

KIRKBY

A Many-Splendoured Thing

HOMAGE TO

A Corner of Lancashire

For Ever Malaya



Dato' Yunus Raiss
JP, FRSA, FCIL, M.Ed, BA, B.Sc(Econ), Barrister,
Dip TEFL, Dip Ed Research
dyraiss@hotmail.com

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Invasion by Invitation

A passage to Blighty, Nature's island fortress,
invasion by invitation to remould East and West nearer the heart's
desire.

Shall I compare these twain to the Spring of Love?

More lovely, more dulcet, with great expectations, I must say,

a multi-faceted innovation bringing colour to sombre Britain
like Edmundo Ros's hip-swinging rumba to war-torn, determined
London.

In 1952 they came to little Kirkby from sunny Malaya to austere
cold January winter;
and in the misty autumn of the same year more arrived,
to a fog-choked Liverpool bristling with brollies and bowler hats,
to grimy, rainy, colourless Manchester, still with its satanic mills,

lost in oversized, sombre overcoats,
in sarong, cheongsam, saree, some looking like Maharajahs, some
petite cherubim.

They learned to battle the frost with mufflers, gloves, wellies,
woollies and tweeds,
to thrive on fish and chips, Lancashire hot pot and chicken curry,
austerity rationed meat and sugar, half-smoked Woodbine butts,
powdered eggs and milk.

Sometimes, hosted aboard P & O Liners in Liverpool Docks, they
dined like kings.

Eagerly they attended lectures and tutorials
in endless barracks of munition Fortress Kirkby
with heart's content, setting the mind afire,
some hogging the Library or reading in the Junior Common Room,

gazing at those Oxbridge spires,
yearning to capture the genie of Education, the journey's end.

Dancing on Southport Pier

‘Wakey, wakey’, called motherly Scouse maids, “rise and shine, my sunshine.”

The besotted nurses in the Sick Bay pampered them with, “a cuppa for you. Ta ra, duck.”

They were taken on exciting trips, to see the Mikado in kimono, the Roman Walls of Chester, Spring daffodils dancing in Windermere, punting in Oxford, the lights of Piccadilly Circus, Houses of Parliament and Big Ben, the magical Blackpool Illuminations in mellow autumnal evenings

enchanted by Mr Acker Bilk’s 1961 “Stranger on the Shore”.

All to expose them to a bigger, wider world than dinky Kirkby, its railway station by the little stone bridge, Bill’s Stores, the lone Cottage Café in the field, the welcoming pub at the gate just outside the barbed wire fence around the College,

and Green’s Camera shop in Blackbull with the ravishing receptionist.

In time they grew fond of buses and the clippies, of buttered toast and dried Mee. They wrote home letters of adventure, letters of joy, telling of how they read ‘Don Camillo’ and ‘How to be an Alien’, how Samuri dozed off listening to Puccini’s Madame Butterfly, how they visited Walker’s Gallery or the Playhouse to see Beryl Bainbridge, later Dame,

how they sang ‘Daisy, Daisy,’ ‘Singing in the Rain,’ imagined Marilyn Monroe or Gregory Peck brushing by their thick-curtained windows, how they sewed, cooked, or developed films for their loved ones.

They were tickled by Ken Dodd’s Diddy Men, Ken who eventually beat the Beatles with his ‘Happiness’,

they sang Vera Lynn's "We'll meet again," made friends with
brave Bessie Braddock MP, with
L.P. Hartley of 'The Go Between' fame, with the musical Normans,
the Joneses of Sutton Manor, Fred, Sheila, Harold and all,
they saw George Formby play his cheeky little ukulele,
heard wonderful Gracie Fields singing " 't'was on the Isle of
Capri that I met her."

They went to Everton and Liverpool football matches, to the
Grand National in neighbouring Aintree,
to Stratford-upon-Avon to hear 'how a man in his time plays
many parts
and then is heard no more',
saw Lord Richard Attenborough, later of Gandhi film fame, in
The Mousetrap,

danced on Southport Pier with Teddy Boys and their full skirted,
cigarette-smoking girls,
played rugby, the recorder, sang Ten Green Bottles Hanging on
the Wall,
learned to foxtrot and to entangle with the tango,
the Seniors mercilessly ragging the braggart Freshers.

III

Remembrance of Things Past

Pocket money £10 every month into the Blackbull TSB Bank,
riches enough to venture to Moulin Rouge in gay Paris, to
Fontana di Trevi in eternal Roma.

Arshad, Naranjan, Francis, Seenikatty, Choy, Kesavapani,
Mark heard others singing "Three Coins in the Fountain",
"Make it Mine."

"Make it all come true", cried Devi.

They hitch-hiked freely to the Mermaid in Denmark,
Ibsen's grave in Oslo, Edinburgh's craggy castle, the Book of
Kells at Trinity College Dublin,
to Cork to kiss the Blarney Stone. They were mostly hopeful
barristers, psychologists and politicians.

Ajmir's heart flew to the serene Golden Temple in India.

Ridzuan met blonde Helga on the train to Hanover,
fascinated her with his moustache and mouth-organ.
Sweet little Swee Bee was pursued through St Marks Square in
Venice by Casanova Pavarotti
singing "Come back to Sorrento," and surrender to my arms,
cara mia.

Othman and Rafik stayed close to their loved ones.

IV

Teaching Practice Highlights

De rigeur, all taught schoolchildren of different ages,
entertained them with their charts and other inventive, colourful
visual aids,
fascinating the learners with their Malayan nationality -
mud-grey, brown, banana-skinned and almost fair.

Emboldened by irrepressible curiosity, pupils asked,
"Sir, have you got a pet tiger at home?"
"Sir, do schoolgirls in Malaya wear stockings?"
"Miss, does curry grow on trees?"

In McGull, St Helen, Knowsley, Ormskirk or thereabouts,
a good time was had by all, teachers and pupils alike,
the clever, the shy, the timid and the bold of old.

What wonderful magical days,
everything going their way,
with the lark in song at break of day,
the wise owl flying at night.

V

Love Royal

Inevitably, lovers went a-roving in Lovers' Lane by moonlight,
pleaded with the fleeting moon to make it all come true.

Some won, others vowed no other love would they ever have.

Raja Azlan Shah, later king of Malaysia,
found at Kirkby his queen from the Island of Penang.
“My Queen, my Queen, same deference to my Queen,
or I renounce my crown,’ was his demand.

He got his way,
their wedding sheer magic in the Kinta Valley of Kings.

Lucky destiny-maker, luckier queen,
and luckiest of all, Malaysia
to have this handsome, hockey-playing, barrister as king,
for as Plato said, the best king should also be a lawmaker.

The world saw Elizabeth’s Coronation on Television.
The Queen of Tonga rode in an open carriage, defying the rain.
Peter Townsend said the guns at Singapore were facing the
wrong way, but he could not predict his and Princess Margaret’s
future.

The Suez Crisis was followed by a modern, racial Romeo and
Juliet,
the West Side Story;
the ever-spreading love tree,
a Shangri-la fortress of love, embracing Great Britain and
emerging Malaya.

Ridzuan and Zainal acted in “A Town Like Alice”,
Bill Haley was overtaken by subversive Elvis Presley’s
‘Jailhouse Rock’ and ‘Are you Lonesome Tonight?’,
followed by yet to be iconic Beatles’ ‘When I am Sixty-Four’.

Sir Roger Bannister ran one mile in under four minutes,
Sean Connery made his debut in ‘Dr No’,
and Dame Shirley Bassey appeared from Tiger Bay to sing
“Goldfinger!”
The world was re-shaping. A few graduates returned to Kirkby
for more.

All the Lovely People

The two years dwindled into two brief months.
 Time to say goodbye to adorable maids, cooks, gardeners,
 to Papa Gurney (remember the scar on his cheek?),
 pipe-smoking Mr Walker, daddy to all,
 the lovely Walters, Mr Broughton the impresario,
 Mr Kennedy of the Portuguese storming Malacca,
 Dr Terret "Remember my lectures and you will pass,"
 Mr Struthers all mathematics, Mr Lund of the telescope,
 Miss Jee the teacher's teacher, Miss McBain in tartan teaching
 the Gay Gordons,
 tall Dr Fielding of Dickens fame with his clarinet,
 Mr Cross, "in heaven you'll hear music of the spheres,"
 Mr George the Dutch-speaking lateral thinker,
 Mr Wilde, "close the door and we will talk about cameras,"
 or did he say, "Always play to win"?
 Miss Hodge all artistic and colour.

Woodwork lecturer (Mr Jones or Mr Weston?)
 said, "this boat with a crooked mast can hardly cross the Mersey
 River."

Encik Baharuddin, the Malay lecturer, said, 'Mind how you handle
 Malay idioms.
 kemaluan saya besar does not mean, I AM VERY ASHAMED; it
 means, my dick is really big!'

The Greek god, the statuesque blond with blue eyes,
 a glittering diamond whose name I forget (Mr Dunn?),
 handsome is as handsome does, fitted the bill,
 endless girls waited to babysit for him and his adorable
 handsome wife.

Kirkby was the Promised Land in Nature's island fortress.

Quentin Crispin and Dylan Thomas stayed put in Soho, with their
 originalities,
 far away from little-known Kirkby, a haven of innocence,

as did Anglo-Indian Sir Cliff Richard singing 'Summer Holiday'.
Ruth Ellis, hanged by her own words, did not know love or
shangri-la Kirkby,

died so sadly, leaving a son who committed suicide.

VII

Cry Merdeka

When we see each other again,
will the camaraderie be the same?
Surround yourself with kindred spirits
and be touched by the hand of God, brotherhood of man.

"Next year, Merdeka!" proclaimed Tunku Abdul Rahman at
Kirkby College,
the Charming Prince of Inner Temple with a twinkle in his eyes
and the sweet, creamy scent of DURIAN in his nostrils.

"Sadly, Razak is no more with us,"
said Tunku Abdul Rahman in the Great Hall.
A hush fell over the audience -
he had killed off his eventual successor with an English saying.

Kismet, Kismet, you can make beggars choosers and vice versa.
We strangers in this paradise salute you and ask you
to keep Malaya and Blighty happy and glorious for all time.

VIII

I spy with my little eyes

Two mysterious clockwork visitors to Kirkby College came,
Mr Moustachio with patent leather shoes, a regular dancer,
Derek Oxford daily in a three-piece suit, a gentleman spiv,
made friends with all the boys and some girls too.

Mr Moustachio was a perfect gentleman,
an undercover agent from MI5 or CIA or KGB or?
Derek simply an uncommon thief, with so much charm
he stole hearts with a smile, sometimes cash as well.

“Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear,
go and say goodnight to my darling Kai Yin.”

Her jilted lover was hanging half-dead
from the hot water-pipe in the ceiling,
saved by Teddy Bear in the nick of time.

“Did you promise to marry John Lim?”
“No,” replied Siti, “I know he is in love with me, he wants to
marry me,
but I cannot be his Juliet,
I am a devout Muslim, he an atheist.”

Elope to Gretna Green?
Maybe to Mecca, but no more.

IX

Hari Raya and other Jollies

So they sang Auld Lang Syne, Vera Lynn’s We’ll Meet Again,
departed leaving happy memories of Hari Raya jollies,
Lion Dance with mighty Chinese drums,
Deepavali burning bright in the night and

the PHAN TAS MA GO RI CAL
Shakespeare’s Midsummer Night’s Dream, directed by Dr
Geoffrey Broughton,
with silken Malay, Chinese and Indian costumes
of yellow, blue, red, and green,
reminiscent of Arabian Nights and the dragon dance in the
Forbidden City of Wang, the mighty Emperor.

In ripeness of time Kirkby acorns grew into shiny oaks in the
Straits of Malacca,

together with their compatriots at Brinsford Lodge,
forerunners of present-day British diversity,
augmenting the British Summer of Love and Ethnicity with

chapati, chicken tikka masala, chow mein, mee goreng
and spaghetti too.

The twain had met,
Love a Many-Splendoured Thing was born.

The Kirkby Xanadu steam-rolled over in 1962 will live for ever in
their hearts,
the serenading Hibiscus and the uniting Tudor Rose, alive, oh, alive!

X

Mr Kipling was wrong

You were wrong, Mr Kipling.
Lovely is a rose by moonlight anywhere.
East or West,
Love is the emperor. We are all children of Eve.

The Kirkby Elysium was 'all correct', an OK Order (OKO)
of willing and able leaners and able and willing doctors,
reminiscent of scholars in Benares, Shanghai, Al Azhar
University,
Paris, Bologna, and thirteenth century Oxbridge monasteries.

Speaking heart to heart, an OK university, the philosopher's stone,
could put to rights
the discordant world of President Donald Trump and company.

Long live love of learning, peace, beauty
and old Blighty and New Malaysia.

XI

The Power and the Glory that was Kirkby

“Fish and chips for me tonight with tomato ketchup,”
said Ahmad London, erstwhile Dahalan,
stepping outside his mother’s hut wearing his trilby hat
in sun-drenched Royal Kuala Kangsar.

Kirkby a brain-child of East and West
will never say “We are dying, Egypt, dying.”
Demolished yes, dead - no.
The DNA of life is Love is Love is Love.

In the Brave new glasnostic world,
all’s well that ends well.

Rasa sayang, hey, rasa sayang, sayang, hey.

XII

Kirkby in a Pantun

Get me to Kirkby, oh get me to Kirkby on time,
For my Rider Haggard She, my Jan, is Kirkby bound.
Hegamous, shegamous, love is maximous.
Here’s looking at you kid, feeling so divine.

My Rider Haggard She, my Jan, is Kirkby bound.
The Kirkby rose smells the same in Penang’s clime.
Love in Tokyo, Singapore or Kirkby wears the crown.
Hegamous, shegamous, love is maximous.

The Kirkby rose smells the same in Penang’s clime,
the burning tiger and the burning bush are alike.
Precious love in Kew Gardens grows with tlc.
Love in Tokyo, Singapore or Kirkby wears the crown.

The burning tiger and the burning bush are alike.
Love is a wild rose, a blithe free spirit.
Love is a virus you cannot see, only feel or smell it.
Precious love in Kew Gardens grows with tlc.

Love is a wild rose, a blithe free spirit
like Mount Fuji forever receding.
Kirkby trained and retrained love of merit.
Love is a virus you cannot see, only feel or smell it,

like Mount Fuji forever receding.
Sensitive feelings and thoughts can only be divined.
Love is a virus you cannot see, only feel or smell it.
Love, king of thieves, always survives.

I flew the skies by Comet with her in mind.
Hegamous, shegamous, love is maximous.
I should be so lucky lucky, in love not so calamitous.
Oh get me to darling Kirkby, get me to my darling in Kirkby on
time!

High-flying Love
a haiku

Kirkby's Mount Fuji
flying horses sometime stumble
love is so sure-footed.

XIII

The Kirby Ode to Education

The child is father to the man.
Parents entrust their darlings to teachers
for a dozen years or so,
to mould them nearer to the heart's desire.

The child is a natural leaner.
He grows, he learns, he grows, he develops
in his classroom,
microcosm of society.

He or she acquires knowledge and skills
so as to fit into society.
He learns science and the arts, plays too.
He responds so well to love and kindness.

He resents ill-treatment or discrimination.

The child's physical, mental, spiritual growth
reflect society norms.

The teacher plants the tree
with its roots in humanity,
its trunk, physical and mental powers,
the sky-touching branches, aspiration.

There are no US or THEM,
no, no, no, no!
Everyone's priorities: self and family
friends and country.

Education is not a voyage of the damned.
It is the golden ladder to heavenly joy.

The heart and mind must have plasticity
for never-ending learning and growing.
The classroom is the Japanese garden
of happiness and oneness.

It matters not whether the shoes be black or brown,
so long as they walk the walk,
sing tunes of glory and honour,
and bring home the DURIAN.

Tertiary education lacks educational theory and philosophy:
why?
Fear of the leviathan?
Or just insouciance?

We cannot neglect the philosopher's stone
God has put into our hands for all time.

XIV

What the Dickens are Brexit and New Malaysia?

What the Dickens are Brexit and New Malaysia?

A tale a two countries with seismic changes,
the best of times, the worst of times,
trying to get out of the fortuitous mess.

The Ecstasy and the Agony of Brexit

melts the Tories' Talisman:

loyalty, unity and national interest.

No more the spirit of Rolls-Royce of Ecstasy?

Cometh the hour, cometh Dr Mahathir

to heal the Malaise of the nation,

to slay the audacious crocodile Greed,

to cleanse the stygian mess.

XV

Love Remembered

My Kirkby is best summed up

by the Master Visionary's sonnet No 29

about the vicissitudes of life, constancy of nature
and the power of love.

When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,

I all alone bewep my outcast state,

And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,

And look upon myself and curse my fate,

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,

Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,

Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,

With what I most enjoy contended least;

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,

Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
from sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate,

For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorned to change my state with kings.

Whatever will be, will be!
Che sara', sara'!



Learning to learn, living to learn

Dato' Yunus Raiss

Tel: 0207 286 43 40

Mobile: 07766 967484

Email: dyraiss@hotmail.com

