

Postmodernism in The Art Concept of Putu Wijaya

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ABSTRACT

This research will explore the life journey of a prominent Indonesian writer, Putu Wijaya. His life history is traced especially his connection to traditionality and modernity, starting from childhood until graduating from high school in Bali, as a student to his graduation in Yogyakarta, then moving to settle and making art in Jakarta. The three places gave him an intense understanding of the traditionalities of Bali, Java, and the Archipelago. At the same time, the three places also provide him with an understanding of modernity. The various forms of traditionality and modernity mingled in Wijaya's works, traditionalities such as fairy tales, wayang stories, and even mystical things that do not make sense also influence Wijaya's way of thinking. Meanwhile, one of the important modernities that also influenced him since childhood was Indonesian language. The language was chosen and designed based on the modern thinking of linguists Von de Wall, HC Klinkert, and Van Ophuijsen from the Dutch colonial state. Wijaya's mingling of traditionality and modernity allows him to write fluently various things, including the absurd and the absurd. His understanding of himself and his readers who were victims of feudalism and colonialism, made him write literary works to make his readers think more freely. This makes Wijaya's literary works tend to have a postmodernist style.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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1. Introduction

Putu Wijaya is one of Indonesia's most important writers. The development of the form of literary writing is often called postmodern style. However, Wijaya's early works were considered conventional realists by Sumardjo, then absurd according to Allen, Soemanto, and Gillit, and finally called postmodern style (Sumardjo, 1992: 264; Allen, 2004: 128; Soemanto 2007: 44; Gillit, 2010: 1; Heryanto, 1993; Sugiyartati, et al:2020).

Allen said that Wijaya's literary works are characterized by non-realism, anti-ideas, nonlinear plots, little character development, and humor that is often bitter. Soemanto called Wijaya the pioneer of the absurd style in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Gillit connects Wijaya's absurdism with Antonin Artaud. Meanwhile, Artaud is called Sarup (2003:227) as a postmodern theater figure.

The literary characteristics that Allen calls are already a trend of postmodern literary style. The researcher who directly mentions the postmodern style of Wijaya's literature is Heryanto. Wijaya's literary works present anecdotes or parodies and puns as a serious "discipline" of radical discipline. Antihero, not showing prima donna, no stable and firm enemy or friend, is a feature of postmodern art (Heryanto, 1993).

This study aims to explore the background of Wijaya's life and artistic concepts that are assumed to influence or become the motives that make him write postmodern literary works. There are two things that are assumed to influence Wijaya's way of thinking and art, namely traditionality and modernity. The two blended together and gave an influence that allowed Wijaya to formulate two of his artistic concepts, 'mental terror' and 'moving from the existing'. Traditionality and modernity in these two artistic concepts have a dialectic, bringing Wijaya to the era of creating a 'new tradition' which gave rise to his literary works in a postmodern style.

2. Postmodernism Perspective

One of the important views of postmodernist thinkers is their distrust of big narratives such as the construction of the truth of science, the glory of high culture, and history. The grand narrative is modernist believed to be true objectively related to reality. Postmodernists replace the big narrative with an acknowledgment of various small narratives and plural

systems of thought (Lyotard, 2009: 37). This marks the end of the modern era and the emergence of new autonomous and fragmented modernisms or micronarratives that characterize the postmodern era.

Post-modernism is a mixture of various traditions and the past. Postmodernism is a continuation of modernism, as well as beyond modernism. The characteristics of his works are double meaning, irony, many choices, conflicts, and the division of various traditions, because heterogeneity is very sufficient for pluralism (Jencks, 1989: 7).

The development of modern technology such as print, electronic, and internet mass media makes pluralism of various traditionalities and modernities spread globally. These various traditions and knowledge are then accessed and mingled in the understanding of contemporary society and help them see emancipatory and different objects (Rahman, 2017; Tahir, et. al., 2018).

Charles Jencks in the mid-1980s —as also mentioned by Anderson (2008: 38), celebrated postmodernism as a tolerant and pluralistic world civilization with many choices. The thing that makes polarization with binary opposition terms such as west-east, logical-illogical, traditional-modern, makes no sense.

3. Putu Wijaya's Tradition and Modernity

Putu Wijaya or I Gusti Ngurah Putu Wijaya, was born April 11, 1944 in Tabanan, Bali. Wijaya grew up in the Puri Anom environment which is full of Balinese customs or traditions. Wijaya grew up in this environment since he was young until he graduated from junior high school (Prihatmi, 2001:93). Despite living in a strict tradition, Wijaya since childhood has been accustomed to communicating using Indonesian.

"I learned (Indonesian) from my father," said Wijaya. His father, I Gusti Ngurah Raka, always spoke Indonesian to Wijaya's mother, Mekel Erwati. Raka who is of a high caste uses Indonesian as a gesture of respect to his wife by avoiding the use of high caste Balinese to Erwati who is of a lower caste. This situation made the Wijaya family accustomed to using Indonesian (Abidin, 2014: 165).

When he attended the People's School (SR) Tabanan in 1956, the use of Indonesian as the language of instruction at school was no longer a problem for Wijaya. At that time, he began to enjoy reading literature. "From the writings of Karl May to translated books such as William Saroyan's *Comedy of Man* and the short stories that stimulate lust that exploded in the 50s. I also enjoy watching movies, puppets, and plays. Collecting Tarzan, Flash Gordon, Mahabhrata, and Ramayana comics and a love of cartoons and anecdotes," said Wijaya (2009: 176-178).

Wijaya entered junior high school in 1956 and began writing seriously when he was in the third grade of junior high school. Wijaya's first short story entitled *Etsa* was published in the Denpasar, Bali edition of the Indonesian *Suluh Daily* (Hartoyo, 1995).

Wijaya continued to high school in Singaraja in 1959. At that time, he was guided in theater by the leader of the drama group in Singaraja, I Gde Dharna. Wijaya's interest in theater grew when he met Yogyakarta artists such as Motinggo Busye, Nasjah Djamin, Nizar, and Kirdjomuljo who often came to Bali. Dharna and Wijaya then studied literature and theater at Kirdjomuljo (Prihatmi, 2001: 94). Through the care of Kirdjomuljo, Wijaya played in the play *Badak* by Anton Chekov (Hartoyo, 1995).

After graduating from high school in 1962, Wijaya moved to three universities in Yogyakarta. Each at the Faculty of Law, Gadjah Mada University (UGM), Asdrafi, and Asri. He studied law since 1962 and finished in 1969. Asdrafi only reached the level of preparation. While Asri lasted a year, between 1964-1965 (Prihatmi, 2001: 94).

While in Yogyakarta, apart from Javanese traditions, Wijaya also gained knowledge and art knowledge from the West. "...the first six years in Yogyakarta, I struggled with Western references," said Wijaya in a speech conferring his Doctor Honoris Causa in theater from the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI) Yogyakarta, February 21, 2018.

Wijaya's early dramas were called Jacob Sumardjo conventional dramas such as: *When the Night Adds to Night* (1964), *In the Light of the Moon* (1964), *Invalid* (1964), *The Last Sun* (1965), *The Crow* (1966), *Not Until Three Months* (1963-1967), *People of the Night* (1966), *The Singing Ocean* (1967), *No* (1969), and *The Dead* (1969). He said the last two titles had shown the latest style of Wijaya's drama script (Sumardjo, 1992: 264).

Traces of the latest style of Wijaya's work, especially in terms of plot logic, began with the drama *Dalam Cahaya Bulan*. "... a scene in the drama *In the Moonlight*, where the grandmother character says her granddaughter is dead. But then the grandson was still alive. To me it's only natural. What's wrong with people - characters - cheating and saying what they want?" writes Wijaya (2009: 183).

Furthermore, when writing and directing a short script entitled *Kieke* for an annual birthday at a women's dormitory in Yogyakarta. Wijaya let the end of the play blurry and even seemed illogical. "Let it be. What's wrong with being illogical?" said Budi Satria who became Wijaya's personal critic. "At that time I was amazed. I thought hard. Then I began to see the clear road in front of me. That the media is a medium for expression, not just a storytelling media," said Wijaya (2009: 183).

At the time, he admitted: "...that I was lured into the absurd and the surreal." The 'illogical' plot then continued when Wijaya wrote the 1977 novel *Keok* and its sequel, *Blong*. "Even crazier, more undisciplined, and without calculation. I write whatever comes to my mind. What is there I throw up. Anything. I am very proud after writing that, because I feel I have been "brave" and "free" in writing and expressing something," said Wijaya (2009: 198).

Wijaya also joined the Theater Workshop which was founded by Rendra in 1967. At that time, Rendra had just returned from studying theater from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York and attended several non-degree courses at New York University from 1964 to early 1967. basic Javanese meditation exercises such as *Betoro Siwo Tiwikromo*, *Nggrayang Rogo*, and *Nggrayang Donyo* (Rendra, 1999: 11-16).

The first performance of *Bengkel Teater* was in the form of an untitled anthology called 'mini kata theater' by Goenawan Mohamad (2000:47)—because it did not contain many words and emphasized nonverbal expressions in the form of voice, sound, singing, movement, and dance (Rendra, 1999: 16-17). Rendra acknowledged that the non-verbal theater was supported by his experience watching the *Kecak* dance in Bali, September 1967.

After performing mini word theaters such as *Bip Bop* (1968) and *Rambate-Rata-Rate* (1969), *Bengkel Teater* performed *Sopochles' Oidipus Sang Raja* (1969) and *Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot* (1969). When performing *Waiting for Godot*, Wijaya played the character *Pozzo*. After that, Wijaya left *Bengkel Theater* and moved to Jakarta in 1969 (Rendra, 1999: 17-18).

Wijaya in Jakarta worked as a journalist for *Express Magazine* in 1969, *Tempo Magazine* from 1971 to 1979, and the Managing Editor of *Zaman Magazine* from 1979 to 1985. All modern institutions that Wijaya had been through, such as schools, universities, to working as a print media journalist, were places where he worked. -a place where Indonesian is dominantly used, both for speaking and writing (Abidin, 2014: 166).

Apart from working in journalism and writing literature as well as performing theater, Wijaya is also a part of the artistic life at *Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM)* Jakarta. Wijaya admits that his journalistic experience, especially from *Tempo Magazine*, greatly influenced his writing skills. "...how to write something difficult made easy. Write in the style of a fool. So that those who understand are not only ministers, but also pedicab drivers. That's *Tempo's* style," said Wijaya in figuresindonesia.com.

4. New Tradition

Wijaya in Jakarta also joined *Arifin C Noer's Small Theater* and *Teguh Karya's Popular Theater*. Wijaya was touched by the ferocity of the capital city and listened to various forms of art interacting at *TIM Jakarta*. His contact with various traditional arts from across the archipelago and from the West at *TIM* made Wijaya find his own concept of art which he called a 'new tradition' (Wijaya, 2018: 20).

In "... the era of the 'new tradition', I wrote the novel *Telegram* (1971) and the play *Aduh* (1971) with a different agem. No more poetic titles. No more preamble. No more sticky local colors. Characters without a clear identity. And a floating ending. No more worrying about the possibility of not being followed or understood by society. All things run and take place freely and freely. When I first wrote it, I didn't know where it came from or what prompted me to jump "edhan" like that. Now I consider it a new traditional aurora" (Wijaya, 2018: 21).

After that, Wijaya wrote the play *Aduh* which won the 1973 Jakarta Arts Council Screenplay Writing Competition (Soemanto, 2007: 44). In addition to calling himself a 'new tradition' in his work, Wijaya also referred to a 'new tradition' as a symptom of working in Indonesia which later emerged after a decade of the establishment of *TIM*.

"Tradition has just emerged after a decade of the establishment of *TIM*, making the mapping of modern Indonesian theater no longer to the West, but to the peaks of works that have appeared in *TIM*. The West continues to be a reference, but the basics of assessment are always returned to the roots of local wisdom in Indonesia's rich theater tradition." These include Wijaya's comments in his notes dated December 30, 2007 as a jury for the 2007 Jakarta Theater Festival (FTJ) at putuwijaya.wordpress.com.

5. Starting from What's There

There are two main pillars that serve as the foundation and focus of Wijaya's work: 'starting from what is there' and 'mental terror' (Wijaya, 2014: 618). 'Starting from what exists' is a work concept that plays a philosophical and spiritual-psychological role in overcoming all limitations –such as material-economics– to produce literary works that have the effect of mental terror. 'Starting from what exists' is an understanding like a savior god from all limitations that work does not have to wait for emotional stability, perfect means, time, and the right opportunity.

For Wijaya, 'starting from what's there' can be a strategy for the poor who are struggling. In line with 'positive thinking' which in any situation can force the search for a 'new paradigm'. Things like that often open up the possibility of finding a fresh 'other' point of view.

'Departing from the existing' turning the situation into nothing is impossible. Starting from what is there, doing acrobatics, actualization with creativity, so that the target being worked on is achieved. 'Departing from what is' also does not mean doing something modestly, but making what is there equal or able to convey what is really going to be done. Not surrender or surrender, but rebellion and attacks against powerlessness (Wijaya, 2014: 618).

6. Mental Terror

The text about mental terror as a creed, among others, was written by Wijaya in two paragraphs on page nine of his short story collection entitled *Gres*, (first edition in 1982), published by Balai Pustaka, Jakarta. Wijaya, among others, wrote:

"A short story is like a good dream and a bad dream. It doesn't really matter the order, the thread, because sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't. The main thing is the message it carries, the fascination, magical power, imagery, likeness, soul stab, premonitions, and various effects that attack those who experience the dream. It can be clear, clear in detail and exactly describe what will happen, but it can also be the opposite or completely opaque as a prediction that requires interpretation. Short stories are mental terror to humans.

At the end of the second paragraph, Wijaya writes: "The meaning of a short story in the end is not only determined by the author, but also from who the reader is" (Wijaya, 2005: 09). Wijaya's views regarding mental terror were also expressed in an essay entitled *Sastra Terror* in the 1990s.

According to Wijaya, terror literature is disturbing, terrorizing. It is going in a different direction from what is flowing. It's called going against the flow. Some call it absurd, or experimental literature (Wijaya, 1997: 208).

Furthermore, an essay entitled *Mental Terror* was written by Wijaya bertitimangsa Bandung, 1995. The essay is more about mental terror in theater performances (Wijaya, 1997: 387-392). *Mental Terror* was later published as the first essay in Wijaya's book entitled *Putu Wijaya The Mental Terrorist: Accountability for the Creative Process* in 2001. The writing is like a summary of the previous *Mental Terror* essay and does not only talk about mental terror in theatrical performances, but also concerns Wijaya's other literary works. .

7. Postmodernism of Putu Wijaya

Wijaya's brief biography provides an overview of the background of his intellectual development. Balinese culture, Indonesian language, schools, and universities, reading modern literature from outside Indonesia, make traditionality and modernity blend within Wijaya. All of that then influenced Wijaya's way of thinking in art and literature.

Wijaya grew up spending his childhood to adolescence in an environment of Hindu and Buddhist rituals. Both religions use Sanskrit in their holy books and prayers. Meanwhile, Sanskrit is the dominant contributor to vocabulary in languages in the archipelago, especially Malay, which later also became the origin of Indonesian (Collins, 2009: 19).

Apart from Sanskrit, Indonesian language also comes from Arabic, Portuguese, Dutch, English. Indonesian language is not just a tool of Indonesian nationalism, but long before, was a construction of modern thought by Dutch linguists. Indonesian was 'processed, manipulated, added, mixed with other languages, intellectualized' by Dutch scientists: Von de Wall, HC Klinkert, and Van Ophuijsen, as quoted by Amin Sweeney from Jan van der Putten (2007: 28), in order to fit and channeling modern knowledge from the Dutch colonial side. This work was then continued by Western-educated Indonesians such as Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana who tried to apply the logic and rules of Dutch grammar into Malay (Sweeney, 2008: 199-200).

Wijaya then came into contact with Javanese tradition and various forms of modernity to absurdity in Yogyakarta. Javanese traditions such as *kejawen* meditation and theater of the absurd he acquired when he joined the Bengkel Theater led by Rendra. While other modernity knowledge he also obtained from college. This makes Wijaya have various forms of knowledge mixed in him.

An important part of Wijaya's literary experience in Yogyakarta was the change in his view of plot, from logical to illogical. It made him lured into things that are surreal and absurd. Wijaya also recognized the absurdity of playing Pozzo in Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*.

After being fascinated by illogical things, Wijaya then wrote the absurd. The writing is also more out of control. He writes whatever comes to his mind and feels he is "bold" and "free" in writing and expressing something. All of that became possible for Wijaya because he was very fluent in Indonesian.

The experience of traditionality and modernity has penetrated and blended into Wijaya since he was a child until he graduated from high school in Bali. The traditional experiences include social and cultural life and Balinese tales. This fusion was added to Javanese traditions, academic knowledge of art and law, and literature –including the art of the absurd— while studying in Yogyakarta. The intensity of blending tradition and modernity increased again within Wijaya after moving to Jakarta. He works as a writer and journalist using his early experience with modernity, namely the Indonesian language.

Furthermore, his experience with various traditionalities and modernities gave him awareness as a writer who has had a 'new tradition' and made him confident to produce his own artistic concepts that are not in accordance with modernity standards, such as anti-logic plots and the emphasis on influencing the reader as well as liberating the reader. understand his work through his creed of mental terror.

Mental terror is a product produced by Wijaya in his literary work (Wijaya, 2016: 678). Elsewhere he wrote: My concept of art is mental terror wrapped in anecdotes. ...What's so interesting about the concept of art like that? I am dealing with a society that is immersed in a "culture of swallowing" due to entrenched colonialism and feudalism." (Wijaya, 2001: 227).

Wijaya's view above shows his understanding of the background of the reading community which is still influenced by feudalism and has experienced post-colonial adverse effects in Indonesia. Feudalism and colonialism are two forms of power and oppression, both separately and simultaneously, have been massively and for a long time afflicting Indonesian society (Abidin, 2011: 3). An overlapping colonialism, namely between pre-capitalist local invaders and capitalistic foreign invaders (Loomba, 2003: 3).

8. Conclusion

The background of traditional and modern life makes Wijaya very have the opportunity to write works in postmodern style. This can be seen from the concept of 'going away from what's there' by making art using whatever is available and not necessarily according to Western standards. While in 'mental terror', Wijaya mainly puts meaning to the reader.

Wijaya's mission of 'mental terror' is so that his work can make his readers think. The readers are Indonesian people who have long been immersed in feudalism and colonialism. Wijaya's view is a thought about the bad effects of colonialism which became the failure of modernism. A major failure that became an important critique of postmodernism.

Indonesian language itself has a traditional cultural background that was engineered in a modern way by Dutch colonial linguists. The traditional-modern Indonesian was then used by Wijaya to free his people from the bad effects of colonialism. So his literary works have a tendency to postmodern art style.

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