Never-Neverland Revisited: Malay Adventure Stories

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4 | Man Versus World: Malay Adventure Stories and Malay Ontology

In his 1962 publication on *hikayat* or Malay prose works, Bausani remarked that the Malay adventure story, apart from being an amalgam of narrative material drawn from Indian and Arab traditions, showed its originality in a kind of minute realism that paid much attention to emotional and psychological detail (Bausani 1979, 17, 77 n. 21, 46, 48). Without realizing it, he struck a rich vein: the detailed and frequent descriptions in these stories of the protagonists' emotional imbalance, psychological states and fainting were what piqued my curiosity in the first place. The seemingly feeble constitution of the kings and queens and their offspring who are featured in these narratives forms the starting point for an explorative journey through the world of Malay adventure stories.

This chapter examines passages in Malay adventure stories that describe the pervasive presence of another dimension or another world, in its relation to altered states of consciousness. Apart from the phenomenal world perceived by the stories' characters through their senses, there are flashes of another realm that seems to exist simultaneously with the primary world of the texts; this world cannot be experienced by the characters in an ordinary way. Short embedded stories tell of encounters with ghosts and spirits, religious messengers, deceased relatives and future kings in this otherworldly sphere. Events occur that defy the laws of nature, giving the stories their supernatural colouring. The make-up of this dimension appears to be very complex, as it seems to comprise past and present as well as the future.

For the purpose of this investigation a corpus of seven Malay narratives was created. It includes the *Story of Bahram Syah*. A complete list of titles and bibliographic information can be found in the Appendices. The group of stories comprises six written narratives that are known from the manuscript tradition and the transcription of an oral narrative, in two versions. Group markers are the use of the Malay language, contents and narrative

structure. All stories centre on an adventurous journey; hence, they are referred to as Malay adventure stories. They do differ, though, in terms of medium, provenance and date. This is justified by the perspective used to view Malay writing here. Whereas the previous chapters focused on a localized writing practice, this chapter presents a Malay animist world view that is shared by Malay adventure stories from different periods and regions, oral and written. Analogous to Henk Maier's view of Malayness as 'playing relatives' (Maier 2004), these seven Malay texts are considered here as relatives with a familial bond that transcends their mutual differences.

An analysis of the seven Malay adventures stories generates an ontology that provided the readers of these stories with the basic ontological categories they needed to understand and act upon the world they inhabited. This particular way of viewing the world centres upon the difference between human beings and non-human entities, and how to safeguard the boundaries between the two. Malay adventure stories depict a dangerous world that abounds with strange and puzzling encounters and events that are capable of triggering an emotional imbalance in human beings; a world in which even the slightest emotional upset can cause a human being to lose consciousness, fall ill, become insane and, ultimately, die. It is asserted that Malay adventure stories form an important medium for the transmission of ontological knowledge, because they give expression to concepts that are not found elsewhere. But public readings of adventure stories were more than just a means for a one way communication; they offered the audience a forum where matters relating to the supernatural and otherworldly entities could be questioned and debated.

This chapter examines texts in their relation to society.[1] It assumes that the human subject cannot escape the mental categories it uses to make sense of the world, not even in its wildest dreams. From this follows that texts, as cultural representations, are imbued with these mental categories. Together, these classifications form culturally informed coherence systems, or ways of knowing, or world views (Bruner 1986, 1990, 1991). As intangible, symbolic constructs, they are "[...] not vague conceptualizations with little or no reference to reality, but instead are critical parts of the formation of that everyday reality. [...] they contextualize reality and affirm its meanings; they also serve to facilitate encounter with new realities, new ideas, syntheses of old and new" (Yengoyan 1979, 325). Cassirer speaks of mental categories as 'organs of reality':

> [...] it is solely by their agency that anything real becomes an object for intellectual comprehension and, as such, is made visible to us. For the mind, only that can be visible which has some definite form; but every form of existence has its source in some peculiar way of seeing, some intellectual formulation and intuition of meaning (Cassirer 1953, 8, cited in McKean 1979, 293).

One can assume that people only write, read and listen to what they consider to be

[1] In this chapter, 'text(s)' refers to both written and oral narrative(s).

noteworthy. Thus, when certain themes recur in stories, especially over a long span of time, in different kinds of texts and/or over a large geographical area, this is significant. The frequent occurrence in the Malay adventure stories of fainting, dreaming, illness, healing rituals, 'magic' and the depiction of the 'supernatural,' marks them as prominent preoccupations of both authors and audiences. Their presence warrants an examination of the stories: an attempt to gain insight into other orderings of reality than the one that is rooted in the West and is hegemonic in a large part of globe.

Considering their fairytale-like nature, Malay adventure stories might not seem the obvious choice for learning about the real world that exists outside the texts. But they bear the mark of the society that brought them forth. In particular, Darnton's work on European fairytales (1984) has demonstrated how seemingly whimsical narratives as folktales and legends contain information on a particular society that cannot be found elsewhere. In his book *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (1984), Robert Darnton challenges the commonly held view that tales are atypical, suspended in time and impossible to connect to one particular area or ethnic group. In the chapter titled "Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose," he successfully demonstrates that the French tales offered a view of other social realities than the well-documented one that existed within the confines of the French royal court during the Enlightenment. The fairytales speak of themes that portray the harsh reality of life for the common people in seventeenth-century France: hunger and starvation, wandering vagabonds, the importance of using one's wits to stay alive and child abandonment. Following Darnton's line of argument, this chapter aims to show that Malay adventure stories contain important Malay cultural knowledge: a coherence system that offers man tools to understand and act upon his surroundings.

In the field of Indonesian studies, anthropologists Bill Watson and Vinson H. Sutlive have turned to texts to glean information on the mental horizon of a specific community. Watson read modern Indonesian novels to reconstruct a mindset that supported the use of 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery.' In his article "Perceptions from Within: Malign Magic in Indonesian Literature" (1993), he offers a useful model of

> [...] how fictional material should be read by anthropologists who are alert enough to recognize the problems inherent in trying to read off the fiction as straightforward ethnographic data yet nonetheless feel that inscribed within literature are social understandings of sorcery and witchcraft (Watson 1993, 191).

One of these problems Watson refers to is the existence of underlying forces that shape fictional representations. He mentions in particular the political context that can colour texts. Another one, as will be shown in the current chapter, is the narrative format of a text.

Similar contemplations occupy Sutlive in his study on oral narratives of the Iban (an

indigenous people of Borneo) and the role they play in the socialization of Iban children. Although he feels that the Iban way of viewing the world cannot be understood solely on the basis of the stories the Iban tell each other, he questions whether it can be understood without taking them into account. He states that

> The literature is both reflective and refractive [...]. Some reflections are true, others distorted and difficult if not impossible to recognize. Nevertheless, the images and their structural relations must be examined for the insights they provide into the perceptions and projections of the Iban (Sutlive 1979, 105).

Like Watson and Sutlive, I believe that texts contain information on a society's core values and ontological categories, but are not one-to-one reflections of a social reality.

The examination of Malay adventure stories in this chapter clearly bears the mark of structuralist theory. Structuralism is the theoretical paradigm that emphasizes that elements of a culture must be understood in terms of their relationship to a larger, overarching system or structure. Philosopher Simon Blackburn summarized it as

> [...] the belief that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract culture (Blackburn 2005, 353).

If the current examination of Malay stories resembles Clifford Geertz' 'thick description,' it is because the latter's premises where taken up by New Historicism.[2] 'Thick description' explains human behaviour in its own, cultural context, in such a way that the behaviour becomes meaningful to an outsider (Geertz 1973, 3–33). At the same time, my line of argument echoes the work of Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth on, what he called, the 'anthropology of knowledge'. The questions he is fascinated with, such as what factors determine the validity of knowledge, and how and to what degree knowledge is standardized and shared in a society, and why some forms of knowledge are more portable or catching than others, are relevant to the current issue as well (Barth 2002, 1–18).

After the relationship between different human states of consciousness has been have been explained by highlighting their common base, these findings are compared with what anthropologists say about the matter. Both discourses are then carefully read against each other to discover how they illuminate each other. Lastly, the focus shifts to the Malay adventure story as a repository of cultural knowledge and a highly effective means of transmission of this knowledge.

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[2] This study especially fits in with the strand of literary theory referred to as New Historicism. See the Introduction.

The Paradigm of Vital Force (*Semangat*)

A close reading of seven Malay adventure stories learns that the different human states of consciousness that are described in them are closely related. The foundation for this familial relationship is found in their common cause: the loss and sustained absence of a part of a human being, called *semangat*.[3] As a prolonged absence of *semangat* ultimately leads to the death of the person it belongs to, I translate *semangat* as 'vital force'. Beside death, the loss of a person's *semangat* can cause a person to remain asleep, to faint, to fall ill or become mad. The texts do not describe what exactly *semangat* consists of or looks like, but are explicit on its properties. Embedded stories that tell of the journeys undertaken by the *semangat* of people that are asleep, unconscious or dead suggest that this entity resembles the person it usually is attached to. A *semangat* can do anything an ordinary human being can and it behaves and acts in conformity with the social rank of its 'owner'. It is therefore compelling to think of *semangat* as having a human appearance. Closer scrutiny though, makes it clear that a *semangat* has extra abilities that set them apart from an ordinary human being. The stories relate how *semangat* travel through time and space and are able to cross the boundary between the ordinary world and another, intangible realm. But, before it can roam this other world, it needs to escape from its physical confines. The Malay stories refer to a person's fontanelle, mouth and big toe as points of entry and exit of *semangat*. *Semangat* act in a dimension that exists parallel to the world that can be perceived by the protagonists through their senses. In short, *semangat* is like the reflection of a person in a mirror: exactly the same and different at the same time, and existing in a different dimension.

The investigation starts with the conspicuous 'strangeness' that characterizes the world that is portrayed in the stories. Malay adventure stories allow the modern-day reader to explore strange and wondrous worlds of fiction. The text leads her from one miracle to another and she cannot but be amazed by the multitude of speaking animals, magic objects and clever characters she learns about. This process of reading mirrors the journey(s) described in the text: the traveling protagonists turn out to be at least as bewildered by the things they encounter as the reader. The textual world of Malay adventure stories is as strange to the stories' characters as it is to us now. As soon as the princes and princesses have left their father's state, they see, hear and even smell new things. They learn about things that have never been heard of "[...] from the time of their ancestors up till the present day".[4] And thus Malay adventure stories abound with passages that relate how kings, princes and princesses become flabbergasted after they have witnessed something extraordinary. The following words are used to denote this state of bewilderment:

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[3] Some of the stories incidentally refer to this entity as *arwah* or *roh* (Wilkinson 1959, 47, 978).

[4] [...] dari pada nenek moyang kami sampai sekarang (SBS 5b). This formulaic phrase is used in Malay adventure stories to indicate that something is unfamiliar to the characters.

heran, *tercengang-cengang* and *termangu-mangu*. They can be translated with 'amazed,' 'surprised,' 'flabbergasted' and 'dazed' or 'confused' (Wilkinson 1959, 210, 405). The frequent use of the word *terkejut*, 'surprised' or 'frightened,' indicates that the encounters with the unexpected not only arouse amazement and surprise but are also accompanied by feelings of fright and fear.

The 'strange' in Malay adventure stories is connected to one of the stories' most intriguing features; that is, the number of characters that collapse and faint. It is not just the main protagonists who frequently swoon, but others, such as the female servants at the palace, faint as well. They fall to the ground and lie flat on their back or stomach or collapse and sit down leaning against their horse, for instance. This is described by words such as *rebah*, 'to fall to the ground,' *terhantar*, 'astretch,' 'to lie on the ground' and *tersandar*, 'at rest against' (Wilkinson 1959, 395, 955, 1014). When a character loses consciousness, the scene becomes one of anxiety. Bystanders encourage the fainted person to wake up, '*bangun*', and frequently express that if their loved one does not regain consciousness, they have no reason to live on. In their attempts to make the fainted person come to, he or she is yelled at, blown at, caressed, or sprinkled with tears, magically treated oil and vinegar or, more commonly, with rosewater. One of these remedies usually results in a quick recovery, which is sometimes followed by a crying fit.

Moreover, the way the language is used in these passages underscores the prominence of fainting in the stories. As explained in the previous chapter, Malay adventure stories have a formulaic composition with repetitions on different levels of the text. Words, phrases, sentences, metaphors, motifs, personal names, names of places and magical devices, all recur within a single text and within the whole corpus of Malay narrative texts. This feature has been linked to the aural nature of the stories, which were frequently read out aloud at public gatherings. While the vocabulary of Malay adventure stories is rather limited, the words and phrases that are used in the stories to refer to fainting display a remarkable variety. *Lupa akan diri*, *tiada kabar akan diri*, *tiada sadar akan diri*, *tiada tahu akan diri*, *pingsan*, *merca*, *bius*, *arwahnya pun hilang*, *rohnya pun hilang*, *semangatnya pun hilang*, and *terbang semangat* are all used to convey that a particular character faints. Of this series, *arwahnya pun hilang*, *rohnya pun hilang*, *semangatnya pun hilang* and *terbang semangat* can be translated as 'to lose one's vital force'. This unusual lexical variety stands out even more if one takes into account that these phrases are often found combined:

> Hatta maka kelihatanlah kemala Ratna Suri memancar-mancar cahayanya itu, maka cemerlanglah tiba kepada muka baginda itu seperti sinar matahari, maka raja itu pun *rebah, merca, lalu pingsan, tiadalah kabar akan dirinya* [emphasis mine] sebab kena sinar cahaya kemala Ratna Suri itu (SBS 35b).

Fainting now turns out to be linked to traveling. Having regained their consciousness, some of the fainted characters tell of places they have been and about the things they

have seen there. In the *SLB*, for example, Prince Indera Bumaya faints when he sees a portrait of the young and beautiful princess Kusuma Dewi in a dream. After he has come to, his father asks him why he slept and stayed unconscious for such a long time. His son answers that he saw a beautiful scene and that this captivating sight kept him from 'waking up' (*SLB* 5).

The fact that in this same passage from the *SLB*, *tidur*, 'to be asleep' and *pingsan*, 'to be unconscious', are used next to each other to denote one and the same state suggests a relationship between the two. Adventure stories feature scenes that point to the relationship between *tidur*, 'to be asleep' and *lupa akan dirinya*, 'to faint,' or one of its synonyms.[5] In the stories, not only unconscious people travel, but sleeping people wander during their sleep as well. Their experiences are often similar: after they have 'woken up,' they tell that they were received as a guest in another state, either godly or unknown, where they were present at an audience in the king's audience hall and received different kinds of gifts afterwards.

Fainting is not only related to sleep, but to death and dying as well. Death is a recurrent motif in Malay adventure stories, but for the present argument it is in particular those instances where deceased characters are revived that call for closer examination. Only those who have returned from the dead are able to report about the other realm. After-death experiences resemble the adventures of people who are dreaming or who are unconscious. Like sleeping and unconscious travelers, deceased characters usually travel to a foreign state where they wait upon the local ruler. In the *SIP*, for example, the main hero uses his magic power to kill many of the boating princes at the lake called Sea of Passions. Later, he revives the same young men by sprinkling magically treated rosewater on their corpses. After their return from the dead, the princes tell how they sailed to a certain state after they had died, and how they went to wait upon this state's ruler (*SIP* 139).

It seems that the distinction between sleep, unconsciousness and death that is made in the modern Western world is absent in Malay adventure stories. The same worries and anxieties that accompany the death of a loved one are found in passages that describe a prolonged period of sleep or unconsciousness.[6] The affinity of death with sleep and unconsciousness is evident from the following quotation taken from the *SMB*: a royal mother addresses her two dead sons:

> "Oh, my sons, come to, my life, come to, light of my eyes, come to, my everything! I am crushed, destroyed. What forest are you traversing, what mountain are you passing, what plain are you crossing that you do not even care to respond to your mother's cries?" (*SMB* 59)[7]

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5 See for instance *SDM* 121.

6 See for instance *SDM* 277–278.

7 "Wah Anakanda tuan, sadarlah nyawa badan Bunda, sadarlah cahaya mata Bunda, sadarlah batok kepala Bunda serta hilanglah remuklah Bunda serta lenyap. Hutan yang mana tuan jalani dan gunung yang mana

What is striking about this fragment is that the mother does not seem to accept the fact that her sons have passed away. Instead, she assumes they are somewhere else. When she asks her dead sons about their whereabouts she is not addressing their bodily remains that lie in front of her, but calls out to that part of her sons that has left its mortal remains behind. In Malay adventure stories, dead people can leave their body behind and travel to other places, as can people who sleep and who have fainted. For an answer to the question why sleep, unconsciousness and death are similar, we must look at the basis for a possible relationship.

All the fragments that depict one of the different states of consciousness share a description of the division of a human being into two separate parts. One of these consists of the seemingly lifeless body of one of the characters lying on the ground, while the other part, of which few details are given, has left the scene. This missing part is spoken to, yelled at or called back, as in the last example from the *SMB*. The stories provide the reader with various names for it: *semangat*, *arwah* and *roh*. The phrases *arwahnya pun hilang*, *rohnya pun hilang*, *semangatnya pun hilang* and *terbang semangat* prove interchangeable and are used to denote sleep, fainting, illness, madness and death. The words *terbang* and *hilang*, 'fly' and 'to lose' or 'lost,' in combination with *arwah*, *roh* and *semangat* make clear that these conditions, whether sleep, unconsciousness or death, are caused by the loss of *semangat* or vital force.

Causes of *Semangat* Loss

The question remains as to why people in Malay adventure stories lose their *semangat* so often. A closer look into the circumstances in which people swoon, fall sleep or die reveals the triggers that make the *semangat* flee. Surprise prompted by an encounter with the strange or unexpected has already been mentioned. The following section will address yet other causes: strong emotions, such as grief, sadness and anxiety; the confrontation with beauty, magic and lovesickness.

Malay adventure stories abound with scenes of sudden disappearances, kidnapping and death that lead to an emotional upset of bystanders and, subsequently, their loss of consciousness. The strong emotions of sadness, grief and anxiety, which accompany the realization that a loved one is gone, make the body an improper home for the *semangat* to reside. As a result, it flies off, leaving the physical body behind asleep or unconscious. In the *SIP*, a young prince is seized by a golden peacock. As soon as his father learns of his son's sudden disappearance, he faints. After he has regained consciousness, he starts to cry and faints again (*SIP* 51–52). Another case of fainting that is caused by grief or sadness

tuan edari dan padang yang mana tuan lalui maka tuan lalai tiada khabarkan bunda memanggil akan tuan ini?"(SMB 59).

is found in the *SMB*. Prince Bikrama Indera discovers that the handsome young captain he has just met is, in fact, a beautiful princess. Her parrot tells him that it is impossible for him to stay friends with her; firstly, because she is a woman and secondly, because her brother works for him as a servant. When he hears this, Bikrama Indera is devastated. He faints. His mother yells at him while he is lying on the ground. She is upset and sad, but also scolds him for not leaving her a message telling her where he went (*SMB* 59).

Fright is another strong emotion endured by the stories' protagonists. It is often concomitant to the feeling of surprise that is aroused by an unexpected encounter. The new lands that are traveled by the young princes are inhabited by strange animals and unfamiliar people. As such, they present countless opportunities for confrontations that incite fear or fright. In the *SDM*, Dewa Mandu witnesses how an elephant miraculously transforms into a beautiful princess. This is obviously too much for the hero, as he faints (*SDM* 109). In another story, Prince Indera Bumaya enters the Garden of Multiple Passions to catch sight of a princess taking a bath. When he discovers she is not in the garden, he is shocked and swoons (*SLB* 51). Luckily for the victims, the loss of consciousness is temporary. Usually, they react positively to the treatments they are given to rid them of their affliction.

The *SBS* suggests that pain and agony are also potential causes of *semangat* loss. One of the most dramatic passages in the *SBS* relates how Bahram Syah crosses the Sea of Fire, while seated on the back of a giant garuda or mythical bird. Before their departure, the garuda warns Bahram Syah of the pain and torments he will suffer during the hazardous journey:

> The garuda said, "Oh my son, listen to me! I have flown to the state of Gastu Gasta before. It is situated in the west, on the other side of the Sea of Fire. To the left of the Sea of Fire, there is the Sea of the Tree with the Double Coconut and to the right are various maelstroms. The Sea of Fire stretches down into the earth. If I ascend and fly high up in the air, it takes seven days. If I fly level, it takes me three days, and if I descend and fly low, we can definitely make it within a single day. However, the sufferings will be immense; it will feel as if you are losing consciousness as the Sea of Fire's flames are extremely hot. Three times already my breast feathers have been scorched and my skin singed. Such are the torments, oh my son!" (*SBS* 24b).

The subject of 'the beautiful' and its perceptions in Malay writing has been extensively addressed by the Russian scholar Vladimir Braginsky (1993a, 237–239, 243–253, 264–266, 289–290). Apart from the use of the word *elok*, the beautiful in Malay texts is primarily conveyed by the word *indah*. In his effort to reconstruct the Malay concept of beauty, Braginsky turns to Malay poems, tracts and prose stories of a notably Islamic Sufi character and their Arab and Persian sources. He claims that the Malay ideas about the essence of beauty are basically Islamic and are similar to how beauty is perceived in other regions of the Islamic world. In Islamic thought, the beauty of an object is a reflection of the creative power of God and is thus intrinsic to Creation. It represents diversity,

but at the same time harmony and order. The more different manifestations the objects displays, the more perfect its beauty. This, Braginsky argues, accounts for the lengthy descriptions of pretty princesses, handsome kings, lush gardens and impressive battles in Malay narratives. As homage to Creation and its Creator, the authors depict as many different qualities of a palace, a garden or a royal dais; for it is in multitude that perfect beauty is to be found.

Two images in the *SBS* in particular illustrate this concept of beauty: the multi-talented bird *Marah* Jalin and the magic stone Jewel of the Queen. The following passage makes clear that the bird's beauty is not only perceived by the senses of sight and hearing, but of smell as well. When Bahram Syah finally managed to find the bird, the animal

> [...] immediately put up its beak, spread its wings, wagged its tail and, while clicking its nails, moved like a dancer on top of the golden tray. Then it started to talk. At that same moment, gold and silver were scattered from its beak. After this, it started to tell stories and diamonds and various kinds of small gems were sprinkled from its eyes. It began to recite poetry and verse and all sorts of precious stones flew from its nose. After this, it recited *pantun* and short poems and from the follicles of its feathers, different kinds of perfumes emerged; they pervaded the air and filled the whole palace. The entire court was awestruck and the guards who watched the gates were flabbergasted; they had a hard time and shook their heads as they had never seen this bird speaking as it did that day, with the sound of its voice so heavenly (*SBS* 34b–35a).

The bird and the multi-faceted stone Jewel of the Queen are the tokens of betrothal for Bahram Syah and Princess Drifting Beach Hibiscus Flower. The stone is the ultimate symbol of the Malay concept of beauty. Its description appeals to multiple senses as well: the stone equals any weight and emits every possible colour of light.

In the Malay stories, beauty is experienced through exquisite sights, sounds and odours. In the *SLB*, for instance, a prince dreams that an old woman takes him to a breathtakingly beautiful palace. Having arrived there, he sees a portrait of a lady of ravishing beauty and – still asleep – subsequently faints. For seven days and seven nights he remains unconscious. When he finally awakes, he tells his father that he was unable to wake up, because he was under the sway of beauty. And although he succeeds in breaking free from its spell and comes to, he is not completely free from the ecstasy induced by the beautiful. Passionately longing for the lady depicted in the portrait of his dream, he is unable to eat or sleep (*SLB* 5).

A typical scene in adventure stories depicts a wandering young man of noble descent, who comes upon either a simple hut or a fine palace, but both with a magnificent flower garden. When the prince enters garden, he is surprised to hear enchanting music. From an example in the story of *Panglimo Awang* it becomes clear how sound is able to influence a character's psychological state. When lady-in-waiting Kombang hears the beautiful voice of the servant Lamat, she is startled and afraid and nearly collapses. The text is explicit about the cause of her unusual behaviour: it is Lamat's extraordinary voice that "[...]

stealthily penetrates the heart," "[...] cuts through the bones like a bamboo splinter" and "[...] creeps, sneaks into the marrow," that makes the girl Kombang act the way she does (*PA* 331).[8] But not all sounds in the Malay stories are enjoyable. Overwhelming noise can make people fall unconscious en masse. In the *SSI,* the rampaging ruler *Raja* Balildanta attacks a city-state. He spits fire and his screams are so loud that they resemble thunderbolts that split the earth in two. As a result of the ear-splitting noise, the city's inhabitants all faint (*SSI* 141).

Whereas the prince in the *SLB* was unable to wake up because of something he saw, the forty kings portrayed in the *SIP* are affected by a fragrant odour. When the story's main hero wishes to marry Princess Tulela Ratna, King Gohar Hinis orders that the treasury be opened. When they enter the building, they stumble upon the forty kings that had been missing for some time. The young men are there, lying unconscious between the gold, silver and precious stones. Once they are sprinkled with magically treated oil and vinegar, they regain their consciousness. They tell the king that the sweet-smelling odour of musk and spikenard in their dreams prevented them from waking up (*SIP* 138–139). A second example is found in the *Story of Dewa Mandu*. It is told that Prince Dewa Mandu and Angkaran Dewa are relaxing in a pavilion called Different Kinds of Flowers. A gentle breeze is blowing and the sweet scent of flowers that surrounds them pervades the air. The captivating odour penetrates the young men's noses and they doze off (*SDM* 190).

But there lurks a serious danger in the confrontation with beauty: multiple sensory stimulation can lead to a loss of self. When the sensory circuit overloads, the body is no longer a comfortable home for the sensitive *semangat*. It exits the body, with fainting, illness, madness, lovesickness or a deep sleep as the result.[9] Cases of *semangat* loss demand acute treatment; if this vital force is not quickly reunited with its 'owner,' the victim will ultimately die. In some cases, beauty entails a fatal attraction. It is able to instil longing, and longing, in turn, prompts the *semangat* to take off. This vital force longs to be united with the fair maiden, the delicate piece of jewellery or the lush garden desired by the owner of the *semangat*. In short, most sights, sounds and odours of Malay adventure stories are exquisite and pleasing, but some are potentially detrimental to an individual's health.

The narratives speak of one trigger that involves intentional actions by human beings; that is to say, 'magic.' The application of magic in the stories is often found in the context of lovesickness. The Western roots of 'magic' have been revealed in the previous chapter.

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[8] The *PA* contains more passages that portray a protagonist suffering from the effect of hearing a beautiful sound; see for instance pp. 137, 282–287. An interesting article on the effects of sound on the human psyche in a Malay context is Braginsky's "Meaning of the Sound: Magic and Sufi Mysticism in the Phonic Structure of the Malay Charm and Chant." *Indonesia and the Malay World* 34, 100 (2006), 281–314.

[9] See for instance *SIP* 123–124.

'Magic' as is depicted in Malay adventure stories actually concerns the manipulation of *semangat*, the ethereal substance that sustains life in a human being. What scholars of Malay writing in the past referred to as magical practices, are actions aimed at affecting a person's physical or mental health through the manipulation of vital force.

The application of magic occupies a prominent place in the Malay stories. Unfortunately, the texts are seldom explicit about what exactly constitutes magic. The obscure nature of magic in Malay adventure stories is epitomized by the Malay word *hikmat*. Although the word frequently occurs in the stories in the context of magic, it is difficult to provide an apt translation for it. Sometimes it refers to a concrete object, such as a stone with extraordinary qualities. Usually, however, *hikmat* denotes an object that is not further specified and that is either inherently magical or can be empowered by a religious formula or the breath of a specialist practitioner. In yet other instances, *hikmat* refers to a potent formula or charm. The list of attributes that are used for the manipulation of *semangat* is a long one. It includes all kinds of stones, immersed in a liquid or not, rosewater, human hairs, feathers, incense, cloth, burning candles, limes, breath that transfers life force, Islamic prayers and, lastly, charms.

A recurrent phenomenon in the stories is love magic. It is used to enhance a person's physical beauty to attract love, or to induce love in other ways. This particular kind of magic is not as harmless as it seems. It aims to induce a serious longing in another person, with *semangat* loss and subsequent suffering as a possible consequence. The *Story of Dewa Mandu* contains an illustrative example of love magic. Assisted by her ladies-in-waiting, a princess makes the necessary preparations to win Dewa Mandu's love. First, she applies an undescribed kind of magic to make Dewa Mandu turn away from his spouse. Then, she recites Islamic prayers and drinks a potion to make her voice sound extraordinarily sweet. With this voice, she intends to make Dewa Mandu fall madly in love with her (*SDM* 259). 'Mad' or *gila* is often found in the stories in relation to lovesickness or *berahi*.[10] Those suffering from the pangs of love are overcome by desire and are no longer capable of normal and social behaviour. The stories are explicit on the final outcome of this horrible affliction; if no treatment is found to make the *semangat* return, the lovelorn victim will ultimately die.

Cures

Considering the fatal end that awaits the sleeping, fainted or longing character, it is understandable that her family members and servants become concerned. They are anxious to try every possible means to restore the health of their loved one. As fainting, sleep,

[10] Wilkinson 1959, 123, 367–368 describes *berahi* as a "particular kind of emotional imbalance" that results in madness (*gila*).

madness, lovesickness and death are the result of *semangat* loss, the treatments for the different afflictions are interchangeable. They all aim to lure the life force back to the body it escaped from.

The group of remedies is large and diverse, but a few general remarks can be made. Liquids of various sorts, such as *air mawar*, 'rosewater,' are the most popular cures for ailments that are connected with *semangat* loss. The liquid is either sprinkled on the face or poured over the body. This action brings about a quick recovery, although the victim may experience after-effects, such as physical weakness and a pale complexion. A liquid can be made potent by immersing a magical stone or object in it. In the *SIP*, a non-described *hikmat* is used to imbue vinegar and oil with magical power to create a medicine for unconsciousness (*SIP* 139, 165). Tears can function as an antidote as well, as the following quotation from the *Story of Dewa Mandu* illustrates:

> As she watched Dewa Mandu lying unconscious as if he was sound asleep, the princess felt pity for him. Without realizing it, her tears fell on Dewa Mandu's chest. To Dewa Mandu they felt cool; it felt as if he was being sprinkled with rosewater, and he regained consciousness [...] (*SDM* 258).[11]

Besides rosewater, lime juice plays an important role in the treatment of *semangat* loss. In the *PA*, for example, Panglimo Awang bathes his younger brother with lime juice, "so as to make his spirit return" (*PA* 517). In the same story, the lovesick Princess Mai Bonsu is cured after she is bathed with lime juice. The restlessness and excessive perspiration that was caused by her desire for Panglimo Awang is gone.[12] The bath has made her heart happy and her mind cool, the texts reads (*PA* 286–293).

The ultimate cure for lovesickness is for the afflicted character to be united with the object of their desire. But when, for the sake of the continuation of the story, a blissful reunion of the lovers has to be postponed, there are other measures that can restore the health of a lovelorn person. Even the prospect of an encounter with the loved one in the near future can bring a love stricken youth back to his or her feet. The acquisition of one of the personal possessions of the loved one has a similar effect. In de *SDM*, Bambaran Raja Keinderaan asks a princess for one of her personal items to soothe Dewa Mandu's longing for her:

> Burning fresh coconut in the kitchen
> Storing its ashes in a small cup
> "I request a betel quid

[11] Terlalu belas hati tuan puteri memandang laku Dewa Mandu itu seperti laku orang tidur yang amat nyedarlah rupanya, maka air matanya tuan puteri pun titik tiada berasa lagi jatuhnya kepada dada Dewa Mandu maka dirasainya oleh Dewa Mandu terlalu amat sejuk rasanya seperti disiram orang dengan air mawar kepada rasanya baginda, maka ia pun ingatlah akan dirinya dari pada bius itu [...] (*SDM* 258).

[12] It was Panglimo Awang's sweet-sounding music that instilled strong feelings of love and longing in Princess Mai Bonsu (*PA* 287–293).

As a medicine for an anxious heart."

The ladies-in-waiting reply:

Dang Madini grows a betel vine
The betel leaves are not harvested yet
"We do not have betel here
As the betel is still on the vine."

But Bambaran Raja Keinderaan does not intend to leave empty-handed:

The hornbill and many of his friends
Drink sherbet and eat sponge cake for dessert
"I request a withered flower bud
As a medicine for a headache."

His plea, however, remains without effect. The princess and her ladies-in-waiting refuse to hand over the requested item with the excuse that they are not physicians:

A drifting bamboo raft
Gets stuck in a narrow stream
"We do not have a flower bud
As we are not physicians" (*SDM* 260–261).[13]

The head plays an important role in the treatment of *semangat* loss. Fainted characters regain their consciousness after someone blows over their head. In the *SDM*, Dewa Mandu meets a rather strange looking elephant. The animal can speak and cry like a human being. It informs Dewa Mandu that it is actually a princess, who is cursed by an evil king. Her name is Charming Precious Gem. She offers Dewa Mandu her body and soul in exchange for his help to free her from this terrible curse. The prince obliges. He recites an Islamic formula and then blows three times over the elephant's head. This creates a cool sensation in the animals' legs and, shortly after, the animal transforms into a beautiful young lady. Witnessing this spectacular transformation, Dewa Mandu collapses and faints. The princess, in turn, blows over Dewa Mandu's head. Quickly he comes to his senses and praises the Lord (*SDM* 109).

[13] Membakar nyiur di dalam dapur / Habunya taruh di dalam cawan / "Memohonkan sirih barang sekapur / Akan obat hati yang rawan." Dang Madini bertanam sirih / Sirih ada di rumpunnya / "Di sini tidak menaruh sirih / Sirih ada pada pohonnya." Burung enggang banyak sekawan / Minum serbat bertambul baulu / "Abang memohonkan layun tuan / Akan obat kepala ngilu." Hanyut rakit buluh betung / Hanyut tersangkut di sungai sempit / "Kami tidak menaruh kuntum / Bukannya kami menjadi tabib" (SDM 260–261).

The *PA* contains a description of a ritual that aims to 'call back' the *semangat*; it is called *upah-upah*. At one point in the story, Badul Komis feels sick. His hands and feet are cold; he suffers from headache and feels dizzy. In his anguish, he starts to scream. To cure him, the bystanders must perform a ritual that will make his *semangat* return; it consists of a bath with lime juice and the recitation of formulas. The juice is poured on his fontanelle and big toes. These actions ensure that Badul Komis recovers quickly (*PA* 514–517). The fontanelle functions as a gate through which the *semangat* leaves and enters the physical body. The trembling of the skin that covers the fontanelle is an indication that the *semangat* is passing through this gate (*PA* 176–177).

Life Comes with a Sneeze

Another common sign that the *semangat* is leaving or entering the body is sneezing. Characters sneeze when they regain consciousness, wake up from a dream or are revived. The following quotation from the *PA* presents a ritual for reviving four young men who lost their life in a fierce battle. The girl Kombang Cino refuses to accept their deaths and starts preparations to have them revived. At the end of the treatment, all four sneeze:

> She burns white incense
> Its smoke reaches the distant sky
> Lord Sheikh Panjang Ganyuik comes down
> He makes two with Princess Toruih Mato
> They make three with Siposan Putih
> Having arrived, he opens the window of the *anyong*
> Panglimo Komih is dozing off in the inner room
> When he arrives at the *anyong*, Kombang Cino is startled:
> "Bring all these corpses back to life again, my Lord"
> They are distributed by Sheikh Panjang Ganyuik:
> "Bring back to life Silamat, Siposan Putih
> Bring back to life Gadih Kainam, Princess Toruih Mato
> I bring back to life these two corpses"
> Rosewater is sprinkled, a drop for each one
> The big toe is sprinkled on, the heart beats
> The heart is pressed, the fontanelles beat
> The fontanelles are pressed and sprinkled on
> Then, all four sneeze
> After that, all are alive again
> But it remains quiet; they don't talk loudly (*PA* 174–177).

It is peculiar that the deceased have a heartbeat. But only after they have sneezed are they considered alive. Life comes with a sneeze; that is what the text says. In the textual world of Malay adventure stories, death need not be the end of a person's life. There is death and

there is another, much more frightening kind of death. In the first case, the deceased has a heartbeat and the situation can still be reversed. Malay adventure stories tell of ways to bring a dead person back to life. In contrast, the second type of death is irreversible. It is irreversible death that is feared by the men and women who inhabit the world of the Malay adventure stories. For if the victim's friends or relatives fail to make the *semangat* return to body of the deceased, he or she will pass away for good.

A clue to the grounds for the correspondences between vital force, the nose and sneezing is found in a Malay oral tradition on the origins of man. The story narrates how the archangel Jibrail gives the first human being, Adam, the Breath of Life. He does this by blowing into Adam's nostrils. Upon this, Adam starts to sneeze vehemently. But, as he is made of clay, his sneezing causes his image to break into a million pieces (Laderman 1991, 6; see also Skeat 1972, 19-20). An example of a character who sneezes right after regaining consciousness is found in a short Malay oral tale that was noted down by G. M. Laidlaw at the turn of the twentieth century. In one scene, the main protagonist called Kherudin is lying unconscious in his palace. He has fainted after he heard that his magic ring had been stolen by a Chinese goldsmith. A scrawny, mangy dog and cat, whose lives Kherudin once saved, retrieve the ring for him. They put it on their master's chest and, immediately, Kherudin sneezes and comes to (Laidlaw 1906, 27–57).

From these stories we learn that life is given through the nose. And it causes the recipient to sneeze; just like the protagonists of Malay adventure stories do at the moment life comes back to them.

What Do Anthropologists Say?

The above findings on *semangat* and its phenomenology largely correspond with anthropological studies on this topic. The following remarks by Van der Toorn (1890) on the belief in an erring spirit called *hantu haru-haru* in West Sumatra are illustrative for the parallels between the two discourses. The story reveals ontological assumptions similar to those found in the Malay adventure stories: the existence of a supernatural realm and the dual make-up of a human body. In the flowery style characteristic of his time, Van der Toorn describes the experiences of *semangat* in the other world:

> He is taken far, far away by the erring spirit, the *hantoe haroe-haroe*, until he arrives at beautiful village with magnificent houses, playgrounds and bathing places. Beautiful women and cheerful youths welcome him. Horsemen on nimble horses are galloping and he too is given a fiery horse as a steed. Lively maidens play the most beautiful music and invite him to join in. Male and female dancers are dancing around to the rhythm of the loveliest music, showing their graceful movements.

> Generous hosts provide him with dishes and drinks, the smell and taste of which he is unfamiliar with (Van der Toorn 1890, 54–55).[14]

In the following section, the concept of *semangat* and related ideas that are expressed in the Malay stories are compared with anthropological discourse on the same subject. These sources vary in date of publication and research area. Their commonality lies in the fact that they are based on research conducted in various regions of the Malay World. The majority discusses Malay- or Malay-dialect-speaking groups. The remainder concerns indigenous non-Malay-speaking groups that inhabit regions directly bordering the Malay cultural space. They have borrowed elements from Malay ideas on health and the manipulation of vital force. Reading through these detailed descriptions of beliefs and rituals, a picture emerges of a Malay coherence system, dealt with in detail next.

Where Malay adventure stories tell of animals and plants that can think and talk like human beings, anthropological works speak of a fundamental uniformity of being based on a vital force that imbues all entities on earth, human and non-human (Benjamin 1979; Endicott 1991; Gimlette 1971; Kimball 1979; Laderman 1991; Skeat 1972; Van der Toorn 1890; Winstedt 1982). The more recent sources distinguish between this undifferentiated vital force, commonly called *semangat*, and a more defined form of a vital principle, confusingly also called *semangat.* The first one groups man together with animals, plants, water and mountains, for instance; the latter is differentiated and bound to a human body (Endicott 1991). In the same way as the sixteenth-century Malay Sufi poet Hamzah Fansuri used the simile of the ocean and the wave to express the fundamental sameness of God and servant, this same image can be employed to illustrate the sameness of the two forms of *semangat*: both are the same and yet different.

The origins of the concept of an unbound, free-floating vital force, the *semangat* of the Malay stories, are likely to be found in man's dreaming experiences. It is the experience of having two bodies, one in the waking world and one in the dream world, which give rise to different cultural explanations of this phenomenon. This matter is aptly addressed by the Swiss psychoanalytic psychiatrist Medard Boss in the following quotation:

> While waking observers see him fast asleep in bed in Zurich, the dreamer may feel that he is skiing, with consummate physical grace and pleasure, down an Alpine slope. The question now is which

[14] Verre, verre wordt hij door den dwaalgeest, hantoe haroe-haroe, weggevoerd, totdat hij aankomt in een fraaie kampoeng, met prachtige huizen, speel- en badplaatsen. Schoone vrouwen en levenslustige jongelingen verwelkomen hem. Ruiters, op weelderige paarden gezeten, galoppeeren er in de sierlijkste wendingen, en ook hij ontvangt een vurig ros, om het te berijden. Frissche maagden maken er de welluidendste muziek en noodigen hem tot meedoen uit; dansers en danseressen bewegen er zich, op de maat der heerlijkste tonen, met lichte en losse bewegingen in 't rond. Door gulhartige gastheeren wordt hij onthaald op spijzen en dranken, wier geur en smaak hem geheel onbekend zijn (Van der Toorn 1890, 54–55).

> body is the 'real' one, the body that others see lying in bed, though the dreamer is unaware of it, or the body that the dreamer himself feels so intensely but that no waking observer can perceive? We are at a loss for an answer, probably because the question is inadequately formulated. We may discover that both bodies, the recumbent and the active one, belong equally to the bodyhood of the sleeper's existence. In any case, however, physicality has shown itself to be no criterion for distinguishing between the human waking and dreaming states (Boss 1977 cited in States 1993, 14).

This 'two body problem' has resulted in cultural explanations that display a fundamental similarity in different regions of the world (States 1993, 14). While there is a large body of scholarly work dedicated to this universal category and the varied ways it is expressed by different peoples around the globe, here this category is examined in a Malay context.

The *semangat* leaves the body during dreams as well as during trance, spirit possession, unconsciousness and several forms of illnesses, including mental illness (Benjamin 1979; Endicott 1991; Laderman 1991; Skeat 1972; Van der Toorn 1890). Neighbouring ethnic groups in peninsular Malaysia like the Chewong and the Temiar have a similar notion of a human body with (a) detachable 'soul(s).' The *ruwai* or life force of the Chewong and the Temiar head soul are similar to the Malay *semangat* with respect to their ability to leave the body during dreams and trance, for instance, and their relationship with the etiology of illness (Howell 1984; Roseman 1991). On the actual appearance of *semangat*, Skeat says that it is "[...] a thin, unsubstantial human image, [...] which is about the same size as a thumb and [...] corresponds exactly in shape, proportion, and even in complexion, to its embodiment or casing (*sarong*) [...]" (Skeat 1972, 47). A *semangat* is endowed with quasi-human feelings and possesses the personal consciousness and volition of the person the *semangat* belongs to (Skeat 1972, 47–48; see also Kimball 1979, 266). Skeat is not unique in mentioning the manikin aspect of *semangat*; Van der Toorn also refers to it, while Roseman remarks that the detachable head soul of the Temiar, which is similar to the Malay *semangat*, is a two or three inch replica of its owner (see also Howell 1984, 136; Roseman 1991, 25; Van der Toorn 1890, 57).

Apart from the view of the *semangat* as a small human-like reproduction of the body it is usually attached to, there is also a notion of the *semangat* as a bird, or even a fly (Cuisinier 1951, 204, cited in Laderman 1991, 42 n. 3; Van der Toorn 1890, 57, 70; Winstedt 1982, 18). Wilkinson states that it resembles a bird in that it can fly and is easily scared off (Wilkinson 1959, 1053). The use of the exclamation *kur*, commonly used to call chickens, and the scattering of rice in rituals performed to call the *semangat*, attest to this conception of the *semangat* as a bird (Skeat 1972, 47 n. 2, 49, 76; Wilken 1884, 943; Laderman 1991, 42; Winstedt 1982, 18). In 1900, Skeat partially dealt with this inconsistent image of the *semangat* as both a manikin and a bird by successfully arguing for the metaphoric value of the bird-image. It was not until seventy years later, in the publication of Endicott's *An Analysis of Malay Magic* (1970), that another hypothesis was offered. Endicott claimed that the differentiated vital force of a human being called

semangat has three different aspects. Besides the differentiated vital force, which is also called *semangat*, a person's *semangat* consists of *nyawa*, the Breath of Life, and *roh*, the Spirit of Life, the possession of which sets man apart from the rest of creation. The different conceptions of *semangat*, i.e. as a manikin, a bird and breath, are connected to its three different aspects. Thus, the *semangat* narrowly defined is seen as a manikin, the *roh* that can leave the body as a bird and *nyawa* as breath (Endicott 1991, 79–80).

All sources agree that *semangat* is a highly sensitive entity that is easily startled, after which it will leave the body and fly away. Common causes of *semangat* loss are fright, fear, a loud or sudden noise, abduction by a hostile spirit and music (Laderman 1991, 41–43; Roseman 1991, 26; Skeat 27, 197; Van der Toorn 1890, 50, 54–55, 57; Kimball 1979, 266). The flight and absence of a person's *semangat* is always fraught with danger, although not every case of *semangat* loss is viewed in a negative way. In some instances, the *semangat* leaves the body because it is 'invited' to do so, for example when a trance is induced or during childbirth (Laderman 1991, 42, 102–103; Van der Toorn 1890, 53). Moreover, a person's *semangat* can be abducted. Notorious cases of abduction involve love magic; a rejected lover, often with the help of a specialist in Malay magic, can cause the *semangat* of his or her object of infatuation to flee (see also Endicott 1991, 173; Kimball 1979, 193–194; Skeat 1972, 468–469, 574–576, 760–770; Van der Toorn 1890, 50–51, 55; Winstedt 1982, 83–84, 102).

The greatest danger involved in a prolonged absence of a person's *semangat* is the possibility of falling prey to attacks by malicious spirits.[15] Besides facilitating the departure of *semangat*, the permeable boundaries of the corporeal body make a human being susceptible to attacks by spirits, *hantu* or *jin,* who take possession of the body.[16] Endicott offers the hypothesis that spirits, themselves consisting of unbound differentiated vital force, attack an individual with the purpose of feeding on the remainder of that person's vital force (Endicott 1991, 53–54).[17] A mild form of spirit attack, when only the spirit's 'heat' affects the victim will result in various kinds of symptoms or illnesses, but the ultimate result of possession by a spirit is invariably death (Laderman 1991). There is a myriad of Malay oral traditions on malevolent spirits that attests to the ever-present fear of these kinds of assaults. The danger comes from many different spirits, each with their own preferred type of victim (Gimlette 1971, 74; Kimball 1979, 45; Laderman 1991, 43–44; Skeat 1972, 101–106; Van der Toorn 1890, 102–103; Winstedt 1982, 21–60).

The relationship between the body and the *semangat* is characterized by mutual dependency. Changes in the well-being of either one of them will be reflected in the other.

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15 For two case studies on spirit attacks, see Peletz 1996, 168–185.

16 Kimball 1979, 78, and especially Peletz 1996 mention the commonly held belief that women are more susceptible to spirit attacks and spirit possession as a result of their 'weak' *semangat*.

17 In addition to unbound evil spirits there are familiar spirits bound to a corporeal body, such as the *polong* and the *pelesit*. They can be sent off by their owners to cause mischief (see also Gimlette 1971, 271; Endicott 1970, 57–60; Gimlette 1971, 47–48, 103–104; Skeat 1972, 101 nn. 2 and 5).

A depletion of *semangat* affects both a person's physical and mental health. The victim faints, falls asleep or becomes ill or mad. Conversely, when a person fails to take proper care of his or her body, vital force will cross the weakened corporeal boundaries. Fright, illness, overwork and fear are all capable of decreasing the amount of vital force in a person, thereby making the body susceptible to spirit attacks (Benjamin 1979, 10–11, 16–17; Endicott 1991, 50; Laderman 1991, 42–4; Skeat 1972, 48; Van der Toorn 1890, 49–50).

Not all illnesses are caused by the evil influence of spirits, but those that are require specific healing methods (Laderman 1991, 40). When a person's *semangat* flees, it has to be 'called back.' Skeat (1970) and Van der Toorn (1890), for example, give detailed descriptions of rituals that are performed in order to make a *semangat* return. A weak *semangat* or a low amount of *semangat* in the body causes symptoms such as dizziness and weakness. This calls for another kind of cure, which is called the 'fixing' of *semangat* or *menetapkan semangat* (Skeat 1972, 274). It is aimed at strengthening the physical boundaries of the body to prevent the loss of more *semangat*. This treatment entails the transference of *semangat* of any object that is considered as having a 'strong' *semangat*, '*keras semangat,*' to the ailing body (Benjamin 1979, 17). Examples are iron nails and knife blades, candle nuts (*buah keras*), stones, and cockleshells (Kimball 1979, 92-93; Skeat 1972, 274; Winstedt 1982, 3, 53–54, 101–511).

The above account shows striking parallels with what Malay adventure stories reveal about *semangat*. But also on a linguistical level similarities between the two discourses can be pointed out. They revolve around the use of the oppositional pair of words consisting of *lupa*, 'to forget' and *ingat*, 'to remember'. In the Malay narratives they are used to convey that a person experiences an altered state of consciousness. Here, the words occur in the phrases *lupa akan dirinya* and *ingat akan dirinya*, 'to forget oneself' and 'to remember oneself'. They are used interchangeably to denote unconsciousness, sleep or death and the victim's restoration to his or her former state. In the ethnographic descriptions though, the word pair figures mainly in the framework of a shamanic complex. There, it refers to an altered state of consciousness not yet mentioned here in the context of Malay adventure stories; namely, trance. Shamans are able to induce trance in themselves with the help music, songs, smoke or fumes, and cross the boundary to the spirit world. There, they communicate with spirits with the aim of negotiating specific knowledge that the shaman needs to be able to cure a patient or restore the social harmony in a community.

Gimlette (1971), discussing a Malay shamanistic healing performance called *main peteri*, mentions that the assistant of the *bomor* – the 'shaman'– has to 'forget' to be able to call up the spirit helper. This person is also called *orang lupa*, 'the one who forgets.' The same *orang lupa* figures in a different type of performance, *main berbagih*, often staged to cure the sick or to locate a lost or stolen object; here, the *orang lupa* brings himself into a trance by inhaling incense fumes and repeatedly shaking his head. The same concept but with the focus on the counterpart of *lupa*, i.e. *ingat*, 'to remember,' is found in

Laderman 1991. Here, *tak ingat*, 'not remembering,' is used to describe a *bomor's* patient while in trance. Laderman explains that the latter phrase is used for the patient while in trance, whereas *lupa*, which refers to a deliberate act of forgetting, applies to the *bomor*. A successful treatment by a *bomor* can only be attained "[...] when 'remembering' and 'forgetting' are in harmonic balance" (Laderman 1991, 88). In the Temiar ceremonies, the politics of remembering and forgetting are played out to the fullest of their potential. The Temiar, Roseman argues, have to 'remember' to be able to 'forget,' as the forgetfulness of trance is achieved by remembering a particular song given to a potential healer by a familiar in a dream (Roseman 1991, 151–60).

The importance of the head in actions that are aimed at manipulating *semangat* has been observed by anthropologists as well. Peletz makes mention of a Malay healer or *dukun*, who blew over the head of a victim of spirit possession to lure the *semangat* back (Peletz 1993, 156–157). Skeat explicitly refers to the fontanelle as an exit for the *semangat* (Skeat 1972, 206–207).

However, the anthropological sources lack a conceptual theory that draws these observations together. Malay adventure stories offer such an overarching theory. With their representations of the other world traveled by *semangat*, the different states of consciousness that are the result of *semangat* loss and efficient countermeasures, these narratives express a Malay ontology that consists of a cosmology and a theory of consciousness. Its premises are the existence of *semangat* or vital force, the dual make-up of a human being and a spirit dimension that exists parallel to the ordinary world. This second dimension is the abode of spirits (unbound differentiated *semangat*, in Benjamin's terms). Humans can visit this realm through their detached *semangat*, during sleep (in dreams, see the following chapter), trance and unconsciousness. However, a prolonged absence of *semangat* is detrimental to a person's health; it makes the body prone to spirit attacks. This particular way of seeing the world presents the world as a dangerous place to live. Spirits can attack and feed on a person's *semangat* or lure the *semangat* away to the other world. Pain and strong emotions, such as fright, fear and desire, provoked by encounters with beauty or the strange and unexpected can lead to a loss of *semangat* and, subsequently, illness or death.

This coherence system is, basically, animist. In an animist world view, everything in the cosmos shares the same vital principle; there are no inanimate entities. Water, trees, soil, rocks and animals are considered as living entities, for they are all endowed with *semangat*. In this respect, they resemble man. Such a world view is fundamentally dialectic and dynamic. Benjamin (1979) gives an apt description of its dynamics. He states that this way of thinking (and, subsequently, a way of seeing),

> [...] posits division of cosmos into two dialectically conjoined planes of existence, the plane of things, matter, categories; and the plane of essence, spirit, soul. For each entity on the plane of matter there is an equivalent entity on the plane of essence, and vice versa, in a one-to-one relationship.

> Any disturbance of this relationship, whereby essence escapes the bounds of matter, will introduce a dynamic imbalance into the system which may come to be regarded as the source of such things as power, danger, pollution [...] (Benjamin 1979, 10).

This 'essence' or vital force, Benjamin adds, tends to break through the categorical boundaries to coalesce and form free 'essence'. Free vital force, whether in the form of *semangat* that was formerly attached to a human being, or a spirit, implies danger and illness. In contrast, bound vital force stands for neutrality and health.

The Malay adventure stories express a 'man versus world' attitude towards life and posit a society and a natural world that is inherently hazardous. The stories portray the world as a dangerous place and inform the reader about how to safeguard their health. The only way to confront these dangers without losing one's life is to recognize them and be prepared for them. Possession of specific knowledge and being alert and keeping your wits about you are quintessential for survival. Time and again, protagonists are warned of dangers awaiting them or admonished for having been careless. To convey this message, the word *lalai* is used. It can be translated as 'careless' or 'negligent.' Similar warnings are *jangan lupa* or *ingat*, meaning 'do not lose your *semangat*!' Thus, in the *SBS* we find Bahram Syah's parents warning their three sons to be careful and to pay attention to whatever they are doing or are confronted with during their quest for the miraculous bird:

> When everything was ready, they kneeled before their parents' feet, and bowed their head to the ground. Their parents wept, embraced, and kissed their sons. They said, "Yes our sons, we will render you to God, may He be praised and be exalted, who will take care of you. But whatever you do, do not be careless and forgetful!" (*SBS* 7a).

In his study of a cultural matrix that he labelled Malayan animism, Benjamin similarly observes the man versus world axis that is specific to Malay cosmology. He states that the Malay cosmos is structured upon an in-out (or man-world) axis. The human individual is seen as set apart from, and acted upon by, the world and as sharply differentiated from the rest of creation. Differentiation of ontological categories is in the nature of a continuum on this in-out axis. Thus, the world is seen from the perspective of man looking outwards. The farther away a category is from man and the closer to 'nature,' the more it is associated with danger. At one end of this continuum stands man with his 'bound' differentiated *semangat*, representing neutrality and health. At the other end we find the 'unbound' free-floating undifferentiated vital force that permeates the natural world and is associated with danger. Free *semangat* in the form of spirits or ghosts that consist of unbound differentiated vital force are found somewhere in the middle. Closer to the 'man' end of the axis, one finds the category of animals whose *semangat* can be relatively easily set free, but who are not so remote from man as to be dangerously uncontrollable.

Benjamin connects this Malay world view, which sees man as a potential victim of forces outside his control, to the traditional Malay mode of sociopolitical organization. In his study, he argues that the centralized and hierarchical nature of the traditional Malay state was the variable that gave Malay animism its specific outlook. Power for Malays was traditionally extrinsic, deriving from a locus outside of the villagers' control. This implied that one always had to be careful, just like the protagonists of the Malay adventure stories (Benjamin 1979, 20).

The perception of power as extrinsic is also encountered among an indigenous Malay dialect-speaking people called Sakai. They inhabit the upstream Mandau area of Riau, East Sumatra and are originally non-Muslim. Anthropologist Nathan Porath did extensive fieldwork among the Sakai in the late 1990s. His explanation of how Sakai perceive themselves and their environment matches closely with the world view expressed in the Malay adventure stories. Based on these similarities, the following hypothesis can be made: the many references to *semangat* loss and the spirit dimension in the Malay stories are retentions of an older, pre-Islamic Malay way of making sense of the world. First, Porath's concise characterization of the Sakai view of the cosmos and man's place in it in his Introduction already gives expression to the close affinity of both discourses:

> For the upstream Mandau people the concept of a boundary is a central concept for both individual and group protection in relation to threatening others in a fluid world [...]. The boundary of an individual is the physical body. It embodies [...] consciousness, which is easily penetrable through a detachable aspect of it called *semanget*. [...] The maintenance and re-creation of boundaries is necessary in a fluid world where individual and social identities can fly like a bird through different terrains and climes and transform with the experiential process (Porath 2003, 7).

And

> Shamans [...] manage consciousness through a metaphorically articulated theory of consciousness that has been developed through, and premised on the human universal experience of altered states of consciousness (Porath 2003, 7).

Second, Sakai cultural practices are generally considered as pre-Islamic Malay. The originally forest-dwelling Sakai people formed part of the lowest social group in the Malay kingdom of Siak. In the nineteenth century, their livelihoods depended on the trade of forest products with Chinese and Malay traders who lived downstream along the river Siak. Today, there is a growing economic differentiation among the Sakai and many follow a rural Indonesian life. Moreover, since the 1960s, many Sakai have converted to Islam. Notwithstanding their entrance in the greater worlds of modern Indonesia and Islam, their shamanic healing tradition called *dikei* is still practiced. Porath convincingly argues how the Sakai shamanic complex functions as a technique to manage personal and social disintegration under changing conditions; for example, the increased pull of hege-

monic Malay culture. But what makes the Sakai case especially relevant for my argument is that the Sakai are, in a sense, Malays and their way of viewing the world is essentially Malay.

The inhabitants of the upper Mandau region are generally considered as 'proto or older Malays,' who did not convert to Islam and refrained from growing rice as a staple crop. In a pan-Malay perspective, they have come to represent the Malay World as it was before the Malays became Muslim (Porath 2003, 1–31). Retention of older, pre-Islamic conceptual ideas, such as the concept of *semangat* in the Muslim environments of both contemporary Sakai society and Malay adventure stories is facilitated by the syncretic nature of Islam in the Archipelago.

Aside from the similarities between the two discourses, they contain differences as well. These prove significant in light of the stories' encyclopaedic function in society and, therefore, will be addressed next. Adventure stories present a complete theory of consciousness, minus trance, whereas anthropologists have focused mainly on shamanism. Another marked difference is that malevolent spirits, so poignantly present in anthropological studies, do not play an important role in the Malay narratives. Only occasionally do the stories hint at the fear of a spirit attack. Next, only adventure stories speak of people who have been revived. It comes as no surprise that reversible death does not exist in the world outside the text. As a sign that vital force has re-entered the human body, sneezing is linked to the restoration of life. Several authors, amongst them Laderman and Kimball, make incidental reference to sneezing, but refrain from linking it to the loss of *semangat*. Only Skeat mentions, in passing, sneezing and the danger it entails (Skeat 1972, 533 n. 1). The Malay stories speak of sneezing as beneficial rather than dangerous; the sneezes invariably occur at the moment a character is reunited with his *semangat*. Finally, the anthropologists remain silent on what happens to the *semangat* in the spirit dimension after it has left its physical confines behind.[18] The Malay stories, in contrast, abound with embedded stories that offer a window on this other realm.

Nowhere in the Malay adventure stories is an explanation given for the anxiety that is experienced by the bystanders when they witness a person faint. Here, the work of anthropologists informs the fictional world; the studies mention the belief in the existence of hostile spirits that can attack human beings who suffer from a weak or depleted vital force. Thus, it may be that the seemingly unfounded concern over the fate of a sleeping or an unconscious person in the narratives is caused by the fear that a malevolent spirit will invade the body.

Endicott's (1991) useful distinction between undifferentiated and differentiated *semangat* explains the minor afflictions suffered by the lovesick as well as the after-effects experienced by protagonists who have just been woken up or revived. A small loss of vital force results in minor symptoms; dizziness or a lack of appetite are the most common

[18] Except for Van der Toorn (1890), who was cited at the beginning of this chapter.

consequences of a mild attack. The situation becomes more dangerous when a large amount of undifferentiated *semangat* disappears or when the differentiated *semangat* escapes.

How can these differences in the representation of this specific ontology in the two discourses be accounted for? Two factors are involved, it is argued: first, the nature of the knowledge that is transmitted; and second, the narrative constraints of the Malay adventure story as medium for the transmission of that knowledge. In one of the propositions that accompany Porath's PhD dissertation (2003) on shamanic therapy among the Sakai, he asserts that

> Sakai knowledge is not knowledge that can be articulated in a narrative. It is embodied knowledge pertaining to the social-body as it is lived in the world. To understand Sakai knowledge we have to understand the way this knowledge is performed (Porath 2003, proposition 9).

This statement refers to the Sakai shamanic-complex, which consists of a theory of consciousness and shamanic healing sessions. In his Acknowledgement, however, he thanks a fellow scholar for introducing him to "the importance of understanding Malays and Malay-speaking peoples from their oral literature" (Porath 2003, ix). Here, Porath unconsciously makes a division between two different fields of cultural knowledge. The one, on shamanism and trance, depends for its transmission on performance and constitutes embodied or 'lived' knowledge. That explains the relatively limited subject matter of the anthropological sources. Anthropologists study man's behaviour, especially 'exotic' behaviour such as shamanistic rituals or healing rituals performed by traditional healers. Until very recently, the 'stories' of a particular society remained outside the scope of anthropological studies.

The other pertains to knowledge on a larger ontology that shamanism and trance form part of. This particular knowledge is preserved and transmitted through storytelling. It includes information on other altered states of consciousness, such as fainting and sleep, the causes of *semangat* loss – notably strong emotions – and countermeasures. This argument can be taken even further. Perhaps the Malay adventure story is the ultimate, or even only, medium for the transmission of this important cultural knowledge. Form and function of the Malay adventure story coincide: the central theme of a journey through an unfamiliar region of the world facilitates the expression of the concept of *semangat*, in particular the dangers of the arousal of intense emotions in a human being. This unknown land named *negeri Anta-Beranta* or *Entah-Berentah*, 'Land of Multiplicity' or 'Never-Neverland,' offers all the strange, unexpected and beautiful sights and sounds that are needed to lead the sensitive *semangat* – and likewise, the reader – to the spirit dimension. Only a few publications on Malay magic allude to a relationship between sickness, sleep, madness, unconsciousness, trance and death. However, they do not provide the basis for this relationship. Malay adventure stories do: they implicitly

present a comprehensive ontology and a theory of consciousness. On a higher level, the Malay stories attest to the supposed universal affinity between sleep, dreams and death that Carol Schreier Rupprecht and Kelly Bulkley refer to when they ask whether or not there is a "[...] core of truth to mythological representations of sleep, dreams, and death as members of the same family" (Schreier Rupprecht and Bulkley 1993, 8).

With the above in mind, it is not surprising that Tony Day and Will Derks (1991) call the journey a 'master trope' that covers many different manifestations of the encyclopaedic impulse in Malay and other texts from the Archipelago. In their article "Narrating Knowledge," Day and Derks employ the Western notion of encyclopaedia as a device to demonstrate that narratives from this part of the world have the basic characteristics of encyclopaedia. This encyclopaedic impulse can be discerned in Malay adventure stories as well. The adventure story, like the Western encyclopaedia, presents "[...] information about the phenomenal world organized and selected according to certain conceptual principles [...]." Those principles may vary according to time, place and culture (Day and Derks 1991, 309). The story of *Panglimo Awang* – included in the research corpus of the current chapter – is mentioned by Day and Derks as an example of an 'encyclopaedic' narrative. It is said that the story is "[...] full of knowledge about the Malay World [...]," in particular about "rules of conduct in social situations" (Day and Derks 1991, 311–312). Stories 'narrate knowledge' and the authors and storytellers are often explicit about this didactic function of their stories. *Pak* Taslim, one of the storytellers who performed the story of *Panglimo Awang*, expressed the hope that the tale he was about to tell would be 'useful' (Derks 1994, 193). The message that is found at the beginning of the *Story of Bahram Syah* is written in a similar vein; it states that the story is composed by a wise person as a 'reminder' (*ingat-ingatan*) to future generations (*SBS* 1).

The way the concept of *semangat* is presented in the stories is, to a certain extent, determined by the constraints of the narrative format. This accounts for some of the discrepancies between what anthropologists say on the subject and what is found in the narratives. For instance, the prominence of the 'personified' form of *semangat*, as opposed to free-floating *semangat*, in Malay adventure stories can be linked to the fact that narrative requires protagonists: wandering human-like entities that are able to think and act. Furthermore, the conspicuous presence of the beautiful and the strange as causes of *semangat* loss is related to the unique nature of the stories' Never-Neverland or *Negeri Antah-Berantah*. This wonderland is often called *Negeri Anta-Beranta*: Land of Multiplicity. And 'multiplicity,' as was discussed above, stands for the highest degree of beauty according to Malay aesthetics. Objects of perfect beauty appeal to multiple senses at the same time: touch, sight, hearing and smell. Thus, most of the cases of fainting that are depicted in the stories are the result of an encounter with something extraordinarily beautiful or strange. Lastly, none of the anthropologists observe the possibility of reversible death. The revival of deceased characters in Malay adventure stories is a narrative device. The story that leads to the death of a protagonist makes for an engrossing adventure, and

his or her return from the death secures the continuation of the story and postponement of an ending.

Concluding Remarks

In an overview of studies on Malay magic pertaining to the Malay Peninsula published in 1983, Robert L. Winzeler addresses the disagreement among scholars on what the notion of magic should mean. He doubted that the, then widely held, view that magic is understood as the beliefs and activities involving the manipulation of the material world through supernatural means was useful "[...] as a means of categorizing and analysing an entire or major segment of Malay culture [...]" (Winzeler 1983, 438). He did not believe that the use of charms, divination, 'lore' – with which he probably meant the various beliefs in spirits and related rituals – and medicine was interconnected to "[...] form an integrated system underlying a major segment of their culture, organized around a central notion *corresponding to our notion of magic* [emphasis mine]" (Winzeler 1983, 438).

What Winzeler thought impossible, the analysis of the Malay adventure stories has proved to be the case. Seemingly unrelated human conditions that are presented in Malay narratives, among them fainting, dreaming and madness, form an integrated system organized around the central notion of *semangat*. And, if Winzeler saw 'our notion of magic' as the manipulation of the material world through supernatural means, then my findings support that view of Malay magic. For it is *semangat* and unbound vital force in the form of spirits that is manipulated to influence the realities of illnesses, failed crops or the death of livestock, and so on.[19] But social relations too can be shaped by manipulating *semangat* and spirits. Love magic, the measures taken to induce desire in a man or a woman, forms one example, the domestication and use of a malevolent spirit by a spiteful individual is another. Even at the very beginning of human life, at child birth, a *semangat* calling ritual is performed to ensure the child's smooth delivery.

This chapter has explained how exactly those passages in the stories that made earlier critics repudiate these Malay narratives, prove to be significant. Adventure stories provided the readers with an indispensable map of the different categories that constituted the world they lived in. The stories taught them what defined them as human beings and how to avoid the loss of *semangat*. This knowledge pertains to matters of life and death. The estranging world of the adventure story suits its function aptly; with a proliferation

[19] The Appendices of Skeat's monumental work *Malay Magic* (1900) contains a wide array of Malay charms and invocations related to different aspects of man's life in relation to his surroundings. There are charms that are used to appease the spirits of all kinds of animals, including game, and plants, trees, mines, soil, and malicious spirits and ghosts.

of the beautiful and the strange, the texts offer endless opportunities for the author to make *semangat* escape its physical confines.

A comparison with data from anthropological studies pointed to a division in knowledge, reflected in the means for the transmission of that knowledge. Conceptual ideas on vital force and its manipulation by shamans are 'embodied' in shamanic healing practices, while knowledge on the danger of fright, desire and strong emotions for the mental and physical well-being of a human being and the cosmos is contained in adventure stories. Transmission of this ontological knowledge depended on the skills of the original author, or the storyteller, who performed at public gatherings. It was his task to maximize the imaginative force of narrative using narrative and performative devices. In the words of Fredrik Barth, the storyteller – or the original author, for that matter – forms the third 'face' of knowledge, next to the message itself and the means of communication. Knowledge, according to Barth, is only validated and transmittable in an institutionalized setting (Barth 2002, 1–18). In a Malay context, this setting is the storyteller and his public readings. The validation is established by the professional status of the storyteller, and often by the legitimacy of the way he mastered the art of storytelling (hereditary or through an apprenticeship with an acclaimed storyteller). Moreover, the performer and his art are surrounded by a certain mystique that sets him apart from the common men (Sweeney 1973, 8–15).

The transmission of these conceptual ideas is partly prescriptive and partly descriptive. The stories give form to the lived experience of the supernatural; in a way, they make them 'real'. But knowledge is also propositional. Malay adventure stories invite their audience to discuss the matters presented, in particular those related to *semangat*, spirits and the other dimension. They provide a forum to actively engage in producing knowledge through consensus. This was aptly demonstrated at a public reading of the Sumatran Malay story *Panglimo Awang* witnessed by Will Derks in the 1980s. He noticed how the story, after the performance had ended, sparked a lengthy discussion among members of the public on matters relating to spirits, their realm and other *barang yang ghaib*, 'invisible things'.

Malay adventure stories may well be the sole medium for the transmission of a certain kind of knowledge, but that does not mean that they can be reduced to this one function. Texts are multi-vocal and the rich tapestry of Malay adventure stories holds so much more. The *SBS* is profoundly coloured by its preoccupation with the effects of *semangat* loss, but at the same time it conveys multiple messages of an Islamic nature (see Chapters 2 and 6). The co-presence in an adventure story of conceptual ideas originating in two seemingly contrasting belief systems as monotheist Islam and Malay animism is accommodated by the adaptive nature of Islam in Southeast Asia.

A last issue that must be raised at the end of this chapter is the relevancy of the ontological categories and cosmology for the readers of the stories at a given moment in time. To what degree was this world view valid or functional in the society in which

the stories were consumed? The possibility that some of the scenes on fainting or 'magic,' for instance, have fossilized into topoi comes to mind, especially taking into consideration the formulaic character of Malay adventure stories. Perhaps these passages had a totally different meaning to some or all of the readers of an adventure story at a certain time and place. Just like most people in Indonesia are no longer aware of the original function of the exclamation *Pis kucing!* or 'Shoo cat' uttered to this day by some people after sneezing, common scenes in adventure stories could, over time, have petrified into plain style figures.[20] Unfortunately, with so little information available on the reception of adventure stories, it remains impossible to say something definitive about this. As far as the *SBS* is concerned, the known proliferation of 'superstitious practices' – mostly aimed at the manipulation of *semangat* – in the Muslim environment of Barus and surroundings around the middle of the nineteenth century seems to indicate that animist concepts still played an important role in society. Porath's research on Sakai knowledge in the late 1990s has shown that so-called 'traditional' world views, such as the Malay animist one, can be 'modern,' functioning in the setting of the modern-day state of Indonesia.

Finally, one should not forget that, above all, Malay adventure stories were works to be enjoyed. It seems rather unlikely that, for instance, a food vendor, trader or sea captain would walk from the market area to a friends' house after a day of hard work anticipating a long evening of instruction on serious matters. What he came for was entertainment in the company of his friends. Throughout the ages man has been attracted to stories. Following the heroes on their quests in the ordinary or spirit world, we identify with the heroes and share in the cathartic effect of their adventures. For the duration of the story, boundaries of time and place are dissolved, and man is offered an escape from the daily grind.

[20] This exclamation was originally intended to shoo away cats. With the image of the sensitive *semangat* as a small bird and the loss of *semangat* through the nose or mouth during sneezing, cats were potentially dangerous to man's health. If the *semangat*/bird was caught, the victim would fall ill and could even lose his life.