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Life in a Kampong: The Seduction

Review Article: Donn V. Hart

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Dr. Steiner, cited as "Outstanding Woman Horticulturist of 1960", has indeed prepared a much-needed book on ornamental plants that both layman and specialist will be proud to have.

JAIME C. JOAQUIN

LIFE IN A KAMPONG

THE SEDUCTION. By Susan Yorke (pseudonym of Suzette Telenga). New York: Farrar, Straus, & Cudahy. 1960. 248 pp. Glossary of Malay terms.

This "ethnological" novel is a perceptive account of the acculturation of a *kampung* girl, Zainah, and her eventual downfall. According to the author, "The events and incidents in this novel are true, the people to whom they happen are fictitious..." Zainah became the intimate paid companion of a British family living on a rubber plantation in postwar Malaya. She learned proper English, how to handle shrimp and oyster forks, the intricacies of modern plumbing, and the unique folkways of Euroamericans in Southeast Asia. After a series of amorous adventures with an Eurasian, an Indian, and a Chinese, she fell deeply in love with a British rubber plantation official whose mother was an American. David, however, did not return her wild affection. In a fury of rejection, Zainah falsely claims she is pregnant and David is the man. Kelantan men are hired by her father, a *penghulu*, to assassinate David and uphold the *kampung's* honor. Zainah confesses to the police, however, that she killed David; as the novel ends she awaits her trial.

Aside from the plot, the novel is filled with sharply etched vignettes of contemporary Malayan life—scenes in the village coffee houses, the daily routine on a rubber plantation, the interior of the dwellings of wealthy Chinese, and interaction between the Chinese, Indians, Eurasians, British, and Malays. (For a more detailed account of life on a Malayan rubber plantation, the reviewer prefers Pierre Boule's S.O.P.H.I.A.) The Chinese, as often the case in novels, emerge as cunning, avaricious capitalists—Ah Fan, the fat *keep* of the plantation manager, gets her cut on everything done on the estate. Information is given on the food, dress, and other aspects of Malaya's pluralistic society. "Every Division had its temple for the Hindu Tamils. The Chinese went to the Buddhist temple in the village... We Muslims had our mosque just outside our *kampung*... [and] one church on the estate... had been built by the Hindu Untouch-

ables who had embraced Catholicism." Here is a delightful evening's reading in which one may become better informed about Malaya, more knowledgeable about the plural society that both plagues and blesses this mainland Southeast Asian nation. Malay terms are used so skillfully that the reader will learn several dozen terms. The young author, born in Germany and a Vassar graduate, has resided in Malaya.

The Seduction is an excellent example of some recent novels on Malaya—"books [that] represent the final breakaway from the 'traditional' Maughamesque way of writing about Malaya, because they identify themselves with the people they write about" (Han Suyin, "The Creation of a Malayan Literature," *Eastern World*, May, 1957, p. 21). A recent rereading of Owen Rutter's *Chandu* vividly illustrates the great chasm between the Malaya of yesteryear and today, as portrayed by novelists writing about this country. For example, Zainah, confused when she discovers that westerners make serious errors of judgment, is scolded by her British *men*. "There's no Law in God's world to prevent the westerner from being an ass and a fool and many of us are!" *The Seduction*, a source of factual information and insights regarding Malaya, rightly takes its place among the growing number of English language novels on Malaya that no person interested in this country should overlook—*Maraiee* (Chin Kee Onn), *Snake Wine* (Patrick Anderson), *The Flying Fox* (Mary McMinnies), *And The Rain My Drink* (Han Suyin), *The Sumatra* (Donald Moore), and *Malacca Boy* (Katherine Sim). These novels cannot replace scholarly studies of Malayan life but they have much to offer those who wish a fuller and more detailed panorama of present-day Malaya.

DONN V. HART