

BOOK REVIEW

An eighteenth-century Bengali Muslim in Britain: *The Wonders of Vilayat*

The one hundred and thirty pages of the text of *The Wonders of Vilayat* constitute a veritable potpourri of observations about eighteenth century England made by a mostly sharp-eyed observer, writes Fakrul Alam about Kaiser Haq's new translation work

By the middle of the eighteenth century Englishmen and women began traveling to India in increasing numbers: some even started to write about their experience in travel narratives, diaries, memoirs, or letters composed with an eye to their eventual publication. But then the East India Company had been making inroads into India throughout the century. Moreover, events such as Clive's conquests, the horrors of the Black Hole, the extravagant life style of the "nabobs", and the initially spectacular (although eventually anticlimactic) trial of Hastings ensured a steady flow of British writing on India for generations. As Ketaki Kushari Dyson has demonstrated in her helpful book *A Various Universe: A Study of the Journals and Memoirs of English Men and Women in the Indian Subcontinent* (1976), there were a stream of such books, indicating the existence of a great demand for first-hand accounts of the region.

But what about Indians who had visited in England in this period? Recent scholarship has documented the presence of Amerindians in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Africans had been brought to England according to some accounts-- by the Romans when they had conquered Britain much earlier. There is evidence that some Indian lascars had settled in and around London and some Indian servants had accompanied a few "nabobs" to England by the middle of the eighteenth century, but none of them seemed to have left an

account of their travels in Britain. The work of an American scholar, Michael H. Fisher has focused interest on what is the first book by a Bengali Muslim to be written in English, Shaikh Dean Mahomed's *Travels* (1794). However, Dean Mahomed had settled in Britain and his work was published in that country and had no impact on his own people.

It is one of the many amazing discoveries to be made in a reading of Kaiser Haq's recently translated book *The Wonders of Vilayat: Being the Memoir, Originally in Persian, of a Visit to France and Britain in 1765* (Leeds: Peepal Books, 2001) that its author, Mirza Sheikh I'tesamuddin, is the first Bengali Muslim to have left an account of his travels to Britain in his own country (his book was written in 1784). Another aspect of the work that astrophysicist one is how good a writer Mirza is: this is a delightful book, written by a man of rare talent. Finally, Haq's translation is itself a miracle. Haq knows no Persian and has translated from the Bengali version of the work produced by Professor A. B. M. Habibullah as *Vilaytnama* (1981) in other words, his is a translation of a translation and yet *The Wonders of Vilayat* reads like a book written entirely in English, surely the ultimate compliment once can pay a translator!

In his succinct Preface, Haq explains what made him translate *The Wonders of Vilayat*. Evidently, a chance conversation with a Bangladeshi friend who talked about an ancestor who had visited England in the eighteenth century

set him on the trial of Mirza's work. He eventually discovered an English translation of the book made in 1827 by a John Taylor but found the work too quaint for contemporary tastes and therefore decided to produce his own version. But Haq was attracted to Mirza's account for other cogent reasons. *The Wonders of Vilayat* is an early example of the counter-flow occasioned by the British invasion of India: here was an exceptional attempt to represent the English to Indians in a unique and lively manner written at a time when Englishmen and women in droves had set about to package India to the English people in innumerable ways! But Haq is also interested in advocating "a dialogic perspective" in writing the history of the east-west encounter: there is need as well as scope for books that show how nonwhites perceived whites through the ages, even though the publishing/academic industry till now has preoccupied itself almost exclusively with images of Europe encountering its "others".

In any case, Mirza's *The Wonders of Vilayat* deserves to be read in its own right for he has many gems of observation and analysis of eighteenth century England to offer his readers. He also has an insatiable appetite for knowledge, a keen eye, and a zest for life; essential requirements for anyone interested in travel writing. Also, he is a thinker and always seems to be making an effort to see things in perspective. But what is more, he writes in a lively style and is, thankfully, almost never wasteful as far as words are concerned. Although in his Preface he

laments his want of literary ability and inability to "present [his] observations and ideas in neat and attractive language", it is precisely these qualities that he appears to possess.

Mirza's voyage to England was occasioned by a circumstance that had the potential to have made him a major player in the history of Indo-British relations. As a *munshi*, an expert in Persian in the court of Emperor Shah Alam, and as a trusted servant of the Emperor who had given him the title of "Mirza", he had been sent to England to present a letter in which the besieged Mughal was to seek the protection of the British government. But thanks to Robert Clive's machinations, neither the letter nor the "present" of 100,000 rupees that was supposed to accompany it arrived in time, leaving Mirza with ample opportunities to observe the people and the government of the "Fringhees" of "Vilayat". Politically, therefore, Mirza did not even manage to end up as a footnote in Indo-British relations. Hopefully, though, thanks to the efforts of Professor Habibullah and Kaiser Haq, his literary abilities will continue to make him appreciated by anyone interested in the subject for years to come.

Indeed, the one hundred and thirty pages of the text of *The Wonders of Vilayat* constitute a veritable potpourri of observations about eighteenth century England made by a mostly sharp-eyed observer. It also contains some potted history of the coming of the English to India and English institutions and cus-

tom, short entries on ships and navigational instruments and the route to England by sea, and considerable miscellaneous information. Nevertheless, there is almost always a salty observation or idiosyncratic aside to enliven proceedings. Occasionally, Mirza can even take us into the realm of the fantastic, as when he gives us a vivid and compelling description of a mermaid emerging from the depths of the ocean to seduce sailors and lead them astray!

On the whole, Mirza seems to have been bewitched by English women. He is overcome by their "astounding loveliness" and declares that "their beauty would have shamed even fairies into covering their pretty faces." But at the same time he reports how Englishwomen were taken by him and would frequently approach him and invite him to kiss them. However, this information is given at the end of the chapter, "Vilayat at Last" and so Mirza manages to actually avoid telling us whether he actually did so or not or whether his scruples about his family or religion came in the way. In another chapter titled "London Entertainments" he describes his fascinating encounter with a Haymarket giantess on display in a freak show. It is an episode that will remind students of *Gulliver's Travels* where Gulliver's encounters Brobdingnagian women for when Mirza stood before her, he "reached up to her armpits". The giantess and Mirza eye each other with wonder. Once again, however, Mirza concludes the chapter at this point, tantalizing the reader with

visions of what could have been the eventual outcome of the staring contest!

But it is not only the women of Vilayat who captivate Mirza. He is amazed by London's tourist attractions; it is fascinating to think that he is as impressed with London's museums, palaces, gardens, roads, and markets in the eighteenth century as we continue to be even now. Unlike the ordinary tourist, though, his inquisitive mind also contemplates the elaborate arrangements that had been made to ensure creature comforts for the city dwellers as in his account of London's water supply system.

Again and again this perceptive observer from eighteenth century Bengal is reminded of the dynamic nature of English civilization compared to the moribund Indian culture of the waning days of the Mughal empire. For example, he compares the way cultural events are arranged by impresarios in England who have formed companies and built huge concert halls for occasions that ordinary citizens can attend as well as royalty with India "where luxurious young men squander a couple of hundred rupees on an evening's nautch party; and lakh rupees of patrimony". In the "madrasah" of Oxford he is stuck by the high regard the English upper class and wealthy people in general had for people of genius and the generous rewards given artists with India where "by contrast, even if one devotes all of one's life to learning and the arts, and is acknowledge to society will not pay him any

respect". In another passage on the educational system of England, he notes how wealth is pursued in the country to make life comfortable and knowledge pursued for the same reason whereas in his contemporary India the nobility were squandering their all and destroying themselves as well as their country by their wantonness, decadent lifestyles and extravagance.

Not that Mirza is absolutely uncritical of the English. Thus he notes the English prejudice about the Scottish people and Scottish stories about English foolishness and concludes, "There is no country in the world where there are no stupid and ignorant people. In fact, everywhere they are the majority". But Mirza himself seems to have imbibed English prejudices against the French and never misses the opportunity to make fun of them. Indeed, in one distressingly xenophobic passage Mirza the anglophile and Muslim bigot bracket the French and Hindus together to disparage them for "such stupid and superstitious customs that they confound custom". On the other hand, he is a stout Muslim, and will defend his religion and its practices with ingenuity as well as firm conviction.

In the end, Mirza seemed to have felt that England was too much of a good thing for him. Also, he was wary of having to be reduced to a state where he would have to eat food that was not *halal*. In addition, he came to realize that his mission to England was doomed since Clive had no intention of sending the letter that he was supposed to interpret.

Moreover, he had become homesick and so was not to be lured by the offer of becoming an instructor of Persian to the Company's officials. And so after almost three years he returned to Bengal in 1769 and decided to write an account of his trip to Vilayat in 1784 to delight as well as instruct generations of readers. However, it must be pointed out that readers in Bangladesh will find the eleven pounds sticker price of *The Wonders of Vilayat* prohibitive. I hope, therefore, that Haq will be able to work out a deal with his English publishers that will allow readers in the sub-continent to savor this excellent version of Mirza's marvelous travel tale. Certainly, the book deserves to be widely read and Haq's skills as a translator recognized everywhere. This, after all, is his third major feat of translation, for he has already given us a very competent selection of Shamsur Rahman's verse and an internationally acclaimed version of Rabindranath's novella *Quartet*. I am aware that he has completed a translation of another Rabindranath novel and is working on rendering Shahid Quadri's verse into English. Such work is important and worthy of our attention; all the more reason that they should be made widely available to readers in our part of the world as well as the west!

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BOOK REVIEW

Gym slips and hockey sticks: Philip Larkin's schoolgirl stories

Last year details emerged of two previously unseen erotic novellas written by Philip Larkin while an undergraduate at Oxford. In the latest exclusive online essay from the London Review of Books, Jenny Diski examines Larkin's newly-published juvenilia and questions whether such literary excavation is simply barrel-scraping

Trouble at Willow Gables and Other Fictions by Philip Larkin, edited by James Booth. Faber, 498 pp., £20, 6 May, 0571 202347

LIFE is too short to read Philip Larkin's juvenilia. Reading *Trouble at Willow Gables* and *Michaelmas Term at St Brides* is up there with stuffing mushrooms: there is a part of me which, as I read - or stuff - has precognition of the moment of my death and the very last conscious thought, which is the blinding awareness of the precious hours wasted on Larkin's schoolgirl stories or mushrooms when I might have done something more positive with them such as sleeping or filling my nails. Actually, I've never stuffed a mushroom in my life. That much sense I've got. I have no idea whether James Booth has ever gone in for fancy cooking. No time probably. He has his hands full of Larkin. He is a Reader in English at Hull University, and after a false start in 1981 (Writers and Politics in Nigeria), he has devoted himself to the cause of Philip Larkin. Philip Larkin: Writer in 1992 was followed by a collection of essays, *New Larkins for Old* (2000); he is secretary of the Philip Larkin Society and edits its newsletter, *About Larkin* (it's a joke, 'you see?'). Now he has edited and introduced these mostly unfinished and unpublished fictions that have been lying around in the archive. It's what some literary academics do for a living. I know, hanging on the every word of their chosen one, but when it comes down to scratching about at the bottom of the barrel of the 21-year-old Larkin's doodlings during the summer after leaving university, it's time to head for the kitchen and get the mushroom scraper out.

The trouble with making a career around Larkin is that the output is quite small, and others, Andrew Motion and Anthony Thwaite, have already picked the meat out of the life. What's left after a couple of books of literary criticism wouldn't amount to a serious life's work for a mayfly. Or shouldn't. There is, however, an unmistakable reverent quality in the scholarly apparatus. The artefacts with which the acolyte is working are so precious as to require the minutest description of their physical reality. They are relics, touched by and touching the life of an exceptional being, like a sliver of the true cross.

"A typescript (recto and verso) of 16 sheets, less flimsy and of smaller size (224 x 173mm) than the paper used for *Trouble at Willow Gables*. . . The title and author's name are underlined using the red typewriter ribbon, the first letter of "WHAT" is typed over in red, and a short red line has been typed below the date. The verso of the title-page is blank; thereafter the pages are numbered in the centre at the bottom -1-, -2- etc. The essay ends at the bottom of p. 29 which is not numbered but has the final ornament . . . ooOoo . . . with the O and os in red. The verso of the final sheet is blank. The 16 sheets are made into a booklet by two staples a little over a centimetre in from the left edge."

We are not told what width lies between the staples. There must be some priestly secrets or the keep-

ers of the truth would have no function at all.

The above describes the typescript of a spoof essay, *What Are We Writing For?*, written by Larkin in 1943 in the guise of Brunette Coleman, a lesbian writer of girls' school stories. The entire oeuvre of Brunette Coleman (the nominal shadow of a real Blanche Coleman, an "all-girl" bandleader of the day) consists of a finished 120-page novel, *Trouble at Willow Gables*, an unfinished sequel, *Michaelmas Term at St Brides*, the essay mentioned above on the glories and sorrows of writing girls' school stories, and seven poems called *Sugar and Spice*.

The cloakroom pegs are empty now, and locked the classroom door . . . By the end of 1943, Brunette Coleman's day was done.

And even swimming-groups can fade, Games-mistresses turn grey. It was not Brunette who was offered and turned down the laureateship (though some might regret this), nor did she write *Jill or A Girl in Winter*. She existed mainly, it seems, to keep a few Oxford friends - Bruce Montgomery (Edmund Crispin), Diana Gollancz and the dreadful Kingsley Amis - amused. Brunette's work was read aloud to Montgomery and Gollancz after evenings at the pub, and its progress discussed in salacious detail in letters designed to persuade Amis that Brunette's puppet-master was a bit of a lad. Many writers and non-writers have dabbled when young with a bit of porn or pastiches of childhood reading. It's a kind of youthful arrogance, like playing Bach as 12-bar blues instead of doing five-finger exercises. But James Booth would have us see the Brunette Coleman year as something more. For one thing, he claims, Larkin tried to get *Trouble at Willow Gables* published, or so he surmises from the literary agent's stamp on the front of the document wallet containing the manuscript. Larkin took his girls' school stories seriously, it is suggested. This, of course, justifies the archive burrower in his publishing and analysis of the material. But there's another thing about being young: you are crazy to be published. Anything that gets finished is, you reckon, worth having printed. Later, many of us are relieved not to have published evidence lying around of what we were capable of before we got properly going. Let this be a lesson, at least, to anyone who hasn't got around to chucking out the crap they wrote in their teens and early twenties. There will - given the hordes of English graduates with a living to make and only limited numbers of jobs available at Accenture - be someone out there ready to publish a great fat volume of the stuff. Get rid of it now. It's too late for TH White, whose illustrated spanking novel is soon to see the light of day, but you've still got time.

You will, however, be wanting to know about the pornographic content of these works, because if not that, then what on earth is the point of them? This is an interesting question - or as interesting a question as I can come up with given the

material I'm working on. According to Larkin, Coleman represents his "lesbian period". (A side question: is a male-female transsexual who becomes a lesbian woman more cunning than confused?) Booth sees it as a case of transgending, the outflowing of, as Larkin describes it, "the dear passionately-sentimental spinster that lurks within me". Her presence, for Booth, is confirmed as he remembers that Larkin "conducted an interminable fussy-sollicitous correspondence with his mother, and relished the works of Barbara Pym and Miss Read". As if reading Barbara Pym were not evidence enough, Booth suggests that Larkin also retreated into the feminine in face of the war (didn't want to go into the army) and his father's fascism (seems rather to have come to terms with that later). However,



Philip Larkin

psychologically interesting as this may be, Booth insists that Brunette Coleman is, "just as importantly, a creative amalgam of diverse literary

influences". Such as? Um, the impact of "Yeats's poems spoken by women (A Woman Young and Old) is audible in such poems as *Wedding-Wind* and *Deep Analysis* and, less directly, in the Brunette works" Much less directly, I should say. Bruce Montgomery wrote to Larkin 20 years on and wondered if it had occurred to him that "quite the best of your earliest poetry is in *Sugar and Spice*". This, Booth would like to believe, "is not a whimsical judgment", because according to him those "parodic, and self-parodic, elegies are technically among the finest poems Larkin wrote during the decade, with an assured delicacy of tone far beyond anything in *The North Ship*". Just as "Larkin, the mature poet, was later to transfigure the clichés of urban folklore and advertising in poems such as *Essential Beauty* or *Sunny*

Prestatyn" so he turns "well-worn schoolgirl clichés into moving elegies ("Now the ponies all are dead") and "the intimate domestic triviality of the schoolgirl world with its 'seniors', 'juniors' and 'sewing-classes' stands as a poignant metonymy for life."

But enough of poetry, tell us of the pornography, I hear you cry - sorry, the Brunette style is catching. Well, there isn't much. There is one rampant lesbian senior, Hilary ("a big girl, with a strongly-moulded body, damp lips, and smouldering, discontented eyes"), who has a crush on Mary, a sporty junior who causes the words "strong tawny young lioness" to roll around in Hilary's head. Hilary almost has her way with her as Mary nods off over cocoa and biscuits. There is a vigorous punishment scene when an innocent Marie is unjustly caned

to within a yard or two of her life by the headmistress while being held down by two burly prefects ("Then she began thrashing her unmercifully, her face a mask of ferocity, caring little where the blows fell as long as they found a mark somewhere on Marie's squirming body"). There is a mixture of the above two incidents when Hilary beats up and then nuzzles Margaret, an in this case guilty junior: ("Lust had turned into anger, and anger into cruelty, and now cruelty, partly sated and partly still hungry, was turning into lust again. With a smile she stroked Margaret's cheek where her blows had landed, and felt under her hand a solid body.") One of the maids gets titillatingly tied up by Marie as she makes her escape from her locked room, and there is a moment in the second novel, in which the girls have gone up to Oxford, when Mary (the sporty junior, remember?) finally melts willingly into bed with the still damp-lipped Hilary: "Mary gave a pleasurable yawn, and rolled over so that her head lay on Hilary's lap. 'I'm so tired,' she murmured. 'So terribly tired. Do put me to bed.' For a second her tawny eyelashes lifted over her grey eyes, and she gave a little wriggle, and stretched. 'I'm so tired, I shouldn't notice even if you put me in the wrong bed.'" But it can hardly be called pornography. All the details (and details, surely, are what matter in pornography) are cloaked in coyness. Not a breast, not a clitoris is seen or mentioned. It's true that runaway Marie tears her trousers and her naked bum would be visible if she didn't hold the seat of her pants together, and that Margaret also runs away, barebacked and knickerless on a local horse, making a note to herself that it is quite pleasant, but that is as far as anatomy goes, if you don't count the short gym skirts that fly up to reveal a lot of leg when chasing healthily after the hockey ball.

are not required to be bothered with them. Surely scholarship has better things to do? There is indeed a strong sense that Booth hasn't got enough to keep his mind occupied. Otherwise why would he bother with footnotes informing his readers that Hugh Walpole was a "popular novelist", Benny Goodman an "American clarinetist and bandleader (1909-86), nicknamed 'the King of Swing'", and that Myfanwy's comment "Ours not to reason why" is an inaccurate reference to "Theirs not to reason why/Theirs but to do or die . . ." Alfred Tennyson, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*? Is he trying to educate those readers only interested in pornography, who, he perhaps supposes, have no background information about anything at all, or does he imagine that Larkin's avid readers are too young to have heard of Benny Goodman? Or is he merely trying to justify the time and fill out the pages of the little he has to work with?

EXTRACT FROM *TROUBLE AT WILLOW GABLES AND OTHER FICIONS*

"I've been reading a very interesting essay," said Jacinth to me at breakfast. "It was about boys' stories, by George Orwell. [Orwell's essay *Boys' Weeklies* appeared in *Horizon* in March 1940.] Why don't you do one about girls' stories?" she added, looking at me thoughtfully with her great intelligent topaz eyes, and stirring her cup of coffee.

Jacinth is my secretary, and a very clever and widely-read girl. In fact, she has only just left the University. I got her through the Oxford University Appointments Committee.

"Now, Jacinth, you know I don't like you to read in bed when you ought to be getting your beauty sleep. And in any case, what do I know about girls' stories? Don't splutter in your coffee like that - it's very bad manners. I haven't the time. . . You know we're due to start on *Wenda's Worst* Term this morning."

I am too familiar with Mr Orwell, and others of his kidney, to pay any attention to their ephemeral chatter, it seems to me to be a self-evident fact that Art cannot be explained away - or even explained - by foreign policy or trade cycles or youthful traumas, and that these disappointed artists whose soured creative instinct finds an outlet in insisting that it can be better ignored until Time has smoothed away all that they have scribbled on the sand. What I did do, however, was to take down a few books from my shelves, and glance through them - books for and about girls, that I have collected throughout several years of authorship. And after an hour or so, I found myself thinking: Why are these books so bad? Why, though occasional flashes of humour, or charm, or description prove that the author has without doubt some literary ability, is the general tone of the book so boring and incompetent? Why should a book start in this way?

"I was placidly thinking that though, of course, home and holidays were lovely, it was ripping, after all, to be coming back to dear old Ravenden Manor, to be gently purring up the drive where every tree - every blade of grass nearly - was fraught with some joyous memory, when there was a scurry of scarlet jersey and navy kill, a glint of chestnut hair, and June, my dearest friend, flung herself onto the footplate of the car. [Joy Francis, *The Girls of the Rose Dormitory*, Blackie, 1942]"

It is all very well to say that the intolerable clichés and banal matter are excused by the fact that the story is being told in the first person by a 14-year-old girl, but in my opinion it is merely an excuse for downright slovenly composition, dashed off with the radio playing and a cigarette in the mouth. And my knowledge of 14-year-old girls tells me that not one of them would ever commit the solecism of "footplate" (which appears to railway engines) when what obviously is meant is "running-board".

The root of the trouble lies in the fact that the author is consciously "writing down" to his public. Since the spread of cheap and ephemeral printing, and the rise of journalism, the deplorable practice has arisen of discovering "markets", and writing for them, among which is the "juvenile" market. People who have not written for children have no idea of the rules and regulations that govern this kind of work - restrictions of vocabulary, subject matter, even of style and treatment. Now everyone knows that art is never produced by pandering to a public. And this "market-writing" has a bad effect not only on the author and his work, but on the reader too, particularly when the reader is a child. Childhood is the time when one reads almost anything: one has only to read any autobiography of a man or woman born before, say, 1890 to realise this. I remember Jacinth telling me that Samuel Johnson used to sit reading *Hamlet* - or was it *Macbeth*? - at the age of eight, until he was afraid to go to bed. If a child of reasonable intelligence has nothing but Shakespeare to read, it will read Shakespeare - and will benefit, I venture to say, far more than if its parents had supplied it with books from the Christmas catalogues - "suitable for 8-10 years", "girls, aged 14-15". A child who never learns to struggle through long and tedious pages for the sake of the sudden flashes of beauty that seem to illumine the whole earth will have a mind as boneless and slack and resistless as its body would be if it had been fed on nothing but tinned foods.

While I was glancing through my books, I could not help noticing that the best writers tend not to have a heroine, but a group of heroines. Even Dorita Fairlie Bruce, with her beloved *Dimsie* ("a slim, brown-eyed, brown-clad girl of 15"), [The *Dimsie Omnibus*, OUP 1922] makes her the centre of the "Anti-Soppist Club", while writers like Elsie J Oxenham and EM Brent-Dyer, with the Abbey Girls and the Chaelet School, deal more openly in terms of groups instead of single heroines. This is advantageous when the writer is producing a series of books about this set of characters, but from the aesthetic point of view, I find it unsatisfactory. I think every story should have a definite heroine, on whom

the reader's attention can focus, and who can be the prime mover in the story. Further, when there is a heroine, they are too frequently "good".

Naturally, a heroine must have an overbalance of good, but inner conflict is the beginning of every interesting character, and it is significant to note that when there is a passionate girl whose influence swings from good to evil (or vice versa), she invariably overshadows the legitimate heroine. One has only to think of *Coralie Horn*, in *Judith Grey's Christmas Term at Chillinghurst* (George Newnes Ltd, 1942) to realise this. It must be remembered that a heroine is the figure in the story that most wins the reader's sympathy, and weakness is an endearing quality. Even the precious *Dimsie* repels us by being a bit too much of the infant terrible, the little angel of joy that sets everyone's problems right.

"Thanks awfully for what you've done," said Ursula gratefully, "you are a decent kid, *Dimsie* - always helping lame dogs over stiles."

"That's what I'd like to do," said *Dimsie* with a touch of diffidence, "but I'm afraid I'm rather apt to 'barge in' sometimes, and it's awfully difficult to draw the line between helping and meddling."

It is indeed. And by making the heroine unrelievedly "good" - except for sportiveness that the headmistress excuses with "a tolerant smile" - the author almost inevitably fails to make her attractive, and even introduces moral questions into the story, which is most reprehensible.

Similarly, there is an even greater lack of villainesses. Writers seem afraid to draw a character of any wickedness whatever. The most insidious are always the weakest - sallow girls who are "crushed with a word" and the most compelling - *Coralie Horn*, or the fierce, Eton-cropped *Josie Manning* of *Danewood* [Phyllis Matthewman's *The Queeness Of Rusty: A Danewood Book*, Lutterworth Press, 1941] - are usually won over to the right side in the end, or even before.

"Why I Love My School," Shirley Bray said reflectively. "But supposing I don't love it, Christine Medway? Suppose I think it's a dead-and-alive hole and wish I could go to Raleigh House like the Winters?" Priscilla and Nell cried "Shame!" and Mary Whiting said "You - - - thing!" with an emphasis that made Shirley's face turn scarlet. But Chris leaned forward with oddly shining blue eyes.

"Help us all to make it a school to love and be proud of, Shirley," she said. Shirley had an unpleasant manner, but she was not bad at heart. Her face softened. . . [Christmas Term at Chillinghurst]

This kind of thing is happening constantly, and it gives the heroine (if she is "good") no real chance. I seem to remember Jacinth reading me a very pretty passage about it being impossible to praise "a fugitive and cloistered virtue", and that is certainly true in cases like this one. The greatest villain in literature is Milton's Satan: glorious, ruthless, vicious, cowardly, boastful, deceitful - only constant in one thing: his determined opposition to all goodness. To be tenacious in evil is the duty of every villain, or villainess, and she may be beaten and defeated, but never won over to kissing the rod, or apologising "gruffly", or eating buttered scones with the heroine in her study after the match. In nearly every story real conflict is avoided, and so, perforce, is real good and evil. It would be also useful if writers stopped making the villainies of their bad characters so trivial: very often their sin is no worse than a "hasty temper", or at the worst eating burnt tuffe made after lights-out, at the risk of burning the whole school down [Dimsie Omnibus].

Remember Satan, and lago, and Lady Macbeth! Let the villainess be vicious and savage: let her scheme to overthrow games-captaincies and firm friendships, and spread slackness throughout the hockey XI. Let her hate the heroine wholeheartedly, and refuse, yes, even on the last page, to take her hand in forgiveness. Let us forget that we are writing for the "Juvenile Lists", and remember the dictum of Baudelaire: "There are in the young girl all the despicable qualities of the footpad and the schoolboy." Alas, it is only too true! As for prefects and mistresses and headmistresses, this is a case for sticking to tradition. Authority is authority: the world of the school story is a private world: it is a universe, with the headmistress as God and the prefects as angels. As far as possible they must fulfil this scheme, though of course there may be a bad prefect just as there was a bad angel. The headmistress, however, is sacrosanct: there can be no flaw in her character, unless it is sternness; indeed, most headmistresses are far too matey.

After the output of Brunette Coleman there are some desultory attempts to outline and write a third legitimate novel. According to Larkin, his ambition was to be a novelist "in a way I never wanted to be a poet". Nothing happened after he finished *A Girl in Winter*. "I tried very hard to write a third novel for about five years," Larkin remarked. "The ability to do so had just vanished: I can't say more than that." He suspected that he dried up because novels "are about other people and poems are about yourself . . . I didn't know enough about other people, I didn't like them enough." He worked on *No for an Answer* and *A New World Symphony*, both dealing with his relationships with women and his wish not to be engaged to and with them. He had abandoned both by 1953, either, Booth suggests, because he sensed that his 'superego' was too much in control, or because he feared the wrath of those he was writing about - would that be his superego not enough in control? Whatever the reason, he abandoned them. They were not finished or published. Now they are, after a fashion. They are fragments, not worked on, not finally drafted, not even worked through. Scholars might pick them over for whatever theories they may have about the relation between the life of the author and his literature, but these poor pieces of unfinished stuff qualify as neither. Booth suggests the present publication of them "makes it possible for readers to make their own judgment". This is all very democratic. But one of the things a writer does as a writer is to make his or her own judgments about what has been produced and whether it should be made available to the judgment of others. An unfinished work is not a work. And readers have enough to read, surely, without having to flog through the half-chewed thoughts of writers trying to decide what they are going to become. There isn't much that's flagrantly exploitative about Brunette Coleman's drivel, but there certainly is about the publication of these sad ramblings.