

APPENDIX

Synopsis of *Following the Wrong God Home*

In many ways, this book conforms to this pattern. It is a romantic love story set in an Asian society (Singapore) where conformity and order underpin modernity, wealth and stability. And it is a modern love story in that the lovers are modern, well educated and independent. The "opposing forces," however (those afflicting the young women, Yin Ling, at least), are the age-old dilemmas of family-ties and duties, dream versus reality, money, and the social expectations of the society in which she lives.

Yin Ling is a young, sensitive, poetic, intelligent and beautiful woman - all a traditional romantic heroine should be. She is engaged to, and eventually marries, Vincent Chee Wen Siong, the most eligible bachelor in Singapore. Being a Singaporean woman, family ties, duty, and Asian traditions especially Chinese, customs and beliefs, as well as her association with a wealthy, successful, politically active (hence public) young man, means that she is under great pressure to conform. Ben Gallagher, a visiting American lecturer, radical, outspoken and divorced, plays the romantic male lead. Yin Ling meets him through her poetry and they fall in love. Yin Ling struggles with her sense of right and wrong; Ben is eventually forced to leave Singapore for flouting social conventions; and so, Ben and Yin Ling are parted.

The unconventional character in here, however, is Ah Heng Cheh, an old family servant whose devotion is given to her ancient Chinese God shapes the

story. Ah Heng Cheh is irascible, stubborn, selfish, cunning and smelly. Her ancient, deformed, nameless, homeless God needs to find his home, and she will not die until she has found it for him. Yin Ling cannot leave her; Vincent generously supports and accepts her in his home, thus, binding Yin Ling to him; on the other side Ben uses her as an excuse for meeting Yin Ling; and she, in her stubborn-ness, eventually holds American big business and the Singaporean government to ransom over a piece of land she owns.

The plot of *Following the Wrong God Home* is relatively simple, patterned on the juxtapositions of self and society, tradition and innovation, love and money, East and West. Yin Ling, engage to Vincent Chee, one of Singapore's fifty most eligible bachelors, meets Ben Gallagher, a troublesome and unkempt American exchange-lecturer, who has forgotten to leave radicalism with youth. Their romance is doomed from the beginning.

The story begins with Yin Ling as a bride sitting on a bridal car with her mother in law to be, in unaccustomed make up, and glimmered with the jewel of her fiancé's family. She is about to marry Vincent Chee Wen Siong, a rich PhD student from a very traditional, upper-class family, one of Singapore's fifty most eligible bachelors and a politician who has outstanding political career in the future. Yin Ling discovers a dead baby on a rubbish dump on the way to her wedding. This sight of death is to haunt her throughout the book. What has happened before her marriage is then unfolded in the first part; the second part starts with the wedding ceremony. Ben has left Singapore, first to Hong Kong and then to ramble around the globe; Yin Ling settles down to married life and

motherhood. Yet when they meet again, their love proves stronger than all other concerns.

This story of love and money, passion and duty, is dispersed with ethnographic mapping and social criticism, but also with descriptions of dreams and with the powerful, though at times comically described, leitmotif of the novel -- an old servant's search for a home for her god-with-no-home. The homelessness of this unidentified god -- snub-nosed and grinning and perhaps simply an accidentally promoted mortal, a minor player in an opera -- bespeaks the confusions of a multicultural society, articulating a homesickness, a subversive nostalgia for a home suited for those that do not seem to fit in any of the ethnic or cultural slots available. The god-with-no-home is expelled from "the staircase gods" -- a secret shrine that Vincent's mother keeps hidden under a staircase since her son's conversion to Christianity -- as well as from the more openly displayed by Nativity group in the living room. The god's search for a place in a theme park featuring various gods and goddesses offers ample opportunities for Ben and Yin Ling to meet, even inducing Ben to speculate that this god-with-no-home might be a god of love. The god's final choice of a dilapidated piece of land destined to make way for a government project rehearses the dramatic. After the old servant's death, Yin Ling sets out to "the remote village, in China, which they has managed to locate, to return her god to his home" (315). Yin Ling's final letter to Ben, written in China, is then starkly juxtaposed with a released passenger list, including among the fatalities of a

plane-crash Mrs. Yin Ling Gallagher: And “all Ben could think was, *She called herself Gallagher*” (320).

This exit is a perfect ending. As the last lines of the book emphasize, she could not have died at a better time: “[Ben] would grow old, not burdened by the past but comforted and strengthened by it” (328). Yet Yin Ling already died when she consigned her poems to the flames shortly before her marriage (144). It is Ben’s memory that retrieves them just as he will retrieve her memory after her death. The closure of the novel’s romance requires a contrived exit, after the god-with-no-home has been returned home to China, as if a larger plot or mission has to be ended first