changes taking place in the Indies.⁸³ The *Sjech* and Njai Ratna, in particular, long for forbidden partners because of their excess of sexual desire. The circulations of desire do not appear without rewards and retributions. In Tirta's fiction, these retributions take different forms than in Couperus's, but the characters of both authors are enmeshed in sexual promiscuity allegedly rooted in the Indies.

Like Couperus, Tirta also identified magical forces at work in the Indies, and he juxtaposed traditional magic against the enchantments of modernity in his fiction. Tirta respected Indies *dukun*, but did not fear to mock the hypocrisies of practitioners of magic, even though he knew they were out of place and out of time. As Ranajit Guha expressed in his quote that introduces this essay, historians need to put questions of anxieties and the uncanny into the writing of history. Through Couperus's belief in the *elmoes* of Java and the frequent appearance of *dukun* in Tirta's stories, anxieties and the uncanny reappear as echoes not quite in time or out of the time of colonial modernity. Like Couperus, Tirta saw the colonial relationship as one that had degenerate effects on Indies colonial collaborators—the regent class—and the Dutch colonial bureaucrats as well. Collaboration with the Dutch led the Indies ruling classes to wallow in the worst excesses of Javanese and Sundanese bureaucratic hierarchies—the overwhelming concern with *hormat*, mentioned above, which required groveling behavior, performed both by and for the Javanese/Sundanese upper classes to mark their honor and prestige. But pursuing the phantasms of colonial modernity also posed dangers and could lead innocent people like Njai Ratna toward murder and sexual excess. The groups that Tirta focused on in his novellas were the *njai*, bureaucrats of any race who were corrupt, and figures who appeared too Islamic and whom he saw as hypocrites. In his essays, Tirta commented on colonial manipulations of the dangers of Islam represented in the European press and in colonial documents. Tirta also saw the colonial relationship itself as the site of danger and shock, the Benjaminian shock of modernity and its fetishes that in the Indies could lead to degenerate behaviors. But the story of Tirta's own phantoms was one that he never told. In Tirta's novella, *Busono*, the main character had a nervous breakdown caused by malicious gossip and the machinations of his ambitious uncle, rather than by black magic. Busono recovered but, once Tirta was sent into his last term of exile in Ambon, Tirta never recovered and never, as far as we know, wrote about the tragic end of his life in Batavia. The colonial betrayal that Tirta's writings hinted at turned into phantoms and phantasms that haunted Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who portrayed them in his famous *Buru Quartet* as reflections and returns of his own traumas.

⁸³ James Siegel discusses the gap between appearance and identity that frees recognition from any one location in Tirta's journalism through his analysis of the juxtaposition of photographs in the Malay newspapers of Tirta's time. This gap marks a path to modernity for Natives of the Indies by freeing them from fixed identities. See Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*, chapter three.