

The Writer and Society in Contemporary Indonesia: A Case Study and General Analysis

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To talk even as I propose to do within a fairly narrow remit about the relationship canvassed by my title is unavoidably to bandy about that hoary old chestnut, "engagement" in art. And not just hoary and old but also too hot to handle, if the exertions of critics far shrewder than the present writer are anything to go by.¹ The definitional problem so thoroughly surveyed by Sartre in *What is Literature?*: is not all art propaganda inasmuch as it is made out of words and images and insofar as it is in business (therefore) to peddle, whether explicitly or otherwise an argument for or against things as they are? Is it not, as Adorno suggests, engaged in a *second* sense of being entangled through choice of theme in the *realia* of social living, which can hardly be other than living amongst the facts of subordination and domination and at their behest? The epistemological problem, inseparable from these two: is art refraction, invention, transformation? Then again, how — if at all — is it related to agitation? What and whose interests, asks Brecht, does it serve, and how expeditiously? The object is not meretriciously to parade learning nor to make show of settling for once and for all a debate as uproarious as it is ancient, but, rather, to state a few of the difficulties which it is the fate and honour of the novelist in the Third World perennially to have to grapple with. And to state the difficulties is to take it as read that such a novelist, "engaged" whether he knows it or not in just these respects, inhabits a society in which norms and forms are typically still in manufacture and in which nothing (save perhaps trouble) can be taken for

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granted.

Mochtar Lubis (b. 1922) is a case in point. A brilliant light within the literary firmament of his country and a man who has endured a long term of imprisonment without trial,² editor during the 1950s of the controversial daily *Indonesia Raya*, he has in addition to a mass of occasional writing (reviews, travel pieces, feuilleton-articles and the like) written two novels which in translation have served to secure him a reputation alongside Pramoedya Ananta Toer as Indonesia's best-known 'committed' novelist at home and overseas.³ A cosmopolitan littérateur of Batak origin whose warmly acknowledged provenance is the Padang country of West Sumatra, his itinerary as journalist and as writer has spanned the three decades since independence from colonial rule and as such has operated in tandem with some of the most momentous changes Indonesian society has ever undergone. Since, as will be seen, these two novels, if they are by purport "about" anything, are about these mutations as they inflict themselves or are inflicted upon the human subject under stress, it is worth looking at the background of the fictions with a view to assessing their significance and nature.

"Background" misleads, surely, in its suggestion of inert décor, so that it is advisable instead to speak now and throughout the discussion of context foregrounded in text, history enfolded in story rather than "reflected" by the author as *cinéma vérité* cameraman. What in a nutshell is being highlighted is a movement for national self-determination receding as it were to the accompaniment of emancipatory violence into an incendiary situation characterised by cleavages of class, by inter-racial discord, by neo-colonialist exploitation and by ethnological diversification of staggering proportions (some 3,000 islands making up the Indonesian archipelago). With apologies to the specialists crudely potted history will have to do here, for want of space.⁴ The 1945 proclamation of independence by Sukarno and Mohamed Hatta found an Indonesia still in economic terms in fealty to Holland (and soon to be penetrated by foreign capital in the shape of "aid") and in haemorrhage from combat with British forces (landed in Java in 1945 officially to ensure a smooth transition to autonomy) as well as with the Dutch, who, having no intention of jettisoning their immensely valuable possessions in the Orient, commenced anti-insurgency operations with the aim of reconquering Republican territory. The economic and administrative difficulties besetting the new state in the decade that followed (more particularly in the years 1949-1957) were of a special and specially defeating if not entirely unpredictable magnitude. An extremely uneven rate of

modernization in plant and technique was exacerbating relative deprivation and aggravating inequities as between masses and elites in the distribution of wealth and power. In government there were frequent shuntings upward and aside at ministerial level and much chopping and changing in direction, whilst in the pollulating cities the population mushroomed with rural emigrants. Chicanery in the high places of industry and finance was rife, and in the provinces separatist tendencies were being quelled (though not extinguished) by an armed forces growing in strength and in numbers to become, by the early 1960s, the most powerful instrumentality in the state apparatus.

All this attested a national entity looking to be too fissile to yield to management by traditional parliamentary means. In (among other things) a bid to reassert dominion over the fractious Partai Nasional Indonesia President Sukarno, advocating "guided democracy," found it necessary to forge an alliance with the Indonesian Communist Party, then in the ascendancy amongst petty artisans and trades-unionists in an attempt to hold the military establishment at bay. The spectacular miscarriage of this project was evinced in the coup d'état of the 30 September 1965 and in the mass killings of leftists, centrists, and progressives which it unleashed, as well as in the less sensational but no less ominous shift to the right in domestic orientation and a comparatively pro-American stance in external affairs and a declared hostility to communism and especially to Peking, both seen, now, as the *fons et origo* of all mischief.

Mochtar Lubis has been privileged or as the case may be unlucky enough to have been able to observe this passage from revolutionary fire to post-independence frying pan from quarters too close for comfort. One way of appreciating the grittily testamentary value of his productions is with Lucien Goldmann to look at them as "a collective achievement though the individual consciousness of its creator,"⁵ i.e., as works whose structures are 'homologous' with the mental structures of the social group to which Lubis the author belongs. Of signal importance in this regard are his provenance in Sumatran village (or to be precise Mandailing Batak) aristocracy with links with Dutch provincial bureaucracy, and his subsequent transit to an urban bourgeoisie at once inserted and unhoused within a political establishment whose values it opposed from a democratic-radical standpoint. Far from relegating themselves to the decent secrecy of footnote these things bear centrally upon an understanding of not only what Lubis' novels say but, more interestingly, the why and the how of the saying. Put somewhat

differently, it can be said that the fictions arbitrate a reality which in turn "over-determines" them, so that they bear within them — in manner as well as matter — the inscriptions of the moving historical moment in all its ambiguity and contradictoriness. In what follows I want in fact to argue that whatever gloss Lubis' novels are committed to furnishing on the enabling circumstances of their creation, they are also, notably, about the constraints and checks upon the creative act under such circumstances — about, that is, the difficulty of writing — more especially of a particular kind of writing — in such a time and such a place. Literature as well as history asks to be seen here as an arena of struggle, a field of combat in which certain kinds of ideological campaign as well as artistic enterprise are initiated and quashed, proffered and then retracted. Then too, the novels with which I am concerned may be seen as being embroiled in a politics of literature. They distil and extend, project and ultimately though with mixed feelings protect, a practical politics taking shape on the ground and in the corridors of power.

"Combat," "struggle," "campaign"; not for nothing are these the nodal words here. For it is the case that, preoccupied as it is (and must like any nascent body of writing in Third World perhaps be) with the issue of national identity, modern Indonesian literature has since the 1930s been the battleground for competing ideologies of literary production and reception. And like all ideologies, whose function is to engender teleological myths of coherency and purpose, the ones in question purported to resolve in the creative sphere the dichotomies of an almost unmanageably polarised society. Amongst these dichotomies were: province vs. metropole; centre and periphery; the particular and the universal; individual and the community at large. The polarities were mercantile élite and urban proletariat, the latter comprising people of suddenly reduced status freshly arrived in many cases the cities from a countryside dominated by oppressive rentiers, and traditionally subdivided into separate ethnocultural universes ranged along a continuum embracing 19 main groups and a host of lesser ones. The unique area of overlap in Indonesia between these two sets is the *santri/abangan* distinction; between, that is, a commercial-religious leadership and an élite of local functionaries with roots in the old Javanese royal courts (trader vs. gentry, with all that *this* distinction implies by way of cultural patterns and social roles, is perhaps a more concise formulation).⁶ The question of *Kepribadian Indonesia* ("national identity") subsumed, then, highly complex considerations of race and class and, in the framework of resistance to colonial rule, obliged writers to forsake impartiality and take a stand. There

is an analogy, if only a very loose one, to be drawn here with the Russian literary intelligentsia in the Soviet Union after 1917 or with its counterpart in England during the 1930s, the England of Auden, Spender and Day-Lewis. There, as in Indonesia before and immediately after independence, a radicalised intellectual formation felt itself called upon to intervene after its fashion, i.e., through a form of thinking aspiring to be cognate with action, in a progressivist re-modelling of state institutions.

A further parallel is that in Indonesia post-1950 the debate as to the form and nature of such intervention was to some extent conducted through manifestoes and coterie statements. The quarrel, affecting the later development of the literature, revolved a confrontation between two groups of contrary persuasions: the so-called *Gelanggang Seniman Merdeka* (Forum of Independent Artists) and LEKRA (acronymic of the Association for Popular Culture), both founded in the wake of revolutionary commotion.⁷ The *Gelanggang*, emerging out of the earlier and similarly inclined *Angkatan '45* ("generation of '45'"), saw itself as holding out against parochialism and in favour of humanistic and universalist principles in art. With one of their more articulate and vociferous spokesmen, Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, they maintained that to attain to his majority as well as to assume his rightful place on the international scene the Indonesian writer must perforce break with a feudally backwards past and without wavering or somersault embrace modern styles and preoccupations. In operation if not in intended effect this call went forth as a prophylaxis against *adat* literature, the body of writing in Indonesia and more generally in the Malay world concerning itself (in what to untutored eyes is perhaps bound to seem an un strenuously Mills-and-Boon way) with problems conventionally arising out of the observance or breach of Muslim customary law in the rural villages. Over and against this LEKRA (a Partai Komunis Indonesia front) espoused the cause of a literature by and for the masses, denouncing as effete trends towards "individualism" and urging programmatically and by way of correction a version of Socialist Realism *à la* Gorkii or Aragon.

That Mochtar Lubis should have chosen towards the outset of his career as writer to declare an affinity for the "Generation of '45" whilst nurturing a populist disposition stopping nonetheless some distance short of anything resembling a commitment to "proletarian literature"; that he should have elected for his principal medium not modern poetry (which in Indonesia is nourished from an established literary tradition) but the novel in its Western dispensation — these things must qualify any assessment of his major

achievement in prose whilst rendering that sense achievement quaint in the technical. That accomplishment, once again, is not — or at any rate not just — mechanically to do with war (in the family, of the classes, between nation-states) as “theme” or found subject. It concerns a narrative itself furrowed by ideological conflict and embarrassed by incompatibilities resident in the letter of the text into incoherencies and dissonances. The disequilibria in Lubis’ novels, not their “unity,” announce their enmeshment within historical process, but an enmeshment, it will be seen, that is differential not consistent nor consistently profound. Quite how the novels require to be *valued* not just understood in these terms is a nice question I hope to be able tentatively to answer by way of conclusion.

Phrased with a little less jargon that has been deemed necessary to use just now, it can be said of Lubis somewhat in advance of justification that he is a novelist powerfully constrained in the act of writing by absences as well as presences. And these absences condition, intimately if unevenly, his substantive imaginative project. One such lacuna is the sort of felt continuity between a tradition and an individual talent which T.S. Eliot discussed in the essay thus entitled. If the novel in modern Indonesia is highly problematic in status by comparison with Europe and America and even modern Africa, this is because it emerged as a literary form only very recently, having been handicapped at its birth by the lack of — the words are Anthony Johns’ — any “strong creative indigenous tradition with a broader than regional base”,⁸ of a literary-critical bequest conducing (in, say, the ways that the writings of Richards or Leavis in England or John Crowe Ransom and the New Critics in America conduce) to the formulation of sophisticated judgements grounded in complex evaluative criteria. To say nothing of lack of a shared past in a country of very many ethnological groups.

Most important, what was crucially missing was a bourgeoisie both spiritually and materially affluent, a leisured and politically stable middle-class that might have been relied upon to dispense patronage (in the guise, at least, of attention and purchasing capacity) where and when needed and to constitute an informed and accessible readership. If Ian Watt is correct in arguing (in *The Rise of Novel*) that such conditions are the *sine qua non* for the sustenance of an advanced prose fiction, then the novel in Indonesia may through no fault of its own may be said to have got off to a cripplingly late start and to have evolved thereafter under severe limitations. A corollary limitation is the problem of audience. In a novel like *A Road with no End*

this makes itself felt, I want to suggest, in a radical equivocation as to tone and perspective and – a compensatory mechanism producing an additional insecurity – in a need to conjure into existence a readership adequate to the demands of the invention as conceived by the author putting his best imaginative foot forward.

First published in 1950, *Jalan Tak Ada Ujung*, to give it its title in Indonesian, adumbrates this problematic even as it dramatises a turning point in the affairs of an individual, a social class, and a nation-in-the-making. In the novel's immediate background are the re-occupation of Indonesia by imperialist forces in 1946 and the perturbation which resulted, including the unilateral abrogation by Holland of the Linggadjati agreement (extending *de facto* Dutch recognition to the Republic of Indonesia in Java and Sumatra) and the first Dutch 'police action' against the Republic of Indonesia in 1947. The central figure of the book (hero is hardly a just description) is one Guru Isa, a biddable and neurasthenic schoolmaster in the middle of the journey, whose willingness under these circumstances to sacrifice anything for a quiet life is connected with a general shrinking from involvements, a funking of responsibilities which in turn has led to near-total insulation, to his being gaoled in the tight enclave of his own concerns. Curfew, the deprivations of Sikh and other Indian troops, the inevitable shortages and the evacuation by friends and acquaintances of a Jakarta, under, successively, Dutch and British rule and crawling with field security on the hunt for 'rebels' – all this conspires to wreck Isa's peace of mind, which is in any case precarious. A congenitally timid man and not an especially articulate one, his heart's only desire is not "to be involved either with the Republic or with the Dutch. I just want to be a teacher and to stay alive – just that!"⁹ As if, Lubis insinuates, such neutrality were possible or desirable.

I call Isa's peace of mind precarious, because he is a man whose long acquaintance with private failure on several fronts is showing every sign of hardening into a fast friendship. Fatima his wife and he have long since suspended relations and – the lines of communication between the two being permanently down – they are going nowhere quickly in baffled and acerbic silence. The novel discovers Isa in a phase of taciturn involution, his impotence both the cause and the effect of a deep-seated conviction of personal negligibility, doting on his adopted son Salim and seeking refuge in sedulous performance of small rituals from the omnipresent terror of arbitrary internment and torture. As his existence hardens on the one side into routine and, on the other, into despair, melancholic reverie begins to

alternate with desolating nightmare in which, characteristically,

he saw in his mind's eye a road with no end — a road stretching before his eyes, on and on, into the limitless distance, without an end; beginning in darkness, disappearing and continuing into darkness. A road that was no more than a streak of lightning in a dark world, sharply defined and fearsome (p. 63).

The 'road with no end' is of course the novel's central trope and as such has more than one valency. Here it communicates via the terrifying objectifications of dream a generalised dread of life, a free-floating anxiety of which the beleaguered Isa is attempting to be purged. The novel at one level honours its subject by recording with restraint and compassion his education in reality through a retrieval of himself at the eleventh hour.

The going is all uphill — until, that is, the acquaintance is made of Hazil Kamarrudin. Hazil is a young underground activist whose Haldin-like intensities (a foil to Isa's Razumovian diffidence) have set him openly at loggerheads with his father, retired chairman of the district council and a *priyayi* civil servant of the old school.¹⁰ A fondness for classical music and for its amateur performance on the violin serve to unite him with Isa in an unlikely fellowship. Instructing Hazil in the violin, Isa is afforded the chance to participate indirectly in the struggles of which, in his conscious mind, he is terrified; altruistically he assists at the birth of an artistic talent which is clearly an extension of a general ardour. Thus winkled out from a long seclusion, Isa allows himself to be caught up in neighbourhood plans for civil defence, for Jakarta has become by now prey to Dutch and British counter-terror and mopping-up operations. From this sodality it is but a short step to complicity in Hazil's organization, first as courier then as treasurer in charge of remitting funds to operatives delegated by Headquarters to execute clandestine operations. Assignment to invigilate the success or otherwise of a grenade-throwing provocation, to be led by Hazil and designed to justify further guerilla activity, overtaxes an already fearsomely overburdened psyche and induces in Isa a panic reaction to the murder and violence which he is obliged to witness. Discovery that the virile Hazil has put horns on him transports Isa from this crisis to the verge of nervous collapse, staved off, as chance would have, it by their separate arrest and detention at the hands of Dutch CID. Under torture Hazil and his captured comrades have it seems cracked and revealed all; in a chiasmus, it is he who is now prostrate with self-disgust. But Isa, neither brittle nor brutalised, holds

firm under inquisition; and when, at the close he

heard again the tramp of footsteps approaching their cell, he felt at peace with the fear within him. He knew that their terror could no longer touch him. He was free. (151)

So much for the plot which, thus barely rehearsed, the reader may be pardoned for thinking of as suffering from a certain poverty of concept and pirouetting to a decorum of extremes. It would be a pity if this were the only impression received, since to a considerable if not (alas) to a decisive extent the novel fastens itself four-square to the realist tradition exemplified by Dostoevsky and Stendhal. It is palpably interested in insinuating and maintaining a tension plausibly located in links of moral and psychological cause and effect. It deploys plot in the interests of effective dramatic encounter and with a view to portraying inconsistencies of feeling in a protagonist whose makeup is defined by the aberrant inflexions it embraces. And it works to engage our interest in the scrutiny of motives, in not just what happens next but why just that result. That is to say, *A Road with No End* is a realistic novel to the degree that it is referentially expressive of a world more or less contiguous with the one we all know, in its seeming irresolution, its gradations of scruple, its evasions and hesitations.

Now to be sure, any definition must be rough-and-ready, and 'realism' in the foregoing acceptance has had too violent a past for anyone to expect his definition to meet with complete agreement from anyone else. Nor of course are literary conventions ever found in the pure state: we always use them with a sense of approximation and in the knowledge that generalizations about their nature must be fairly malleable. But the formulation just offered provides, I feel, not a standard of judgement but a way of expressing and vindicating both a satisfaction and a dissatisfaction, in the case of a novel like *A Road with No End*, and of shedding light on the quandary of values which in a sense is the novel's constitution. At one level, certainly, Lubis is writing out of the conviction that people are nominally at liberty to select or to desist from a course of action. Story in this dimension is informed with a very familiar sense of freedom as something arduously-won and often genuinely doubtful in application. Guru Isa is presented as a man who commands the respect of high and low for his kind and upright nature, yet a man who is nonetheless trapped in a resolute unwillingness to change or to take the initiative on his own behalf leave alone others'. Vulnerable and

dependent, given to fluctuations of feeling, he takes himself at once too seriously and not seriously enough. And one of the best things in the novel which is functioning here as the transparent instrument of an acute perception is the way his reluctance truly to confront his feelings is matched only by an inclination to analyse them at some length in tormented self-colloquy. Isa's relationship with Fatima, strained as it is by his impotence, is also finely done, she both bemused and embittered but trusting in the face of her husband's ennui, he prevented by ingenuousness in the sexual sphere from perceiving his own part in undoing of the bond between them. Equally convincing, up to a point, is his attraction to Hazil. Charismatic, professionally versatile but promiscuous activist (with his almost papal certainty about means and ends) is yoked to almost luridly lacklustre school-teacher, the latter mined from within by a fear capable of being allayed – so his doctor is on hand to observe – strictly by immersion in some larger life-project (the road-with-no-end leading both to inner freedom and to *Merdeka*).

So the novel is sustained by an argument with a distinguished pedigree, namely, that the private and the public infiltrate each other; an argument conducted with intermittent regard for Forsterian notions of roundedness. Witness Isa consumed with guilt not unmingled with fugitive pride at having had to resort to pilfering in order to buy rations; or his ambiguous alarm at the bloodletting on his own as well as on the enemy's side (eavesdropping on a casual chat between two revolutionaries as to the merits of shooting or beheading as a means of despatching traitors to the cause, he is transfixed with palpitating horror that admits, nevertheless, of appalled fascination). Or digesting in solitude his marital insufficiencies while finding in music, and in other ways he is unequipped to acknowledge, consolation for the thwarting of libidinal drives. Altogether there is nothing ersatz about Lubis' imagining of the way a little man's little train of life falls to pieces under external assault, and a great deal to admire in it in the way of actual as well as potential seriousness and substance.

But if, liberal intellectual that he is, Lubis makes for like-minded and sophisticated readers every effort to render believably the slides and erosions within a personality wrought by psychic travail, there is also a massive and massively crippling concession to another readership, equally but more immediately in need of appeasement. The concession reveals itself in a hapless defection from an imaginative post that, once occupied, requires diligently to be manned if the convincingness of the composition is not to

be harmed, as it harmed here, almost beyond repair. The readiness to insert set-piece perorations that read like publicity hand-outs for the nationalist cause is tell-tale, and if the novel remains mercifully free, to the degree that it is free, of the interventionist thuggeries of socialist realism it also eyes hungrily the prospect of encircling Hazil with a posterwork halo. And this in turn disperses the dramatic illusion, either by diverting the author's attention from the effort to realize, or by weakening what has been successfully objectified; for example the fraught relations between Hazil and his father Kamarrudin, who, cherishing his illusions,

did not understand why people would not accept Dutch rule again. If the Dutch returned everything would return to normal. He himself would get his pension again and perhaps even be reemployed — he knew there was a great shortage of staff in the Government — and the comfort and respect which he had had before would be his again. He had spoken of this many times with his contemporaries and they all agreed with him.

Seeing that the road was empty Hazil swiftly crossed it and went into the front yard of the house facing his own, then hurriedly ran to the back and disappeared in the complex behind the main road. (33)

A Road with No End is a novel declaring in this fashion an interest in motivation and inner consciousness, and a concern systematically to evaluate thought and feeling. A moderate reason for rejoicing, then; and a strong one for worrying about the counter-tendency to fervid wishful thinking. You can see this in the way Lubis depicts Isa's arrival at the crossroads of his life, and his departure hence. If in straits Isa is shown in the act of finding himself or being found by the Revolution, this showing is profoundly, gratefully, at odds with the telling. The credibilising effort has been travestied or at any rate short-circuited in mid-career by an authorial attempt to have one's cake and eat it too. *Isa, we are meant to see, acts spontaneously from a nature which has evolved not only under but towards certain absolute impulses.* Of these the chief is enunciated during a tiff with Fatima:

“In the Revolution’ — he put his thoughts together ‘Many people have to play a part which is alien to them. Now his own position became clearer to him’. You see I am a teacher. I do not like violence. I have never been one for quarrels. I hate

fighting. I regret quarreling as something coarse and uncivilised. But they have chosen me as a leader in the Struggle. I do not like this role. But I accept it. Do you know why I accept it? Not because I am embued with a flaming spirit of revolt or because I have a passionate love for my country. I love my country but there is not, or not yet, in my blood any trace of emotion urging me to sacrifice my life or shed my blood for it. I have never lived in a country to be redeemed by blood; and if there's anyone who claims to possess this spirit, then it is something false and contrived. I accept this role because I am afraid, and I am even more fearful, having accepted it, because I must do things I am afraid to do." (76-77)

The point to emphasize here is that Lubis, suspended and unable to mediate between two rival and perhaps unequal world-views, is in this novel pinioned on the horns of a procedural dilemma. Committed notionally to revealing his hero (or anti-hero) with an eye to interior veracity, he yields, in what amounts to bad faith in Sartre's sense, to the urge to present him in stereotype, so that Isa comes to stand in diagrammatic relation with his interlocutors, becoming more or less but not merely human and, with them, entering upon a formal dance in which he is stripped of all complexity in order that the dance may not be disturbed. As the excruciatingly copybook quality of the speeches indicates, an action begun as imitation is moving towards charade, with a figure beginning as lifelike atrophying as we watch into a mannequin — "type" whose lineaments, we see, have been set in a ceremonial frieze kept in reserve.¹¹

It is crucial quandary, involving as it does the reduction of an inherently complex situation crying out for (and to some extent receiving) the amplified treatment it deserves. And Lubis solves it, as how can he not, by recourse to monopathic formula: a formula that hampers the release of multiple responses — pity touched with dread or esteem, contempt tempered by reservations or even qualified by irony and (dare one say it) by laughter — elicited in the reader by the opening gambit of the story-telling. The result is a discordance, as jarring as it is in ideological terms eloquent, at the heart of the work. It shows through, in the manhandling of authorial omniscience and in the subsidising of a portentous attitudinising. Pastiche occurs when it can least be afforded, leading to sustained essays in ventriloquism that have the effect of parody. In the end the reader finds himself wondering about the very thing that the author would presumably least wish to be

queried: his trustworthiness as a witness to the people whose reality he asserts and situation whose urgency he is committed to vouching for.

Conflicts of ideological and of literary address, it appears, can transpose to dissonances in method; the more so, perhaps, when the method itself is a recent import, or intruder, into the cultural system at a fairly late stage in its development. And where — the sifted data remind us —¹² the pressures conducing to individuality in the European sense of the term are lighter than those making for loyalty in the collective and for submergence of identity within the group, the upshot is likely to be a curbed portrayal of 'character' in more than two dimensions. This is arguably not the least important reason why Lubis inclines in his writing to the simplices of parable.¹³ It also accounts, if indirectly, for his inability to take a firm and unremitting grasp of the third-person mode of reporting thought and feeling which Flaubert, in the West, was the first to have excogitated. But if Lubis doesn't take this protocol as far as it needs to go he does take it a fair distance. Notwithstanding the lapses, among which must be numbered the default on titular promises of metaphorical condensation, *A Road with No End* is a novel of shrewd if fitful insight, honed to a degree in a recognizable tradition, in which the inventiveness is working for truthfulness and suggestiveness of presentation in the teeth of considerable obstacles. It is compact, compressed, it sustains a taut narrative pace, it is (for these reasons) seldom *tedious*. And it turns over and examines an ambiguous situation, intricate in itself, which ramifies by way of partial evidence until a whole society in ferment is taken in.

Senja di Jakarta (1963) is by any standard of assessment a very different affair. As will shortly be seen it emerges from and constitutes a more or less disabled recuperation of conditions for which the epithet morbid would be too mild by half. The novel is an emanation of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when under President Sukarno's autocratic (and very often actually dictatorial) rule so-called "guided democracy" was promoted as the synthetic platform for national regeneration (the beginnings of such advocacy being variously dated somewhere between 1956 and 1959). What were the characteristic features of this period; features, I shall want to argue, which are embodied in *Twilight in Djakarta* in such a way as simultaneously to constrain and redeem its rendition of events?

The most striking feature, it appears, was the absence of a degree of national consensus or of a cohesive stratum or party alignment sufficient to stabilize political life and to keep it on course. Enthusiasm for constitutional

democracy was tepid, save on the part of a handful of the educated elite who continued eccentrically to support the principle of popular sovereignty qualified by an adherence to legality and due process. Even the armed forces (often a source of stability in new Afro-Asian states) were at this stage riven; nor did any of the proliferating parties succeed in becoming a pan-national movement enjoying solidly ensconced majority support. If anything served to bring about a measure of unity on the political heights it was the spectre of insurrection from below, insurrection instigated by an increasingly restive urban proletariat (in Java a proletarianised peasantry, many of whose members had but recently sunk to the level of landless labourer) whose improverishment had not been alleviated by successive post-independence governments. In an era of factional bickering in Parliament and of semi-immobilized instruments of productive control, of competition among and within the political and administrative bureaucracies (now being merged), the tendency was to an authoritarian politics and to the arrogation of prerogative through a judicious combination of vertical repression and horizontal incorporation. The beginning of the 1960s saw an Indonesia in which the Communist Party — collecting a following among rural and urbanized peasants, petty traders and disenchanted white-collar workers and fast becoming the only purposeful, disciplined, and well-organized force in the country — was poised to seize power against a backdrop of rapidly accelerating inflation, a suffocating growth in the volume of regulation and, for ordinary folk in the cities and towns, endless daily difficulties in making ends meet.¹⁴

The value of *Twilight in Djakarta* in reconstructing this tremendously complicated but at the same time dismally simple actuality is on no account to be gainsaid, even if in other ways the novel is far from satisfactory and instructively so. Unfurling a canvas of Balzacian breadth it busies itself with manifold goings-on encompassed in an unspecified year in Indonesia in the mid-1950s (though — an important point, this — it is proleptic of the early 1960s, of which later period it has, uncannily, the feel. Not, mind, that Lubis is clairvoyant. He doesn't see ahead, he just sees straight, foretelling the future by reporting the present.) The observation of these events is in panorama and in stereoscopy and fixes on the reverberations within the private and public domain alike of derelictions of duty on a comprehensive scale. Lubis of course is not the first novelist of this age or in the developing world to describe the upward thrust of a new class and a privileged bureaucracy as being in all its many forms gross and reprehensible.

But, greatly to his credit, he is a novelist who, abominating rank and hypocrisy and muddle in his bones, sinks bulldog teeth into abuses of station and office. Consequently his work comes alive at just those points where the detection of self-interest and parasitism release in him a detached ferocity held in control by a cool spectator's eye and a skill in balancing the registration of unprincipled conduct with a certain wry admiration for its spiritendness and aplomb.

Without toning down the proclivities, *Twilight in Djakarta* successfully organizes all the qualities exhibited by the members of an administrative caste on the make amidst the institutionalized chaos of a post-colonial society: brutal insolence in their relationship with inferiors; bungling mediocrity on the part of those backed up by friends in high office and clinging to mercenarily sought positions; a craving appetite for influence, exercised or enjoyed; estrangement from all scruple; above all, an ability to secure and to bolster power through ententes which affect other orders of society. The indictment is loweringly encyclopaedic. Its cynosure is Suryono Kaslan, a promising scion of the Djakarta's haute bourgeoisie and apple of one of its more prominent industrialist's eye. Suryono, a fainthearted sybarite, has reluctantly returned from an extended tour of duty with the Republic's mission to the United Nations to relative frugality and makeshift employment in the capital, where he kicks his heels in the Foreign Ministry. He is a bewildered and impetuous young man, saddled with a naggingly indecisive temperament, demoralized but with his self-preservating instincts still in keen repair, who has nonetheless completely lost his grip on the circumstances of his private life. The breakdown in control is shown to have a long aetiology, of which conscience volunteers to supply constant reminders. A schoolboy during the Japanese occupation, he joined the newly-formed Indonesian National Army after liberation in 1945 only to desert the field of battle in Yogyakarta, discarding his military uniform when the Dutch routed the nationalist forces and seized the city. Dogged by fear of arrest by the Dutch and generally keeping a low profile after Yogya's surrender to the Republic Suryono has procured work with the newly established diplomatic service by allowing it to be put about that he is a much-deserving former guerilla. His life has thus been engineered around a lie and a fairly tawdry lie at that. From this original deception all it seems must follow: "all" being in any case generally in train for disaster.

At its inception the narrative finds Suryono at a loose end and nursing in fitfully prosecuted correspondence an affair at long-distance with Connie.

an American met during his sojourn in Manhattan. Lacking in conviction of life-purpose he stumbles into three concurrent but equally hopeless liaisons, each affording access to and each deeply implicating him in several compromised worlds. For mistress he takes, initially, his father's second wife, a young demi-mondaine of respectable antecedents bent at all cost on preserving and trading on her arriviste status through a selective dispensation of amorous favours. Fatma has become a social climber, at once egotistic and vacillating, with a well-developed eye on the main chance and one weak one on affections so self-deceiving that she is incapable of knowing what she truly is. With her, as with Dahlia, lickerish wife of Idris, a colleague squirming under the chastisement of an eroded salary, Suryono is:

seized by a feeling . . . which . . . had been creeping up on him at the most unexpected moments. While he was enjoying himself . . . in the middle of a good meal at a restaurant, when he was on the point of signing a cheque or when he climbed into his fine car. What it was that disturbed him so he found it impossible to say precisely, behind it all loomed a kind of fear . . . kind of fear he couldn't make out exactly either. So that he ended up just feeling put out, and often was annoyed with the people who happened to be around him.¹⁵

Bored and secretly contemptuous of himself, seeking diversion but also in an *acte gratuite*, Suryono finds himself dangling the prospect of perks before Sugeng, an idealistic but weak-willed and easily put-upon junior official from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, whose habitual detestation of anything short of unequivocal rectitude whatever the penalties is at best routinely at variance with his duties as they require to be performed and at worst hilariously irrelevant in performance. With the Minister's imprimatur these duties have come to consist of distributing illegal licences and preferential largesse to "corporations chartered only one month ago, with a staff of only one director, who has no office, no experience, and no connections abroad" (133). Rumbled in this malpractice Sugeng, who has also been managing a business on the sly with a view to shoring up his depleted finances (for the price of foodstuffs is rising and there is a house to buy and a pregnant and importunate wife to mollify through its purchase), is arrested and charged. In parallel fresh exactions are laid upon Suryono, who to begin with is in pretty bad shape. In sequence he has taken up with Ies, a high-minded and intelligent but infuriatingly fickle member of a

democratic-socialist study group which convenes in desultory fashion to discuss with youthful earnestness issues of social policy and philosophy. Simultaneously he finds himself up to his eyeballs in a scandal originating with his father who is in cahoots with cronies in the Partai Indonesia. Eventually thrown over by Ies, and with the law breathing down his neck, he does a moonlight flit with Fatma (who with the cynicism of her species has come to realise that her husband's "social position was ruined, and there was no advantage in remaining his wife any longer" (238)), only to keep an appointment in her company with death in the shape of a motorcar smash up on the Bandung road.

Suryono is by no means the only one to be brought to a spectacularly sticky end by Lubis' lengthily reticulated narrative, whose parts, succeeding each other regularly in time, advance co-axially towards a single centre. The number of characters like him proliferates: characters driven by their own obsessions or vitiated by the depraved universe they inhabit. (We may note in passing that the events described by the novel bear a more than superficial resemblance to those surrounding the fall of Ali Sastroamidjojo's government in 1955, events which Lubis, wearing his political journalist's hat, was well-placed to observe from a ringside seat). Raden Kaslan is at the heart of this deranged microcosm; by implication he and his kind bear a portion of responsibility for the bankruptcy that is overtaking it. His wretched son has by his grace and favour been installed as a director of the state-owned Timur Besar Corporation. His unfaithful wife heads the Bahagia Corporation. And he himself, as industrialist and as pivotal member of the ruling Indonesia Party, knits together by means of an aptitude for pulling strings and greasing palms a web of malfeasance that leaves untouched no one with whom he comes into contact, whether in a personal or in an official capacity and however casually.

The aim is to head off the popular discontent gathering pace with more than a little help from opposition groups in parliament, and to nip in the bud an offensive these elements are in readiness to mount against the coalition government, Raden Kaslan to this end has nobbled an influential newspaper editor, Halim, lukewarmly sympathetic to the Party but not actually a member and thus in a position to dictate terms. In return for hefty kickbacks which he will use to pay off debts, Halim, an opportunist to his fingertips and a trimmer if ever there was one, is to assist in swaying public opinion in the government's favour and in scotching accusations in circulation of revenue flowing into Party coffers from illicitly awarded

tenders. But the knowledge that the Party supremos are up to no good whilst requiring all the support they can get is knowledge asking to be used, and he proceeds to raise the ante, milking Raden Kaslan and party chairman Husin Limbara for all they are worth. There is, to boot, the hint of a rigged seat in Parliament to gratify a by now over-reaching appetite never short on stimulants:

Halim whistled softly in the bathroom. He was in high spirits. Standing before the mirror, he shaved his moustache, glancing from time to time at some neatly typed sheets laid out on the little table near the mirror. Then, turning back to the mirror, he rehearsed passages of the speech which he was going to deliver that night. . . . Here they'll certainly burst into laughter and applaud, he thought. And he chuckled . . . Halim cautiously guided the razor, especially near the scar on his left cheek; he had got it when he was only eighteen months old. He had fallen off a ladder and his cheek had been cut open by a sharp stone on the ground. . . . But now there were many people who really believed that he had received the wound while fighting in the revolution, even though no one knew precisely in which of the battles Halim had been wounded. Halim laughed again at his face in the mirror while his fingers stroked the scar (A little lie like this has its uses. Makes people respectful and a bit diffident towards you, he said to himself). (109-111)

Where the likes of Halim are concerned, at least, a good time is had by all and no mistake.

By sharpest contrast (and the narrative would be nowhere without contrast and juxtaposition) Sugeng is queasy with guilt. Propelled by need not greed (though in the long run both are on a par) he has acceded to a bullying proposal by an Arab property developer to arrange for the removal of government offices from a strategic location in the city centre. For his part in this very juicy little local racket Sugeng will receive a substantial cut from the proceeds of the inflated sale of the land for new and badly-needed housing construction. Trapped in the spreading net of corruption and aware of great clattering evils he is helpless to redress, having like other cogs in the machine little to lose and everything to gain through feathering his own nest but hating at the same time the twists and shifts of duplicity, he gives way to extreme self-loathing in the moment of his temptation:

Sugene shook hands with Halim, and as he looked at him contempt rose in his heart. So he was the man who daily denounced in his newspaper corruption and actions detrimental to the people and the state. And here he was playing the same game! . . . What he had done was only to fulfil Hasnah's wishes, and in his view her wishes were just. Especially for his baby. For a baby every man has the full right to do whatever is necessary, he thought. But here was Halim. A newspaper man. He couldn't grasp it. Husin Limbara was another matter, he was a politician. Didn't people always say that politics was a dirty game? What they were doing here was only a part of that dirty politics. The party needed ample funds for the general elections. But Halim, the newspaper man, who day in, day out exhorted people to uphold honesty in their work. . . . ! (119-20)

Written out of morose indignation Lubis' arraignment extends itself beyond the precincts of a governing clique and the soundrels it harbours, and by implication breeds, to embrace paradigmatic figures from gutter and marketplace, shopfloor and (so to speak) seminar room. Perambulating through these milieux and connecting them with the world of political shenanigans and commercial wickedness is Suryono, who having touched pitch and become defiled comes to feel an intensifying disquiet. Through membership of the salon he falls in with Yasrin, disaffected writer (modelled on H.B. Jassin?); Murhalim, a young provincial comptroller and Muslim fundamentalist "who was consistently enraged by conditions in his office" (p. 49), and who "felt strongly what terrible mistakes the government leadership of Indonesia had been making . . . [in] the regions outside Java . . . the most neglected and maladministered of all" (192); and Achmad, doctrinaire Leninist and PKI apparatchik who on the eve of a threatened struggle by the All-Indonesian Dockworkers Union gleefully remarks the immiseration which is its proximate cause and, petitioned by anguished Union officials seeking Party support, advises against direct action by arguing — ends presumably justifying means — that "the present government is more progressive than any other Indonesia has ever had . . . for the sake of our Party's growth we must continue to support this cabinet" (114).

With this creature, the superlative of fanaticism, Suryono, who is essentially a good sort fallen upon wicked men and days, has travelled to the other end of the moral spectrum where extremes meet. Achmad, a nasty piece of work, conscientiously lures Yasrin away from the salon (thus

precipitating its disintegration) by playing efficiently upon the aspiring poet's unassuageable sense of inferiority and by promising money for jam in exchange for token affiliation with a People's Cultural Movement (GEKRA, which of course is LEKRA in thin disguise) soon to be inaugurated with the aim of bringing art-to-the-people etc., and sworn to being "uncompromising and merciless towards our enemies" (168). Yasrin, like Sugeng, like Suryono, like Raden Kaslen — like everyone in the novel, indeed, with a single alarming exception — is tickled to find himself on the receiving end of flattery and obsequy, imagining in an access of unaccustomed self-congratulation "what one longed to have and at the same time know [ing] that it was within one's power to get it" (170). So far as larger ends are once concerned — ends other than aggrandisement or the lining of pockets — Achmad alone knows what he is about and how to obtain it. Inciting to a pitch of fury a crowd enraged by shortages and by rumours of the umpteenth bribery scandal, he sics the mob on his former friend Murhalim in a penultimate scene, in disdain for such "analysts and talkers" and seeking a scapegoat, and with the foreseeable result.

Everything, — not to put too fine a point on it — is of a piece and everything in pieces.

That *Twilight in Djakarta* answers to a well-captured and clinically exact sense of a time and a place is, I think, obvious. So too is the fact that it is not a well-made novel, if by that phrase is meant a serene artifact, "composed" in a Jamesian sense. But what in the end makes it readable and even memorable is the total sense the book involves of a whole greater than the sum of its parts and which somehow just succeeds in being an ensemble. On this score the novel fully justifies the status it implicitly claims of a monumental enquiry into the matter of Indonesia, self-conscious as that inquiry can seem and glib, too, in ways that we are right to hold suspect. In this vaultingly ambitious work all modern Indonesia is annexed, the bourgeoisie, the financiers, the city working-class of several categories. Intelligently annexed too, even if the targets are fairly obvious and the manner deficient in inwardness and subtlety. When all is said and weighed Lubis is aware, extraordinarily aware, of the pressures impinging alike on affluent and indigent, western-educated intellectuals and *becak* drivers. Aware, also, of the vast structure of institutionalized iniquity which is Sukarnoite Indonesia in its final days, as he is of the need to assert and defend humane feeling and solidarity against it. In this respect such felicity as the novel arguably possesses does not hinge on any special intensity of

imaginative effect but, simply, on the exfoliation of facts which speak (or rather – everything in literature, even and especially documentary novels, being constructed – are designed to speak) for themselves. Particularly in the sub-plot notations of the lives (if that's the word) of folk like Saimun and Itam, dustcart drivers subsisting within the ramshackle squalor of metropolitan Djakarta – a feverish, strongly summoned presence – and dreaming of becoming "autolette" driver-owners through a combination of superior animal wit, hard graft and luck in speculation – particularly here Lubis is saying something that has to be said and which perhaps can't perhaps be said in any other way.

But of course neither the generously vicarious rage nor the sedulous conscription of documentary material are in themselves sufficient to guarantee this or any novel's status as remarkable writing, honourable though Lubis' willingness is to court bathos and unembarrassed directness in the interests of registering a protest. The novel's truth-to-life involves, as well, an adjudicative perspicacity with which the European reader is likely to be on comfortably terms. Lubis is for example very good at the imagination of Raden Kaslan's pig-headedness, his hard conservatism not unmixed with cunning and leavened by an amiable penchant for having it off with anything in skirts. He excels at portraying the old man's tendency (more dangerous than he thinks) not to consider deeply enough the extent in the world he presides over of increased mobility, increased impoverishment, increased desperation, increased sacrifice of principle. The novel has a density that derives in large measure from the way which Lubis makes his fictional imitation of Indonesia circa 1955-65 gravitate around this strongly defined and even formidable figure. Equally, the rhetorical exorbitance and essayist's accompanying commentary notwithstanding, Lubis is expert at depicting his central figure's grim moment of self-recognition. Suryono's pusillanimity and self-estrangement are very nicely if not very profoundly hit off, as we follow the inward impact of proliferating vices requiring constant dissimulation:

the old intimacy with his father had vanished imperceptibly. . . .
From time to time he even felt contempt for his own behaviour as well. Emotionally he knew that what they were doing was wrong; that even though it was all quite legal, to exploit the party's power to enrich oneself was still improper, somehow. And it was the same with his relationship with Fatma. He felt

that it was not proper, yet every time he succumbed again. It was the same with his acceptance of the special licences . . . but the hundreds of thousands these licences yielded excited and pleased him, reminded him of Dahlia's caresses, the bright polish of a new car, the pleasure of eating in a fine restaurant, the weight of the wallet in his pocket. Unable to resist this temptation, he even experienced a kind of pleasure. (176)

Still, the deficiencies cry out. There is to begin with the form, which presents special difficulties on account of its fragmentation and disjuncture. The seemingly jackdaw arrangement of the novel into 69 episodes is mimetic, presumably, of a fissiparated reality, more particularly the reality of the city as a mutable agglomeration of people in widely contrasting roles and situations, a place of change and new consciousness, its growth mysterious and tentacular, and is in this respect policy. Equally simulant by apparent design are the disruptive shifts of venue, together with the disintegration of the draughtsmanlike line of the introductory sections into sketch and cameo.

So far, so good: if you like that sort of thing this is the sort of thing you will like. But setting to one side the longueurs and the redundancies that such a method generates, the unfavourable ratio of signal to noise so to speak, there remains the problem of language. What to do about the maladroit prose, which is endowed neither with the authentic tang of colloquial idiom nor the eloquence of well-turned argument? (In fairness it has to be said that Lubis appears to have been badly let down by a villainous translation into an American staple which misses utterly the whiff and tang of the demotic as she is spoke in and around the capital). And we've said nothing yet about the incompletely fused element of didacticism: Lubis is often on a plinth and there is a half-digested quality about his preaching too. Insofar as the narrative is not only in the last analysis dishevelled but exhortatory, infested with cliché and heavily signposted (Sugeng's wife gives birth to a stillborn child, emblem of her nation's misfortunes, Murhalim and his unwitting murderer Itam are found after the riot lying with hands interlocked "united in death" and "in a common struggle" (245)), it is on number of levels unconvincing and vitialed by the urge to editorialise.

Above all there is the monolithic determinism which permeates the novel and which runs counter to the meliorist, or in political terms reformist, message encoded in its plot and in its grammar of presentation to the effect

that things can't get any worse and must (therefore?) soon change for the better. This is pretty well unforgiving. Character is the product of environment and upbringing, and individuals are almost entirely at the mercy of events, are swept up and carried along by them, the strong and the unprincipled winning through or occasionally defeated, the weaker and well-intentioned – represented by Suryono's colleagues in the talk-shop which meets windily to discuss the merits of *Darul Islam vs. Pancasila vs. Marxism* – ludicrously ineffectual, disturbed from within by their own occlusions and vices and threatened from without by forces that would oppose or destroy them. Politics is the realm of sinecurism or jobbery or vulgar careerism, populated by dedicated operators or plain bloody fools (the first almost always one step ahead of the second), all with their fingers in the till. Djakarta is the Scarlet City, mean and dissipated, in which drift and *cafard* are the norm. The atmospherics of passages like the following serve, surely, both to compensate for and to augment this asphyxiating premonition of closure:

A drizzling rain had been falling incessantly since early dawn. The morning wind was blowing in hard from the sea. The wind sneaked into the houses, making Raden Kaslan press Fatma's sound and warm body closer to his own; making Suryono sink into deeper slumbers in his room while dreaming of Iesye; the wind blew into editor Halim's room, who was sleeping apart from his wife because Sugene's sleep, filled with nightmares; made Husin Limbara's afflicted shoulder ache more painfully in the morning chill; and caused the sago-palm leaves on the thatched roof of Pak Idjo's hut to rustle; and having penetrated inside, hovered around Ibu Idjo and Amat who sat chilled near the balai-balai, the morning wind swept by. (145)

Whilst scarcely riveting the prose, going all out to project sterility and desolation through a semantic of weather, is sufficiently interesting to detain for a moment or two. Though mannered it delivers a certain evocative charge, though a charge muffled in impact by a derivativeness one is undecided to call sub-Dos Passos or mock Eliot (the Eliot of the 'Preludes'). The whole thing, whilst making its symbolic point, is mawkish from unabsorbed "influence" and indulges a relish for location as location that vitiates rather than energises the drama in progress. Yet what really disconcerts in this passage and in others like it is not its 'sensitivity', in

intention and in effect stranded somewhere between the ambitious and the bogus, but its apparent conception and prebable execution at the level of description not narration. The same for that matter holds true for the intercalary *laporan kota* or 'city reports,' *roman policier* bulletins periodically displacing the central narrative; as indeed (so the passages quoted above will have intimated) for a good deal of the novel's callow psychologising.

This distinction, between narration and description, is of course Georg Lukàcs', and for the purposes of judgement seems especially useful to invoke here.¹⁶ It refers, you may recall, to a crucial difference in writerly posture as between two ways of telling a story, each way reflecting a degree and an angle of authorial involvement in the struggles (cultural, ideological, material) in which the fiction is entwined. There is storytelling which is inanimated, inward with its subject and with the historical dynamic in which that subject is bedded. Narration in this sense testifies to its author's engagement with his materials and to his effort to make sense of the corporate experience out of which it has been generated — the telling of the story being nothing less than just such a profound making-of-sense, a sub-surface penetration (Tolstoy is Lukàcs' instantiation).

There is however an order of storytelling which is content passively to transcribe and to record facades; an order convened characteristically by an author who senses himself deep down to be powerless before events, impotent vis-à-vis and within the subterranean alignments of history and politics. Narration as exemplified in naturalism, shrilly though it may service a political protest, is by definition such an admission of defeat and is complicit with the object or occasion of protest. Whether mechanically or in indulgently subjective fashion, it dotes on the relatively insignificant and superficial details of a human actuality, gesticulating at the static outward features not reaching down to an inner substance. Fundamentally conservative in bias and in pitch, it is typically an Awful Warning to the powers-that-be to forestall their own impeachment on charges of executive negligence. Lukàcs thinks of naturalism, with its mixture of microscopic attention and appalled recoil, as a literary etiquette proceeding from negative emotions which are themselves the inverted form of sentimentality. And, I believe, it is to something of this sort that Lubis, auditing Indonesian contemporaneity, has capitulated willy nilly.

In other words, *Twilight in Djakarta* is what Lukàcs would call an unmediated totality, in which comprehensiveness involves a monotonous and ultimately sedative sense of the almost lugubriously problematical

quality of social and political life, rather than an amplitude and depth of response or plasticity of understanding. An unmediated totality; and also, in a way that speaks volumes about the frictions within its author's own class-stance (frictions which transpose to the novel's structure of feeling)¹⁷ a contradictory one. Contradictory in playing host to certain feelings which cancel others out, so that through rhetorical blatancies the author monopolises the making of life but interdicts it in his characters, placing under embargo any possibility of a transforming energy in the lives and institutions which the novel depicts. (The same problem, we may note, crops up in Dickens' penetration of Northern industrial England, *Hard Times*.) How else explain the observation *de haut en bas* or as it were through the diminishing end of the telescope of Saimun, Itam and all the rest, fighting for living space in Indonesia's Great Wen? How else account for their presentation as rude mechanicals in the lineage of the Asselineux family (*L'Assomoir*) and other specimens routinely picked up by Zola and by any number of lesser *bien-pensant* novelists of the European middle-classes on safari in exotic social latitudes or in pursuit of copy?

Style and substance, in short, are resoundingly at odds here, are encouraged to lead a collateral rather than a co-operative existence. And the schism is an eloquent commentary on the way revolt and acquiescence are dissident in Lubis' viewpoint — that of a dejected liberal — become point-of-view in the novel.

We return, here, to the point made near the outset about the need to bring an historical as well as a literary awareness to the reading of the text while insisting that the two are so intricately related as to defy abstraction from one another. It is not so much that Lubis has been remiss in coming to terms with the objective and progressive forces of his time (even if with benefit of hindsight one could identify those forces), as that we are here in the presence of a serious writer who, resourceless before a wicked world, deploys a narrative the resources of which have been deliberately pared back. The result is chiefly an ability to communicate blocky units of 'description' in the explicit sense of documentary, together a view of character as evolving almost entirely through the causality and constitutive force of harshly oppressive circumstance. Without suggesting any mechanistic one-to-one correlation or implying that the relationship between the two can be anything other than deviously arcane, I think it can be said that context goes a fair way towards explaining text here; a text which is in essence a failure, though it remains at one level a strong piece of work if in the last

analysis dispiritingly common-or-garden example of its genre. Bleakly, and making no bone about it, the novel interrogates the personal and the political, studying their nexus. But it does so self-limitingly, as it were cutting off its nose to spite its face. And this is related, I propose, to Lubis' orbital position as an intellectual (in the old-fashioned sense of man of letters — he is certainly no man of *ideas*) marginalised or — it comes in terms of powerlessness to the same thing — incorporated, in Gramsci's sense, within an increasingly repressive but at the same time disjunctive and centripetal state system. The Indonesia of which the novel is a recension and in which it was written: was a country whose government, assaying its strength within a void, wielded a near-monopoly of mass communications, manipulating symbols to exercise hegemony and promulgating a syncretic nationalism (*Pancasila*) to paper over rifts in the body politics even as the latter moved towards its final contention. Impasse characterises the context; and deadlock is in proportion superscribed all over the text of *Twilight in Jakarta*, is so to speak in the very air it breathes.

Lubis' career after the 1965 coup and the anti-PKI purges represents an attempt to reverse carefully but at speed out of this ideological cul-de-sac, an attempt made through espousal of a pro-Suharto stance in the aftermath of Sukarno's fall and support-albeit qualified — for the so-called *Orde Baru* (New Order).¹⁸ Having felt the paw of the authorities on more than one occasion during the Sukarno period for criticism of its ways, and having witnessed the banning of *Indonesia Raya*, Lubis found himself, in the guise of editor of the pro-government journal *Horison*, declaring for the new military-technocratic leadership, preferring it as the lesser of two evils and feeling a measure of sympathy for its vaunted commitment to dirigiste efficiency as well as for its pro-western stance. His subsequent evolution, since having been sprung from prison by General Nasution, from liberal-humanist critic of the status quo into a writer who has more or less uneasily made his peace with authoritarian reaction is on a comparative assessment less idiosyncratic than may at first glance appear. One has only to think — wincemakingly in this connexion — of those writers and thoughtful people (not of course identical) who in ignorance or out of idealism were prepared during the 1930s to exonerate Stalinist excesses. And from similar quarters there are the more recent examples of applause in the West for the Cultural Revolution in China and for Mrs. Gandhi's State of Emergency in India in the late 1970s, examples serving to forestall or unsettle complacency. Intellectual no less than physical nature abhors it seems a vacuum: in this

instance the vacuum created by a liberalism whose fundamental tenets (open-mindedness, individual decency, rational compromise, the value of intelligence and will) had perhaps come to seem monstrously irrelevant or out of place in the deeply sundered, intimidatingly plural and apparently ungovernable policy of Indonesia as it was on the eve of reaction. Hesitancies and failures of nerve, though deplorable from a conventional perspective, are from another hardly cause for astonishment, and I should not want to think of judgement at a distance as being anything other than hazardous as well as, inevitably, smug. In the literary department nevertheless, the outcome of such moralism in search of a cause is, in Lubis' case, a species of clerklly treason that oppresses a creative act already severely hedged about by cultural precedent and circumstance.

To the reasons why, acclaimed though he is in his own country and in the Third World, Lubis must be adjudged an essentially second-order writer, this last must be assimilated. He is a novelist lacking in rigorous or sustained imaginative sincerity, whose career is nevertheless of enormous literary-historical interest. Deformed and incoherent in ways that mirror the contrarities inherent in their author's class-location and ideological standpoint, his inventions are also defective in more commonplace ways. They are (when Englished at any rate) weighed down with a cargo of polemic and debate and inhabited by too neatly discriminated characters drawn from stock. And they are disfigured, not just by a laboured straining after significance but by a deliberate awareness of how, in novels, significance has traditionally been imported. But though a novel must indeed 'work' by outfacing its own pejoratives if it is to be great or even a good one, it is not a machine, and value can exist in one which strictly speaking fails. This I believe to be very much the case with *A Road with No End* and *Twilight in Djakarta*. Lubis has his heart in the right place (pun intended); a detergent purpose; a *saeva indignatio* at social injustice. And it's not necessarily condescending to say that if his expressive equipment is modest to the point of being threadbare, his manner almost at times painfully untutored, the reader is gradually conscious — the effect is slow and cumulative and arrived at by continuous application — of a substantive individuality and bluntly authentic conscience strong enough to shine through the gaucherie. Perhaps the most that can be said of his novels (putting a little more enthusiastically the case for) is that, when not moistened by declarative fervour or bullied by gratuitous motives a severe honesty of report is raised in them to perception and becomes capable of particularising ideas and figures-utopian

ideas, transitional figures — from the lived experience of political turmoil. Considering the odds against, it is saying rather a lot.

Notes

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1. The *loci classici* for the discussion of the literature-and-politics question, apart from Sartre's work, are Brecht's *Kleines Organon für das Theater* 1948 in John Willett (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre* (London, Methuen, 1964); *Aesthetics and Politics: debates between Bloch, Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno* (London, New Left Books, 1980); Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (New York, Random House, 1957); and David Cate, *The Illusion: an essay on politics, theatre and the novel* (London, Andre Deutsch, 1971), esp. chaps 1-3. Also of value are A.P. Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda* (London, Methuen, 1983), which contains a full review of the subject together with a bibliography.
2. On pain of anticipating a penultimate argument I shouldn't want to appear, here, to be puffing Lubis as a pocket Solzhnitsyn of the Indies. The truth is a bit more banal than this or indeed than the picture framed by Albert Roland's hagiographical account in his *Profiles from New Asia* (New York, Macmillan, 1970, pp. 24-56). The suggestion here is that, like many a well-intentioned liberal journalist-cum-writer (well, more or less well-intentioned: *Indonesia Raya* blotted its copybook by indulging in yellow journalism and anti-Chinese muckraking in the 1950s) Lubis has laid himself open to the charge or the reality of usage by larger forces. If the ostensible cause of his incarceration was his vilification — as inefficacious as it was imprudent — of Sukarno's second marriage on the score of its alleged religious impropriety, the more profound motive — so Professor Ben Anderson has reasoned, in a personal communication — was a desire to subvert the President's prestige; a desire which by plan or accident fitted the designs of the pro-Western right-wing of the anti-Sukarno coalition in the country. Lubis' denunciation of the freely-held elections in Indonesia in 1967-68 (on the plea that a ballot might give leftist and nationalist forces a not-to-be-countenanced victory at the polls), the imprimature he accorded to the Marcos regime pursuant to his receipt of the Magsaysay Award in 1972, his sedulous cultivation of affiliations with US Embassy circles — all this conjures up in the mind an image of a man who through confusion or shortness of sight or thanks to a well-cocked eye for the main chance has played directly into the hands of reaction. These were represented by the Congress for Cultural Freedom in its CIA-endowed heyday and, concretely, in the person of their man in Jakarta, ever on the look-out for publications (whose intrinsic merit was scarcely the point) which might be exploited for the purpose of mounting a campaign against Sukarno and the communist "threat," which, taking the most charitable view, suggests that the middle of the road, where liberals like to walk, is precisely where you get run

over.

3. Amongst Lubis' other fictions, still to be rendered into English, are two novels, *Harimau! Harimau!* (Kuala Lumpur, Pustaka Melayu Baru, 1976), *Maut dan Cinta* (Jakarta, Pustaka Jaya, 1977), and a collection of short stories entitled *Perempuan, Kumpulan tjerita-tjerita Pendek* (Jakarta, Timur Mas). In addition to Anthony H. Johns' introduction to his translation of *A Road With No End* (London, Hutchinson, 1963), there exists a full-length study (as yet untranslated) of the novelist by Henri Chambert-Loir, entitled *Mochtar Lubis: une vision de L'Indonesie Contemporaine*, Vol. XCV (Paris, Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, 1974) containing a complete bibliography of writings by and about him. Albert Roland's remarks on the writer and man (q.v. ff. 2) should be glanced at, together with Lubis' pamphlet *The Indonesian Dilemma*, trans. F. Lamoureux (Singapore, 1983) and his editorial article "Indonesia: problems and hopes" in the special Indonesian number of *Solidarity* [Manila], III, 9 September 1968, pp. 1-2.
4. For the vastly compressed and simplified review below I have relied chiefly on the following: Ruth T. McVey (ed.), *Indonesia* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963), esp. the extensive essays by D.S. Pauuw, E.D. Hawkins, R. Van Niel and (a scholar whose subsequent work in the political sociology of modern Indonesia has secured his importance in the field) Herbert Feith; W.F. Wertheim, *Indonesian Society in Transition*, 2nd ed. (Bandung, n.d.); George McTernan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1952); and Denys Lombard, *Histoires courtes d'Indonesie: soixante-huite tjerpen (1933-65)* (Paris, EFEO, 1968). *Indonesia* by the late lamented Malcolm Caldwell in the 'modern world' series (Oxford University Press, 1968) is worth consulting, if only for its perversities (the bee in the man's bonnet is very large).
5. "Genetic structuralism in the Sociology of Literature," in *Sociology of Literature and Drama*, ed. Elizabeth and Tom Burns (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973), p. 115; see also his *Towards a Sociology of the Novel* (London, Chatto, 1975), *Cultural Creation in Modern Society* (St. Louis, Telos, 1980). Alan Swingewood and Diana Laurenson's *The Sociology of Literature* (London, Paladin Books, 1971), pp. 63-77, contains an illuminating exposition of Goldmann's critical method. I have in the remarks below found it helpful to supplement Goldmann's approach with the positions developed by Pierre Macherey and Etienne Balibar: see the latter's "Problems of Reflection" in Francis Barker *et. al.* (eds.), *Literature, Society and the Sociology of Literature* (Essex, The University, 1976), and "An Interview with Pierre Macherey," *Red Letters* (London), No. 5, pp. 3-9.
6. For further clarification of this distinction see Hildred Geertz, "Indonesian Cultures and Communities," in McVey, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-43 and *passim*.
7. On the genesis of LEKRA and its aftermath see T. Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature*, Vol. II (The Hague, 1979; Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Lande en Volkenkunde, translation series 10), pp. 135-38 and 29-39; Teeuw's survey offers a helpful conspectus of the field though a conspectus that brings home with painful obviousness the need for a really critically informed and astute study. Vol. II, containing remarks on Lubis' *oeuvre*, was unfortunately not available for consultation. See also Keith R. Foulcher's important article "Images and perspectives in recent Indonesian Literature," *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1978, 1-16; Boen Oemarjati, "Social Issues in Recent Indonesian Literature," *South-East Asian Affairs*, 1979, pp. 134-41; and Harry Aveling, "Indonesian Writers and the Left," *Overland*, Winter 1971. A more partisan

- interpretation is by Achdiat Kertamihardja, *Polemik Kebudayaan-kebudayaan* (Djakarta, Perpustakaan Perguruan Kementerian, 1954). Two important studies are in the form of Australian University BA Theses: Keith R. Foulcher, *Manifest Kebudayaan: the Struggle for Cultural and Intellectual Freedom and Its Relation to Modern Indonesian Poetry* (University of Sydney, 1968) and E.M.J. Huma, *The Reaction in Indonesian Literature towards the Sukarno Regime with Particular Reference to the Literary Journal Horison* (Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1968). The reader who has some Indonesian may wish to consult two literary histories whose assessments need to be taken with the usual pinch of salt: Bakri Siregar, *Sedjarah Sastra Indonesia Modern* (Djakarta, Multatuli, 1964), and H.B. Jassin, *Kesusasteraan Indonesia Modern Dalam Kritik Dan Esei* (Djakarta, Gunung Agung, 1967).
8. Anthony H. Johns, "Through Myth and Dream: the Indonesian Quest for Reality," in his *Cultural Options and the Role of Tradition: a Collection of Essays on Modern Indonesian and Malaysian Literature* (Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1979), p. 200 and *passim*.
 9. *A Road With No End*, pp. 63-64. All further references are cited below.
 10. Brian May, in an otherwise subjective (and very shoddily-written) study, adduces this term helpfully and on good authority to mean "aristocrats, not always financially well-off, who were frequently employed in government service . . . one of superior manner and station who neither works with his hands nor is engaged in commerce." (The Indonesian Tragedy, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 424). See also Heather Sutherland, "The Priyayi." *Indonesia* [Cornell], No. 19, April, 1975, pp. 57-79, and her *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite: the Colonial Transformation of the Javanese Priyayi* (Singapore, Heinemann Educational Books, 1979), both of which improve upon and in certain respects offer a corrective to Clifford Geertz's pioneering *The Religion of Java* (Glencoe, The Free Press, 1960).
 11. The typological nature of the novel may to some extent be attributable to the conditioning presence, within the Indonesian writer's universe of discourse-which is to say the universe he inhabits *qua* Indonesian writer-of *wayang kulit*; there is food for thought, and for comparison, along these lines in Harry Aveling's prefatory remarks to his translation of Pramoedya's novel *The Fugitive* (Hong Kong, Heinemann Asia Ltd., 1975), pp. xiv-xvii.
 12. For a fascinating anthropological excursus into the value-system of a society in which "individually, people do not appear to be very important" (p. 45), in terms pertinent not just to Javanese society and culture but overall to the modern Indonesian nation-state, see Niels Mulder, *Mysticism and Everyday Life in Contemporary Java: Cultural Persistence and Change* (Singapore University Press for Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 1978).
 13. Mr. George Quinn, in private discussion has maintained that the novel in this respect is written in code, a code which the reader in Columbus or Hampstead or Melbourne is perhaps unlikely to cotton on to, leave alone sympathize with. I am not qualified to comment on the justice or otherwise of this view but am on balance - so the above will have rendered plain - inclined to disagree.
 14. The relevant sources here are as follows: Herbert Feith, *Decline of Constitutional Democracy* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1962); J.D. Legge, *Sukarno: a Political Biography* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972); Donald Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia, 1951-1963* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1966) and J.M. van der Kroef, *The Communist Party of*

- Indonesia* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1965) as well as Rex Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Sukarno: Ideology and Politics, 1959-1965* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1974). A convenient and reliable summary of this convoluted subject is available in J.D. Legge, *Indonesia* (Sydney, Prentice Hall of Australia Pte. Ltd., 1964), pp. 147-164.
15. *Twilight in Djakarta*, trans. Claire Holt (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 130-131. All further references are cited below.
 16. The essay "Narrate or Describe?" is to be found in Lukacs' *Writer and Critic*, trans. A. Khan (London, New Left Books, 1970), pp. 11-35, and in Arnold Kettle (ed.), *The Nineteenth Century Novel: Essays and Documents* (London, Heinemann, 1977), pp. 62-83.
 17. "Structure of feeling" is of course Raymond William's notorious formulation: notorious, because it raises as many issues as it purports to resolve. I am however using it deliberately and I hope without simplification in two of William's senses; to identify the area of tension which stands in between a consciously held ideology which stands in complete relation to differentiated classes and "which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognised as social but taken to be private . . . though often more recognisable at a later stage when it has been formalised, classified and in many cases built into institutions and formations" [*Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 132]. Elsewhere "structure of feeling" is defined as "the area of interaction between the official consciousness of an epoch - codified in its doctrines and legislation - and the whole process of living its consequences," and area which, Williams has argued, is "one of the social sources of art" [*Politics and Letters: Interviews with the New Left Review* (London, Verso, 1979), p. 159]; see also pp. 157-72, where the problematics of the concept are thrashed out.
 18. On the coup and its ramifications, see Peter Polomka, *Indonesia Since Sukarno* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971); J.M. van der Kroef, *Indonesia Since Sukarno* (Singapore, Donald Moore for Asia Pacific Press, 1971); M.D. Jackson and L.W. Pye (eds.), *Political Power and Communications in Indonesia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1978); see also Legge, *op. cit.*, 164-194; and - an analysis which manages to be both searching and succinct - Harold Crouch, "The Trend to Authoritarianism: the Post-1945 Period," in H. Aveling (ed.), *The Development of Indonesian Society: from the Coming of Islam to the Present Day* (Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1979), pp. 166-205 esp. pp. 188-204.

