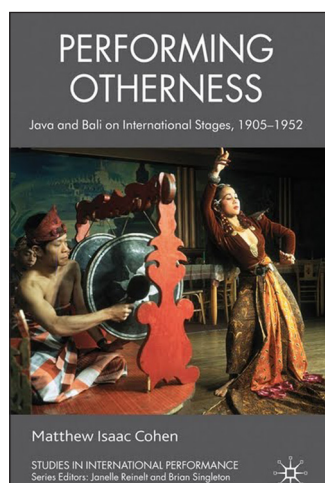


chapter "Asal-usul novel Melayu modern" (The origin of modern Malay novels) states that the novel *Tjhit Liap Seng* (1886-1887) is the first Malay-Chinese novel (p. 151). However, the article "Masyarakat pribumi Indonesia di mata penulis keturunan Tionghoa (1920-1941)" or 'The Indonesian natives from the point of view of Chinese-descent writers (1920-1941)' states that "stories written by Indonesians of Chinese-descent were published in 1903" (p. 376). In addition, the statement that advertisement poems reflected the "onset of Malay-Chinese literature" (pp. 59, 65) adds to readers' confusion over the term "the beginning," the "first", and "the foremost" with reference to Malay-Chinese literature. Such inconsistencies might have been evaded if Salmon had spared some time to review all drafts and had elegantly combined them, or if the editor were more industrious and competent, as the problem is not only about grammar but also about coherence and the logic of the contents of the book. That being said, Salmon's writings are highly useful, especially for devotees and enthusiasts of the history of Indonesian literature.

Matthew Isaac Cohen, *Performing otherness; Java and Bali on international stages, 1905-1952*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, xxii + 285 pp., illustrations. ISBN 13 978-0-230-22462-9. Price: EUR 58.12 (hard cover).



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When I was a little boy, I used to watch *wayang kancil* performed by Indra Kamadjojo on Wednesday afternoons in a program called "De verrekijker" (Binoculars), and when I was a little bit older, we saw on television (at that time in black and white) the curious *Road to Bali* and other *Road to ...* films starring Dorothy Lamour, Bob Hope, and Bing Crosby. Somewhat later still, when I was a

student at Leiden University studying Indonesian Languages and Cultures as it was then called, I used to work for the *Pasar Malam* in The Hague and saw the dances of Indonesia performed by Sampan Hismanto and his group from Jakarta. These meetings between East and West, sometimes quite authentic (Sampan Hismanto) and sometimes downright crazy (*Road to Bali*), contributed to ideas of "Otherness" among people living in the West and never having had any true encounters with the Eastern "Other".

At those times, I had, of course, little idea that I was watching two different

cultural sets meeting in a continuation of encounters that dated back many years, and apparently occurred as early as 1905 and even earlier. A number of these encounters between 1905 and 1952 has been highlighted in the book discussed here and put in a framework of wider trends and explorations in "Otherness" and "alterity". The book, therefore, is concerned with "a history of international stage representations of Java and Bali up until independence" (p. x), and apparently a little bit later. Actually, the book extends its timeframe at the end to a much more contemporary date, and it is a pity that the late Sampan Hismanto or his group - now headed by his daughter Uniek - was not mentioned because they extend the Archipelagic experiences far beyond the confines of Java and Bali, much to their credit. They also presented the Other in their own native Jakarta for foreigners to watch and enjoy when they have already set foot in the Other's country, Indonesia, which might have provided the discussion with yet another no less important angle.

The book contains an Introduction, eight chapters, and concludes with a chapter entitled "Aftermath; Decolonization". The book ends in a Glossary, Notes, Bibliography, and Index. The "Introduction; The spectacle of otherness" introduces us to the encounters between Westerners and the "Other" (with capital) and discusses, for instance, performances of Javanese gamelan at the Royal Aquarium in London and the reaction of the audience to these exotic novelties. The Introduction also explains the theoretical framework employed in the rest of the book. The book says that it draws heavily on Edward Said (his "orientalism" pops up until the end), Rustom Bharucha (after having been discussed on pages 2 and 3 not to reappear), and especially Emmanuel Levinas. The book thus "historicizes two related shifts: from what Stuart Hall calls 'the spectacle of the other' to ethnographically-sensitive responsibility, and from the detached appropriations of exotica to the embraced engagements of twentieth-century international proponents of Asian performance" (p. 4). I have a bit of a problem with the theoretical parts of the book and have the impression they disappear at times to emerge unexpectedly at others and, for me, do not elucidate much. Especially the quotes from Levinas are out of context, often sound hollow, empty, and grotesque. For instance, the quote Cohen presents on page 105, "When man [or woman] truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history". It may be very profound, but I have no idea what he means. Or perhaps the introductory quote to Chapter 4, "In this substitution in which identity is inverted, this passivity more passive still than the passivity conjoined with action, beyond the inert passivity of the designated, the self is absolved of itself. Is this freedom?", which sounds more like a mantra than many mantras I have ever come across.

The book relates the fortunes and woes of a number of strange individuals we would now probably call eccentrics. Special chapters are, therefore, devoted to specific individuals, and they strive to introduce, describe, explain, and evaluate people like Mata Hari (Chapter 1), Edward Gordon Craig and Richard Teschner (Chapter 3), Eva Gauthier (Chapter 3), Stella Bloch (Chapter 4), Raden Mas Jodjana (Chapter 5), Tagore (Chapter 7) and "a transnational agent in a cross-cultural artistic field" (p. 175), Devi Dja (Chapter 8.). Chapter 6 is

devoted to the “Magical Identification with Bali in France”. These chapters are very well-written, informative, and give a wonderful picture of these people’s backgrounds, their artistic specialties and idiosyncrasies, and human relations. I especially found the encounters of these people, be they from the West or the East, with European artists fascinating, the more since quite a few of these Europeans have remained (for instance, Debussy, Gauguin), whereas many if not most of our subjects have all but been forgotten. Mata Hari may still capture the imagination and her tragic execution at the hands of the French because she was deemed a spy during the First World War contributes to her attraction. The description Cohen offers us of her performances and the public’s reaction to them are wonderful. They are informative, imaginative, and hilariously funny.

The book tries to relate the artistic performances of these individuals with contemporary trends in performing arts and often takes a much wider cultural approach. It is, therefore, of great interest because the impact of the outlandish and exotic performances by Westerners and non-Westerners alike on Western culture is not often highlighted, especially not as detailed as in this book. It is interesting to read that the Westerners portraying Easterners often look bizarre and often act to the demands of the audience (as they perceive them), much more so than the Easterners who tended to try to remain within the confines of their dance and performance cultures. It also shows expertly that any stage group can sell just about anything, no matter how absurd, as long as they stay within the limitations of the audiences’ expectations. Especially for the Westerners, the boundaries between art and vulgarity blurred, especially when the performers advanced in age. The “artists” could call what they did as originating from Hawai’i, Bali, Burma, India, Hindu, Buddhist, it does not seem to have mattered: everything was blended to the delight of one and the exasperation of another, depending on the amount of naked female flesh that was displayed, which alternated between visual belly buttons to complete nudity.

Cohen tends to write sweepingly, and that makes me wonder if what he writes is actually true. Is it true that “Mata Hari functioned as a symbolic mediator between classical Java and modern Europe” (p. 34), or “her (Mata Hari’s) trade-mark brassiere popularized the bra as an image of femininity” (p. 34)? Was Farini’s troupe really quickly forgotten in the “constant flow of performers visiting the metropole (London) from Asia and around the world” (p. 14)? Is it true that the Javanese dance and gamelan troupe that performed at the Exposition Universelle in Paris for six months in 1889 indeed made “a lasting impression on European culture” (pp. 14-15)? What to think of this, “The purported awe of royalty of the rod puppets signals a British desire for return to the pre-War colonial order” (p. 37)? My eyebrows went up when I read that “Mata Hari is a tourist icon; her mystique continues to draw European (particularly Dutch) visitors to Java, as well as her birthplace in Leeuwarden” (p. 225).

Some criticisms need to be vented. Cohen incorrectly assumes that many

people know the ins and outs of gamelan orchestras and Javanese music, as well as other technical details of Javanese performing arts. Because of this, he forgot to explain quite a few terms, which may make the book a little bit difficult for the uninitiated. It is also a pity that he describes illustrations he finds important in great detail but does not include them in the book. For instance, inclusion of the picture of "Annah la Javanaise" (pp. 17-18) might have been welcome, as might have been Kireensky's painting of Mata Hari "Bayadère" from around 1905 (p. 30). Incidentally, Malay *Singa Minangkabau* is not Minangkabau Tiger, but Minangkabau Lion (p. 183), Malay *Bela Pradja* means "The Defense of the Kingdom", not its fall (p. 131), Javanese *muga-muga kaparenga* is not "I wish to be granted", but "May I be granted" (p. 200), and the translation of Javanese *lumayan kasagedanipun* as "reasonably accomplished" may lead the reader to a negative association, whereas *lumayan* has a positive connotation.

The book is delightfully insightful and wets the appetite for more. It is difficult to classify. If it purports to be a highly scholarly work, for me it fails; it convinces me if it wants to be an informative history of a neglected part of the East-West experience. It is written brilliantly in some places, but sometimes, especially in more theoretical parts, not quite easy. His remark on page 21 is very important and hopefully will be followed up by others: "I prioritize certain cases over others because I wish to explore a variety of relations to Otherness, not because I think some artists are more 'important' than others". But I hope that he can also find other voices than those of the intellectual and cultural elite in order to substantiate his, at times, too sweeping statements so that he can avoid to fall into the trap he so eloquently states himself on page 22, "Historical memory in cross-cultural performance tends to be short, and hyped-up claims of novelty are rife"! I can't wait for his next book!

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