

## Crossing into the Cultural Other: A Dialogic Reading Strategy

Stephen Rankin

---

**Abstract:** Drawing on the theories of Homi Bhabha and Tzvetan Todorov, this article explores the difficulties facing Western writers of fiction in relation to their participation in postcolonial discourse. This essay suggests that many writers in the West are limited by a lack of hybridity to a space outside of dialogic discourse and as a consequence find themselves restricted in their engagement with cultural alterity to an endless loop of self-reference or to the appropriation of otherness. The article, however, goes on to argue that textual dialogism can provide an avenue for the negotiation of difference for the reader: a conversational space within which both sides can speak and be heard without crossing the line into cultural appropriation. I suggest that this can take place by means of a cross-culturally dialogic reading strategy in which the consciousness of the reader through the internal and socially-contextualised experience of culturally divergent voices is able to share a common literary space. The applicability of dialogism as a reading strategy will be considered in relation to two texts, Inez Baranay's Australian novel, *The Edge of Bali*, and Gerson Poyk's Indonesian short story, "Kuta, here my love flickers brightly," both of which explore fictional encounters between Australian female tourists and Indonesian men.

**Keywords:** dialogism, hybridity, reading, Indonesia, Bhabha

---

Kuta! Here, on your beach, my love flickers brightly along with the algae and the fireflies. Here, at the restaurant table and hotel, my love is like a bright candle which is suddenly blown

out by the sea breeze, then rekindled again with all the fervour of my love, but do you know that this world is no longer the loving world of the villagers where the beloved goes down to the water spout and bathes naked, and afterwards goes home to the village carrying water for her lover? This world has become so large and the lover is like the modern dog's flea which can jump from continent to continent, for instance, from New York to Bali, and then hop on again to Paris.

Gerson Poyk, "Kuta, here my love flickers brightly" (7)<sup>1</sup>

Postcolonial *fiction*, as distinct from postcolonial *theory*, is the preserve of the cultural hybrid.<sup>2</sup> Writers of ethnically hybrid backgrounds write with questions and experiences drawn from what Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, would call "overlapping territories" and "intertwined histories" (1). The epistemologies and ontologies of colonialism and migratory exchanges have bled into the social, psychological, and political existence of these writers and commingled with their indigenous values to make them culturally variable and uniquely qualified to speak across cultures. Tim Woods, for instance, has suggested that Salman Rushdie's writing embraces hybridity by "accepting a new blend of cultures as a positive synthesis" which "allows him to be inside and outside the British culture he depicted" (746).

Dewi Anggraeni, who has worked as a journalist for the Indonesian news magazine *Tempo* and *The Australian* newspaper and has written several novels and short story collections, explains the sense of internal dialogism felt by the hybrid writer:

When I write in English, I assume to a degree, the psyche of a Western, in my case, Australian, writer. This doesn't happen because I consciously target English-speaking readers, but happens automatically. It happens without a conscious effort, probably because I'm part Australian, in the sense that I have lived half of my lifetime in Australia, among my Australian family. Then when I write in Indonesian, I resume my Indonesian psyche, also to a degree, because over the years, I have found my own cultural residence which effectively overlaps in both

cultures. . . . Living [the experience of crossing cultures] is one thing, expressing it is another. In my case, living it and expressing its overlap, the process is seamless. (59)

Culturally hybrid literature is not simply a historical consequence of colonisation but also a product of the extended cultural interactions of migration. When discussing the Western writer in this article, therefore, it is important to differentiate between those of culturally hybrid backgrounds (such as Arab-Americans, Lebanese-Australians, or Russian-Canadians) and Western writers who have remained within a cultural monology, largely unaffected by the processes of cultural hybridisation. This article, when speaking of the Western writer, will be referring to the latter.

With this in mind it will be argued that while heterological discourse has informed the creative insights and blended imaginations of writers who have experienced the effects of colonisation or migration, the culturally monologic stream of Western fiction has been unable to speak about the experience of the cultural other without trespassing into appropriation. Without an experience of itself as the subject of colonisation, Western literature has remained on the outside of dialogic space, un-hybrid, restricted to an observational (ethnographic) understanding of cultural difference and has therefore, in a literary sense, found itself caught in a culturally incestuous loop of self-reference.

The question raised by this discursive bifurcation is what can Western literature do in the face of cultural diversity? How can the West engage with an other that has been exposed to the challenges of a range of Western cultural influences and, by assimilating them, has made for itself a culturally heterological and hybrid identity? As Diana Brydon writes:

How can we achieve the ideal of “heterology” which makes understood the difference of voices—what Wilson Harris terms the “harlequin cosmos at the heart of existence”—while avoiding the twin perils of insipidity and self-parody? *What is the discourse appropriate to this heterological mentality?* (30; emphasis added)

This paper will explore the theoretical and practical difficulties facing Western writers of fiction in regard to their future participation in post-colonial discourse and will suggest that textual dialogism can provide an avenue for the negotiation of difference for the reader, creating a conversational space within which both sides can speak and be heard without crossing the line into the cultural appropriation of otherness. I will argue that—for the reader, at least—textual dialogism represents a first possible step towards the development of a more heterological way of thinking and relating to the difference of the other. The suitability of dialogism as a reading strategy will be considered later in this paper in relation to two texts, Inez Baranay's Australian novel, *The Edge of Bali*, and Gerson Poyk's Indonesian short story, "Kuta, here my love flickers brightly," both of which explore fictional encounters between Western female tourists and Indonesian men who provide tourist services (in this case the Balinese beach-boys, known in the West as "Kuta Cowboys" and in Indonesia as *cowok*).

In *Conquest of America*, Tzvetan Todorov provides a textual demonstration of the productivity of a dialogic reading of cultural alterities in his examination of the European subjugation of Central American civilisations in the sixteenth century. His strategy for the achievement of this textual impression of historical dialogue was to quote extensively from the Aztec chronicles and juxtapose their accounts of events alongside the Spanish histories. The resulting dialogue between cultural discourses was intended to unlock a new textual perspective for the reader. In relation to the Aztec chronicles of conquest, the Western reader is offered a new and unfamiliar telling of events from the other side and the opportunity to explore an alternative perspective which, in turn, raises new questions of interrogation, such as: what were the thoughts and motivations of the Aztecs?; what were their metaphysical dispositions?; what assumptions did they build upon in order to interpret the unexpected infusion of otherness into their world?; how did their culturally-specific ontology inform and direct their decision making?; how did this process of textual/cultural intercourse (which would ultimately become the rape of one by the other) affect the outcome of first contact?

Todorov's stated intention in providing space for this juxtaposition of world views is not to arrive at definitive answers to these questions but rather to interpolate and entangle the texts of the other with the European narratives in order to provide alternate motivations and interpretations and thereby to generate fresh insights into the events and effects of invasion which may have remained invisible in the existing monoglossic histories. Todorov explains that his approach was not to seek "a terrain of compromise but the path of dialogue. I question, I transpose, I interpret these texts: but also I let them speak (whence so many quotations) and defend themselves" (250). This was done in order to provide "multiple determinations which condemn any attempt to systematize history to failure" (252). By giving equivalent space to the Aztec accounts of events, Todorov provides an approximation of dialogue not as a prologue to the definitive response of the Spanish histories but rather as texts that rest on an equal footing with the European accounts. Either set of texts read separately would suggest new insights into the motivations of the other, but it is the marginal entanglement of perspectives through the dialogue of perspectives which enables a deeper perception into the relationship with the other.

By the end of his text, Todorov does arrive at an unusual reading derived from this comparison of perspectives, which is that the Spanish conquest was primarily a result of the clash of differing epistemologies and discourses. He argues that it was the more rational and scientific quality of European epistemology with its reliance on observation and knowledge (the exercise of power over nature) that allowed the Spanish to overcome a culture which tried to make sense of European alterity "in the context of a communication with the world, not with men" (248), consulting oracles, and interpreting dreams.

In the context of this essay, Todorov's reading of the relationship between the West and the other highlights an important and ironic reversal, which is that in the sixteenth-century clash of cultures it was the West that was able to comprehend and exploit cultural alterity most effectively. This understanding was drawn, necessarily, from an ethnographic calculation of the motives and vulnerabilities of otherness derived from observations of behaviours and the gathering of data from

spies and informants rather than by means of an internal or intrinsic dialogic which emerges, for the hybrid, from the experience and internalisation of dual or multiple cultural identities. Nevertheless, it enabled the West to gain power over the Aztec other primarily by means of dominating the discursive terrain. Emergent rationalism and techniques of objective/scientific enquiry in the West provided an opportunity to manage discourse and manipulate truth.

Homi Bhabha argues that as a consequence of the experience of conquest and colonisation, and through the effects of global migrations, a fundamental reversal took place in this discursive relationship, which resulted in the other gaining access to knowledge of the Western mindset unavailable to the West in its reading of otherness: an inversion achieved through the process of hybridisation. While early colonial control was derived from the Western capacity to gather, regulate, and exploit data through observation, the hybridisation of the other drew, and continues to draw, on an internalized knowledge and interaction of cultural epistemologies, enabling the colonised not only to enter into a deeper understanding of the West but also to subvert and challenge Western claims of authenticity.

As Bhabha explains, the transaction that hybridity performs is not only “less than one” but also “double” (“Signs Taken for Wonders” 177). According to this process knowledge is transmitted by the dominant culture and received, though differently understood, by the dominated culture (therefore becoming “less”). It is then repeated within the semantic space, and along with its own syntagmatic associations, in a way which serves to “both estrange its identity” and “produce new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power” (“Signs” 180) (and is therefore, by this means “doubled”). Thus the multiplication of signs (the metonymic) overcomes the attempted imposition of the culturally universal (the metaphoric). As in the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin that relate to novelistic discourse, it is the space or distance that “difference” produces (linguistic and cultural) which permits the critique of mimicry to resist and subvert the assertions of the centre.

The particular difficulty that this represents for the centre is located in the capacity of hybridity to understand and deconstruct *a priori* as-

sertions of authenticity by renegotiating them according to [an]other cultural context. Thus, the fiction of the hybrid, which is derived from an internal blending, interaction, and clash of values, de-forms and re-forms authoritative discourses, re-presenting them as estranged yet familiar entities and thereby stripping away assertions of predominance and progress. This, in turn, results in a degree of epistemological empowerment at the margin. The un-hybridised Western writer lacks a subjective understanding of the experience of otherness and continues to be restricted to the role of external observer.

The difficulty of transition into the “heterological mentality” for the Western writer is to be found in the requisite exclusion of the culturally monologic writer from the internalised experience of a dialogue between cultures, an experience that is available only to the hybrid. Bhabha asserts that it is the *experience* of hybridization that allows for the interruption of the metaphoric at “the point at which there is a loss of meaning in the contestation and articulation of everyday life” (“The Commitment” 34). The refocusing of critical analysis away from the metaphoric/symbolic “truths” of cultural identity generates an awareness of the contingent/temporal production of signification and the production of a dialogic voice.

If this conception of the emergence of the cultural dialogic through hybridization is an accurate theoretical reflection of the process, then it is difficult to imagine that non-hybridised Western writers will be able to participate in heterological discourse in the near future. In fact, it could also be asked—in relation to the argument of this essay—if cultural dialogism can only be formed in the Western writer through extended and extreme processes such as colonization, or extended migration, what is the benefit of raising such an improbability? The answer that is proposed here is that while for the *writer* the trauma of hybridisation is an essential ingredient in the development of a heterological consciousness, such an extended and difficult process is not required of the *reader*. I will argue that greater accessibility to the culturally dialogic is open to the reader because the contiguity and interanimation of cultures is available through the dialogic reading of existing, culturally divergent literary texts.

The dialogic reading strategy proposed in this paper will suggest that the juxtaposition of culturally divergent fictional texts, which have a shared focus of attention, can provide a reading space within which cultures are able to speak back and forth, questioning and answering, interrogating and displacing each other. This shared focus relates to common geographical setting, topics/issues/themes, and/or events about which the West has chosen to speak. For example, the texts selected for this essay (one Australian, the other Indonesian) are both set in tourist Bali and examine the experience of tourist “romance” and the effects of sex tourism on opposite sides of the cultural divide.

The approach in the essay, however, will diverge from Todorov’s *historical dialogic* by suggesting that *novelistic discourse* is more applicable to the exploration of cultural heterology. This is in keeping with Bakhtin’s theory of the dialogic in which he suggests that while history, along with psychological case studies, strips away the social context of language, leading to the reification of “eventness,” the novel inhabits and emerges from social registers and stratifications: “The internal social dialogism of novelistic discourse requires the concrete social context of discourse to be exposed, to be revealed as the force that determines its entire stylistic structure, its ‘form’ and its ‘content’ determining it not from without, but from within” (300). However, whereas Bakhtin regards Western non-hybrid fiction as heteroglossic in terms of its own sociocultural space, I argue that non-hybrid fiction is only capable of reflecting a single cultural perspective and, therefore, read on its own, remains culturally monologic unless dialogue can be achieved by bringing the cultural voices of otherness through the juxtaposition of texts into reading proximity in order to generate the possibility of some entanglement at the edges of difference. In this sense, it is the reader who is given the responsibility of entangling perspectives and arriving at more hybrid meanings through the reading of two or more texts written from different cultural perspectives (one being that of the reader) which are centred on a shared experience of the other.

Poyk’s short story “Kuta, here my love flickers brightly” provides an interesting and, from a Western perspective, atypical reading of the complex effect that tourist demand (*tuntunan tourisme*) (10) has had

on the other, specifically in relation to the creation and maintenance of a previously non-existent beach-boy culture. Poyk, who has travelled and written about the Indonesian experience in a range of Indonesian geographical and cultural contexts, is not Balinese but was born in Roti, an island further east in the Indonesian archipelago.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore important to note that while “Kuta, here my love flickers brightly” is set in Bali, its narrative interest stretches beyond to focus on the broader experience of Indonesia and Indonesians as the subject(s) of Western economic exploitation. This wider focus is reflected throughout the story in the conversations of the main characters. For example, when the unnamed Indonesian narrator and central character of the story tells Regina, his tourist lover, about the role played by the Balinese and Javanese attendants in the tourist industry, he says, “*Kita harus memberi fasilitas kepada semua turis yang datang ke Indonesia*” (17) (“We must provide facilities for all tourists who come to Indonesia”). He speaks of Regina becoming an Indonesian citizen: “*Kau sudah menjadi Indonesia, kan?*” (24) (“You have already become an Indonesian, haven’t you?”). There is little reference to, or explanation of, the intricacies of Balinese culture or customs, unlike other more regionally-specific texts such as Umar Kayam’s *Para Priyayi* which expounds and explains the values and cultural subtleties of Javanese priyayi culture. Poyk’s central character, in fact, talks about “*revolusi kebudayaan di Indonesia*” (25) (“revolutionary culture in Indonesia”) rather than focusing on specific and peculiar traditions of Bali itself. From the constant reference to “*wanita Indonesia*” (17) (Indonesian women), “*lelaki Indonesia*” (17) (Indonesian men), “*orang Indonesia*” (17) (Indonesian people), “*negara Indonesia*” (17) (the Indonesian nation), and “*matahari Indonesia*” (23) (the Indonesian sun), it seems reasonable to suggest that his choice for the setting of his story is determined by the pressures placed on Indonesian society through Western tourism, which finds its most concentrated and harmful effects in Indonesia’s tourist centre, Bali itself.

In an early passage in the story the narrator draws the reader’s attention to the striking differences in community values, cultural moral expectations, and social priorities when he says to the Australian woman, Regina, who has hired him as a guide as well as a sexual partner:

You are truly a modern person, different than Indonesian women, different than Indonesian people. If I meet an Indonesian woman who is not a prostitute who does not ask for payment, the Hansip [the neighbourhood patrol] will surround the house, and the people together with the Hansip, catching me in the act with the Indonesian woman, will herd us to the office and we will be ordered by the Hansip to marry. But with a white woman everything is safe. We must provide facilities for all the tourists who come to Indonesia. They can enjoy the scenery, the Legong dance and the Indonesian boys. (17)<sup>4</sup>

Like many of the other Indonesian men and women caught up in the tourist industry, both Balinese and Javanese, the narrator inhabits a world with its own rules, a world with a special and separate morality, in which important cultural values and practices have been suspended. The way in which traditional values are put on hold in order to satisfy tourist expectations and demands reflects the economic imbalance which enables the West to override such cultural niceties and eschew the necessity for cross-cultural negotiation.

“Kuta, here my love flickers brightly” opens with the narrator’s description of his relationship with Regina, who has flown out of Bali and back to Australia like “a modern dog’s flea” (*kutu anjing modern*): “[M]y love comes, my love goes, ah, she goes too far for me to reach her. Yes, love has become like the modern dog’s fleas that jumps from one city to another city far away” (7). While the narrator, who recognizes his place in this cross-cultural interaction, assures the reader, “I don’t care about her anymore. She is a free person” (7), by the time we reach the end of his narrative, the reader has no doubt that his encounter with Regina has left him deeply disillusioned and embittered by the realities of the economic and ethical imbalances that constitute tourist transactions between the first and third worlds. It is, in fact, through his relationship with Regina that the narrator comes to understand his, and Bali’s, place in the global context.

Baranay’s *The Edge of Bali* represents the Western perspective which will be analysed alongside Poyk’s text. Nelson, who is Baranay’s central

character in the first part of the novel, is an Australian tourist who has a six-week relationship with Miki, a beach-boy who augments his income by working in a Kuta nightclub. She describes their time together as “like a beautiful movie. . . . He was the one who was exactly right for her” (4), and it seems to her that he feels the same way. Before the end of her holiday, which she has extended by three weeks in order to spend more time with him, they plan her return:

She could work for a year and make enough money to come back, he had told her. He said he couldn't do the same. “Work here for a year, make only little bit of money. Only enough for stay here. I want to go to Australia,” he said.

“You will! If you want to, you will.” This contrary to her normal scepticism, she had said with certainty.

“I want,” he said; “I want.” (4–5)

The opening pages of Baranay's novel describe the scene in which Nelson, returning to Bali a year later, arrives at the club where Miki works. Finding him with another tourist girl, she realises her mistake when, as she approaches him, he fails to recognise her. As she rushes out of the club, Miki, belatedly remembering who she is, calls after her, “You! Girl! Chick! Finally, ‘Nelson!,’ but she had gone” (15). Later, staying with Australian friends, Nelson is told by a Balinese boy, Agung, that he is looking for a tourist girl only staying in Bali for another week so he can fill his time until his Dutch girlfriend returns to Bali in ten days. “Yeah, don't waste ten days just waiting” (21), Nelson says sarcastically, highlighting her sense of betrayal.

The introduction of this trope of victimization at the start of the novel sets up a narrative binary between the exploitative behaviour of the Balinese boys and the gullible romantic impulses of the Australian girls. The narrative opposition does not represent an original or singular characterisation of cross-cultural “romance” in Western, or even Australian, fiction but a familiar iteration, replicated in film documentary narrative and news commentary, one that fixes the attentions of Balinese male otherness in relation to Western women within a paradigm of exploitation. Such a portrayal of the beach-boys is, of course, not simply a

*fiction* but neither is it the *whole* or dialogic truth. It is a construction reinforced by two decades of ethnographic studies which typically describe the role of the beach-boys in Africa, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia as guides who use their local knowledge, looks, and social skills (usually requiring some competence in English) to make the acquaintance of female tourists. The intention of these engineered encounters is to informally assist the tourists in negotiating the unfamiliar culture, or guide them on excursions around the island, with the expectation of some future reimbursement for their services. As Heidi Dahles and Karen Bras argue, the local youth perceive their role as being primarily entrepreneurial. Some of the cowoks, according to Megan Jennaway, are also “motivated by a fantasy of migration to the West, and . . . this inevitably introduces sex into the (touristic) equation” (51).

In approaching a dialogic reading of Poyk’s and Baranay’s texts, it is important to determine why this reading represents a cultural analysis and not simply a discussion of class or economic inequality. In the first few pages of Poyk’s story, the narrator explains how he has recently moved his family from the *desa* (village), where he worked a plot of land, to Denpasar where he is attempting to make a living as an “unofficial guide.” He, his wife, and five children are living in a single room in a cheap hotel, like *ikan pepes* (8) (fish wrapped in a banana leaf). He, as the breadwinner, has been *dibebaskan* (8) (set free) by his wife to go out as a guide, to seek money wherever he can find it. While this freedom is born of necessity, it is also the outworking of a more complex interaction of preference, desire, and adventure. This is consistent with Jennaway’s ethnographic description:

[The Balinese youths] enter the economy of pleasure neither by accident nor out of destitution, but in a series of preferential actions characterized by their intentionality, starting with the decision to abandon alternative forms of work as farmers, labourers or craftsmen in favour of the apparently easy life of a cowok. (55)

While the narrator justifies the uprooting of his family for the questionable job of a guide in the city by claiming that his purpose is to

provide a better future for his children, it becomes clear that it is also a consequence of some strain of cultural infection he has contracted from his contact with the tourist community: a moral wanderlust brought on by the temptations of making a living through the agencies of hedonism and the slacker mentality. This apparent deviation from expected behaviour for a man who, with five children, is clearly past his youth, is what the Javanese refer to as “lali” or forgetfulness in regard to one’s familial and communal responsibilities. He, in fact, becomes so immersed in the beach-boy world of the tourist that when he does return to the room with money for his wife and children, after days or weeks away, he feels *pusing dan asing* (8) (disconcerted and out of place).

Unlike Regina (or Nelson), who appears untroubled by her own contribution to the formation of this cultural/moral divide, Marla, the main character in the second part of Baranay’s novel, is deeply critical of the social impact of tourism on Balinese communities. A middle-aged Australian woman emerging from the breakup of a long-term relationship and reassessing her values, Marla settles in a bungalow in Ubud<sup>5</sup> where she meets Carlo, a gay dancer she knew in Australia. Both repeatedly reflect on their determination not to be mistaken for tourists, listing the attitudes and activities that would mark them as travelers. Marla is committed to her search for the values of the true Bali and as part of this is determined not to be drawn into the “Bali romance thing”: “It’s all so obvious: these boys are so pretty and so good at pleasing and they want a white girlfriend—the status, the money she’ll leave—but you think you’re the only one and it only happens to you. . . . ‘I mean,’ said Marla to herself, ‘that’s the most banal story: went to Bali and had the romance’” (128).

Earlier in the novel she interviews an Australian, the long-term manager of a club in Kuta, who tells her: “Most of the girls, Australian girls, haven’t got a clue. There was an Australian girl waiting for a barman here, she had bought him a motorbike, she wants to buy land with him, she goes to all the clubs with him. She’s being used, sucked in. . . . Ninety per cent of the girls with Balinese boyfriends don’t know” (37).

Determined not to get embroiled in what she sees as the commercialization and denigration of Balinese society and the minefield of risks

this presents for the unwary female tourist, she travels on from Ubud through rural Bali, finally arriving at a palace where she has been told the “real” Trance Dance will be performed. In this place, with its well-preserved palace ritual and careful control of tourists, Marla seems to have entered the world of the 1930s, the idealised space of cultural diversity and cross-pollination between Bali and the West, a place she had read about and “known” before her arrival. Marla is the clearest proponent of Bhabha’s concept of the “disavowal of difference” (“Signs” 172), through which he suggests that the West has managed to maintain cultural dominance in relation to the postcolonial/postmodern relativisation of cultural value. This entails the construction of culture in terms of diversity as a strategy that positions the other as a subject of study (epistemology) and definition but not as a site of dialogue (enunciation):

The revision of the history of critical theory rests, as I have said, on the notion of cultural difference, not cultural diversity. Cultural diversity is an epistemological object—culture as object of empirical knowledge—whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as “knowledgeable”, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. (Bhabha, “The Commitment” 34)

Containing the threat of difference within the boundaries of the definable and “studyable” paradigm of diversity represents a new strategy, a contemporary adaptation to the movement of history and modern thought towards ideas of tolerance and equality. According to this process, diversity is celebrated while the challenge of cultural difference is defused.

Poyk’s story engages his central character, and the reader, in the more complex and disturbing world of the modern hybrid. Through the narrator’s struggle as he passes through the predictable stages of desire, disenchantment, and cultural and moral alienation, Poyk leads us towards an understanding of the process and effect of social and familial dislocation brought on by the siren call of the tourist economy. Mid-way through the story, as the narrator travels around the island with Regina, he tells her that he has a large plot of land in the *desa* which he left to

become a guide because the vocation of farming is the most despised in Bali, outside of prostitution. He explains that many young Balinese men “long to leave their rice fields . . . and pursue their fate in the city” (18). Even his wife, who must endure his long absences and remain silent about his possible infidelities, is infected with the excitement of what appears to be easy money: “When she sees the five thousand rupiah note which is still new, she stops me hugging her, then she dances the Janger Bali for a moment, then she exhorts me with complete happiness, ‘Go, go, go again and get lots and lots of money’” (50). This, the narrator tells us, is the “power and happiness of the wife of an unofficial guide with a motorbike, on the island of Bali” (50).

It becomes clear, as the narrative progresses, that it is not only the money but the means by which it is earned, the endless crowds of tourist pleasure-seekers sunbathing on the beaches and drinking in the bars, exuding an unimaginable affluence, that has seduced him away from his family and the hard-graft of the *desa* towards the promise of trickle-down wealth and leisure. “My work,” he tells the reader, “is just for fun [*iseng saja*]. But sometimes it becomes serious” (10). The seriousness comes in the form of *dunia malam* (10) (the dark or night world) into which his chosen vocation inevitably leads him: the world of Javanese prostitutes and their pimps, and the sexual shamelessness of the Western tourists. Sex tourism, as it is played out through the relationship that develops between the narrator and Regina, is the central trope used in the story to illustrate the complexity and social ambivalence generated by the tourist trade in the lives of the native Balinese.

In Baranay’s novel, the sex industry is understood in terms of its more explicit manifestations, explained to Marla by the Australian club owner:

“A lot of the prostitutes are just kids. On the street they charge 3,500 to 5,000.”

“That’s two or three dollars!”

“Or there are clubs that are really brothels. They’re all around here—check them out. Pussycats? Australian guy runs it. His partner is a government minister. Pussycats has never been raided. They charge the girls to use it to meet blokes.”

“Health checks?” she asked. “Condoms? No? Not at all? Hmmmm.” (38)

“Kuta, here my love flickers brightly,” on the other hand, moves beyond the consequences of imported cultural contamination visible to the outsider and focuses the reader’s attention on the more subtle but fundamentally damaging influences on the Balinese themselves. The nearly imperceptible insinuation of the effects of the trade in romance is demonstrated through the experience of the narrator who is largely unaware that he is being ensnared in a web of sexual transactions (in which he is the primary commodity) until it is too late. The subtlety of the cultural and moral corruption of the Balinese (both the individual and the community) is derived from the inextricable association between purpose and method. Jennaway explains that the beach-boys use “love-matches with a foreign woman as a means of economic advancement . . . by enacting intentional strategies of association that require them to repudiate their links with their home communities and by enacting skillful performances of ‘love’” (56). While the purpose of the beach-boys, at least in the mind of Poyk’s narrator, is to earn a living from the tourist by taking on the role of a guide, “the strategies of association” would appear to generate a line between performance and moral damage that is impossibly thin.

The method used by the narrator, to blend in and make contact with the tourists on the beaches, involves what he describes as “*bermodalkan handuk*” (“modeling a towel”) and sunbathing naked:

I hung around, swimming naked at Kuta Beach and Legian . . . until eventually I could get friendly with one of the guys or girls. After we had got to know one another I would offer to take them around Bali on my motor bike. In this way I was able to prey on the tourists and in this way I always kept my pocket full of money, and my children were able to go to a good school. (11)<sup>6</sup>

Tellingly, the narrator uses the phrase “*mangsa turis*” (11) here to describe the way in which the beach-boys initiate contact with their “cli-

ents.” *Mangsa* in its noun form translates as “prey or bait or victim.” As a verb, *memangsa* (which syntactically is the part of speech used by the narrator here—with the prefix dropped in the form of market speech) translates as “prey on, make into a victim” (Echols and Shadily 361). It is clear from this description that the beach-boys are aware of the role that their sexuality plays in attracting clients, but for the narrator the realisation that he himself may have become a victim in the sexual transactions of his trade dawns only gradually.

As he takes Regina to art galleries and religious sites and organizes cheap accommodation through his contacts, their relationship quickly becomes sexual. Initially the narrator sees himself as a willing partner, but as the journey progresses, he begins to contemplate the power differential in their relationship and the fact that Regina is, in reality, his employer. Often tired after driving the motor bike all day, he sleeps early but soon realizes—when she wakes him from an exhausted sleep to translate her poetry into Indonesian and have sex—that he is expected to adapt to her personal and sexual requirements. Despite his attraction to her, he feels increasingly resentful of these demands and begins to reconsider his own role as a “guide” to the tourists. He describes the feelings that are developing from his own perspective when he writes: “In the end I felt that I was a milking cow” (Poyk 36). Eventually, he is forced to consider the possibility that in his eagerness to avoid farming, he has become the thing he despises even more—a prostitute:

For a long time, I have not heard that there are women who search for male prostitutes, so that I had almost come to disbelieve it, and soon I came to disbelieve it completely, until my travels with Regina. But I am not a prostitute. I am an unofficial guide, an unregistered guide who rents his motor bike, who by chance meets beautiful women . . . and all at once I am thinking about male prostitution as has happened with friends who are unofficial guides, nevertheless I am sufficiently relieved, because I have not fallen too far into the tourist garbage heap. (38)<sup>7</sup>

This realization enables him to look more honestly at his situation and consider what benefits he can extract from their arrangement. He consoles himself with the stories he has heard of Indonesian boys receiving huge sums of money from female tourists who have become infatuated with them. Thus, his relationship with Regina takes him to a place where he is both a victim of tourist demand and a hopeful participant. The gains and losses he experiences reflect the broader balance sheet of tourism's effect on the Balinese community.

There is also a personal cost for each of the central characters in the texts. For Baranay's character, Nelson, it is the bitterness and confusion that comes with the realisation that her feelings and desires were little more than a traded commodity; that more (or less) than a person, she was a necessary component of the local economy. Marla, who has been scrupulous in her efforts to avoid the romantic and sexual traps of "paradise," also becomes involved with a court dancer in the palace of the Head Prince in East Bali, far from the tourist centres. When she meets the dancer, she is impressed by his cultural sophistication and dignity, which provides a sense of distance in her mind from the questionable intentions of the Kuta Cowboys and separates her own behaviour from the easy hedonism of the female tourist whom she so despises. Although he is married, the rich cultural and spiritual surroundings and the *alusness* (refinement) of the dancer ward off any sense she might otherwise have of guilt or potential exploitation. Their secret sexual relationship, which extends over several weeks, seems genuine and natural to her until one day he tells her:

He would like to have a business with tourists. His family owns some land near the sea. There they could build a place to stay. If they had more money.

Don't let me think of it, she thinks, don't let me even think of it, I know he wants nothing from me, he has told me so and it is true. (204)

For the narrator in Poyk's story, cross-cultural romance also proves to be costly on a personal level. Even as he imagines and plots the possibility of gaining some financial reward for his services, he realizes that

he has fallen in love with Regina. Three days before she is to leave, he asks her to marry him. Suspicious that he will leave her once he is in Australia, Regina hesitates, but the narrator swears he would never do that to her. She thinks for a moment and appears to agree. When Regina departs for Australia alone, she leaves him some extra money and promises to send more soon so that he can “jump like a modern dog’s flea to the kangaroo continent” (53). After a year without hearing from her, however, he comes to realise that now that she is far away she has escaped his reach and reproach. He knows that she will not even take the time to send him a letter of regret: “I took a deep breath and I realised that man is indeed like a dog’s flea, like a dog’s flea he easily hops from one town to another. After he has made a distant leap, the modern man sunbathes on the beach, travels through the scenic regions, eats at the restaurants and has sex in the hotels” (54).<sup>7</sup> The narrator suggests in this passage that he has been assigned a specific role in a world of economic disequilibrium: a vital function in relation to the wealth and mobility of the tourist. In the western romantic imagination, fenced off in a kind of cultural and geographic stasis, he provides the enactment of an exotic textualised past and the fulfillment of a sexualized present. It is a role that requires him to know his place and stay in that place.

After denigrating the life of the farmer in Bali to Regina and desperately attempting to avoid its claim on him, Poyk’s narrator resigns himself to farming once more, deciding it would be better after all to return to the plot of land he has not yet sold. He sells his motor bike and “burns the immoral towel” (54). After his return to the *desa* he reflects on what has been lost with the emergence of tourist Bali:

[D]o you know that this world is no longer the loving world of the villagers where the beloved goes down to the water spout and bathes naked, and afterwards goes home to the village carrying water for her lover? This world has become so large and the lover is like the modern dog’s flea which can jump from continent to continent. (7)

In relation to this comparative, dialogic reading of culturally divergent texts, centred on a shared though differently understood series of narrative perceptions, Bhabha's focus on the enunciative (experiential nature of cultural negotiation) suggests, through the juxtaposed reading of divergent cultural understandings, a possible point of access into dialogic discourse for the reader through a process of textual hybridization, the blending of alternate cultural values and experiences. It is, he argues, through *negotiation* rather than *negation* that space is opened for real contact in which the *theorisation* of alterity is pushed aside by the (in this case textual) *experience* of alterity:

In such a discursive temporality, the event of theory becomes the *negotiation* of contradictory and antagonistic instances that open up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle, and destroy those negative polarities between knowledge and its objects, and between theory and practical-political reason. ("The Commitment" 25; emphasis added)

In this form, the "centre" or "self" relates to the "margin," or "other," metonymically through contiguity and clash rather than attempting to repress it under the weight of the Western metaphoric. In relation to the fictional texts in this article (Australian and Indonesian), this means that neither voice is given a metaphoric predominance or authority but rather speaks metonymically, as equally valid cultural "truths" which both contradict and interplay, allowing the reader to derive a more hybrid perception of the meanings they convey.

In conclusion, it must be asked what, if anything, is gained through a culturally dialogic reading strategy? The theoretical purpose behind the juxtaposition of texts, using Todorov's approach rather than simply reading non-Western hybrid texts on their own, is to add alternatives to the single text, to multiply the possibilities (whether they seem acceptable or not), and to attempt to provide sufficient material to break up the totality. Seeking out such a textual dialogue with otherness is an attempt to overcome cultural *monoglossia* by providing space for (permitting the voice of) the culturally *heteroglossic* to be heard (i.e., through the reading of Western and non-Western texts set within the

same cultural context and addressing similar issues) and thereby to generate a dialogue (in the thinking of the reader) between cultural points of view. The experience of divergent cultural perspectives, read consecutively or concurrently, can also generate zones of contention in which different discursive positions are able to “fight it out in the territory of the utterance” (Bakhtin 360) with the reader left to negotiate retrospectively a consolidation or revision of meaning. The dialogic reading of novelistic discourse represents the *exteriorisation* of *internal* discourses and allows the reader to experience the clash of two culturally divergent world views: those of the other and of the mirrored self as seen through the gaze of the other. The proximity of alterity to familiarity in the cross-cultural encounter provides a fresh eye in the reading of cultural difference by allowing a conversation between uncommon interlocutors.

## Notes

- 1 *Kuta! Di sini, di pantaimu, cintaku kerlip kemerlap bersama ganggang dan kunang-kunang. Di sini, di meja makan restoran dan losmen, cintaku bagaikan kandil kemerlap yang tiba-tiba mati dihembus angin laut, lalu kunyalakan lagi dengan seluruh semangat bercinta, tetapi ketahuilah bahwa dunia ini bukan lagi dunia cinta orang dusun di mana sang kekasih turun ke pancuran lalu mandi telanjang, kemudian pulang ke dusun membawa air untuk kekasih. Dunia ini sudah menjadi begitu luas dan kekasih bagaikan kutu-kutu anjing modern yang bisa melompat-lompat dari benua ke benua, misalnya dari New York ke Bali, kemudian melompat lagi ke Paris (7).*

[It should be noted that wherever possible I have read the Indonesian texts in the original Bahasa Indonesia, even where English translations are available, in order to gain a “truer” sense of tone and cultural nuance. Gentzler notes in his chapter on “Polysystem Theory and Translation Studies” (in his book *Contemporary Translation Theory*) that it is important to recognise that the process of translation itself is not innocent or devoid of cultural/psychological interference. On this basis, and in order to reduce the cultural filtering effect of two readings, I have tried to refer to the original language text in my analysis.]

- 2 This is not to overlook the broader designation of postcolonial fiction which includes writers such as Patrick White and Margaret Atwood writing in post-colonial countries but rather to take the view forwarded by Woods in *The New Cambridge History of English Literature*, that while

Australians and Canadians sometimes claim to live in postcolonial societies . . . many would refuse them the label because their literature is domi-

nated by European immigrants, and is therefore a literature of privilege rather than of protest. According to the usual Postcolonial paradigm only literature written by native peoples in Canada and Australia would truly qualify. (737)

- 3 Poyk is regarded as an important figure in the development of contemporary Balinese literature, having lived and written in Bali for many years as well as being one of the founders and editors of the *Bali Courier*, along with Nyoman Rasta Sindhu. Darma Putra in “Sastra Indonesia di Bali Sebelum dan Semasa Uumbu Landu Paranggi” included Poyk in a list of important writers of Balinese origin, arguing that “Tjok Raka, Gerson Poyk, Putu Arya Tirtawirya, dan Putu Setia are writers who have been dedicated to extending the lustre of literature in Bali” (5). In reviewing *The Anthology of Balinese Poetry (Antologi Puisi Bali)*, Tirtawirya said that he considered it incomplete because it excluded the work of other established poets who lived in Bali like Cok Raka Pelayun, Faisal Baras, and Gerson Poyk (*A Literary Mirror* 58).
- 4 *Kamu betul-betul orang modern. Lain dengan wanita Indonesia. Lain dengan orang-orang Indonesia. Kalau aku bertemu dengan wanita Indonesia bukan pelacur yang tidak minta bayaran, maka Hansip akan mengililingi rumah lalu massa bersama Hansip menangkap basah aku dan wanita Indonesia itu lalu digiring ke kantor dan di sana di suruh kawin Hansip. Tapi dengan wanita kulit putih semuanya aman. Kita harus memberi fasilitas kepada semua turis yang datang ke Indonesia. Mereka boleh menikmati alam, Tarian Legong dan lelaki Indonesia.* (17)
- 5 Ubud was the site of the anthropological/artistic focus of the 1930s.
- 6 *Aku ikut-ikutan mandi telanjang di pantai Kuta dan Legian . . . sehingga lambat laun aku akrab dengan satu orang lelaki atau seorang wanita. Kemudian kami berkenalan dan akupun mengajak mereka berkeliling Bali dengan sepeda motorku. Dengan demikian maka aku dapat mangsa turis. Dengan demikian kantongku selalu berisi dolar, anak-anak bisa bersekolah dengan bail.* (11)
- 7 *Sudah lama aku tidak mendengar, bahwa ada wanita yang mencari pelacur lelaki, sehingga aku hampir tak percaya, dan kemudian aku tidak percaya sama sekali, sampai dengan perjalananku dengan Regina. Tetapi aku bukan pelacur. Aku seorang guide liar, seorang guide tidak terdaftar yang menyewakan sepeda motor, yang kebetulan menemukan seorang wanita cantik. . . . dan sekaligus mengingatkan aku pada pelacur lelaki seperti halnya teman-teman guide liar yang lain, namun aku masih cukup lega, karena aku tidak terlalu jatuh menjadi sampah pariwisata.* (38)

## Works Cited

- Anggraeni, Dewi. “From Indonesia to Australia and Back: Cultural Sensitivities.” *Crossing Cultures: Essays on Literature and Culture of the Asia-Pacific*. Ed. Bruce Bennett, Jeff Doyle, and Satendra Nandan. London: Skoob, 1996. 59–70. Print.

- Antologi Puisi Bali*. Denpasar, Indonesia: Yayasan Ilmu dan Seni Lembaga Seniman Indonesia Bali, 1980. Print.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. "Discourse in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981. 259–422. Print.
- Baranay, Inez. *The Edge of Bali*. Pymble: Angus and Robertson, 1992. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "The Commitment to Theory." *New Formations* 5 (Summer 1988): 5–23. Print.
- . *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- . "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817." "Race," *Writing and Difference*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986. 163–85. Print.
- Brydon, Diana. "Troppo Agitato: Writing and Reading Cultures." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 19.1 (Jan. 1988): 12–32. Print.
- Dahles, Heidi. "Romance and Sex Tourism." *Tourism in Southeast Asia: Challenges and New Directions*. Ed. Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King, and Michael Parnwell. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2009. 222–35. Print.
- Dahles, Heidi, and Karin Bras. *Tourism and Small Entrepreneurs: Development, National Policy, and Entrepreneurial Culture: Indonesian Cases*. Elmsford: Cognizant Communication, 1999. Print.
- Echols, John M., and Hassan Shadily. *Kamus Indonesia-Inggris: An Indonesian-English Dictionary*. Jakarta: Penerbit PT Gramedia, 1992. Print.
- Gentzler, Edwin. *Contemporary Translation Theories*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Harris, Wilson. *Tradition, the Writer and Society: Critical Essays*. London: New Beacon, 1967. Print.
- Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. Ed. Mark Spencer Ellis. Essex: Longman, 1983. Print.
- Jennaway, Megan. "Cowboys, Cowoks, Beach-boys and Bombs: Matching Identity to Changing Socioeconomic Realities in Post-2005." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 9.1 (2008): 47–65. Print.
- Morson, Gary, and Caryl Emerson. *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990. Print.
- Poyk, Gerson. "Kuta, di Sini Cintaku Kerlip Kemerlap." *Di Bawah Matahari Bali*. Jakarta: Penerbit Sinar Harapan, 1982. 7–54. Print.
- Putra, I Nyoman Darma. *A Literary Mirror: Balinese Reflections on Modernity and Identity in the Twentieth Century*. Denpasar: Universitas Udayana dan Bali-mangsi P, 2004. Print.
- . "Sastra Indonesia di Bali Sebelum dan Semasa Umbu Landu Peranggi." Dasar Bali. WordPress. 2009. Web. 1 Aug. 2013.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1993. Print.

- Spurr, David. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993. Print.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Harper, 1982. Print.
- Woods, Tim. "Postcolonial Fictions." *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*. Ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. 736–50. Print.