

Malin Kundang Myth in *Perantau Yang Terkutuk* Play

¹Sun Yanto, ²Dr. I Nyoman Murtana, S.Kar.,M.Hum.

¹Department of Theatre, Indonesia Institute of The Arts Surakarta, Jalan Ki Hajar Dewantara, Jebres, Kota Surakarta 57126, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia.

²Postgraduate of Indonesia Institute of The Arts Surakarta, Indonesia.

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ABSTRACT: *Perantau yang terkutuk* (The cursed wanderer) is one of the plays in *Alam Takambang Jadi Batu* (*Perantau yang terkutuk*) by Mahatma Muhammad, who is not only the scriptwriter but also the director. This theatre performance originated from various literatures of Malin Kundang, both classic Kaba (story) and later texts written by various authors inspired by the myth. After reading those texts, Mahatma Muhammad tried to create a parody, both in the format and content. Besides exploring oral literature, he also applied the forms of Randai, Tupai Janjang, and Indang into it. The idea of *Perantau yang terkutuk* trilogy play is an effort to offer to the reality of the current society that does not uphold moral values and custom norms anymore.

KEYWORDS: *Alam Takambang Jadi Batu, Perantau yang terkutuk, Myth, Mahatma Muhammad*

I. INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Muhammad is a director born in West Sumatera. He is one of the founders of Komunitas Seni Nan Tumpah (KSNT). This community has several programs, such as introducing theatre to schools, poem musicalization, art exhibition, and national-scale art event. As a man who was born in the land of Minangkabau, his expression in theatre performance often contains the idioms of Minangkabau theatre tradition.

In 2017 at Taman Budaya Padang-Sumatera Barat, Mahatma Muhammad performed a trilogy play entitled *Alam Takambang Jadi Batu* (*Perantau yang terkutuk* or The cursed wanderer). This play is adapted from Mahatma Muhammad's poem *Malin Kundang*. His reading on various *Malin Kundang* myth interpretations is an effort to reconstruct the myth into another form of interpretation so that it obtains a room and recognition. Philosophical text (single interpretation) was blurred. Mahatma Muhammad loosely gave a space for other interpretations in the middle of various assumptions about *Perantau yang terkutuk*.

"Myth in traditional community refers to the believed story in a society which becomes their reference of value and norm system. Myth forms the community's social and culture order. It is people's crystalized understanding of various unexplainable natural events, they created stories to explain those symptoms. They perceive the nature through imagination and expressed it orally. In that timespan, the stories formed social order and keep the community values" (Yasraf, 2018: 108).

The characters of *Perantau yang terkutuk* had mental pressure hidden in their funny actions and jokes. There were various parts where the Audience, Items, Objects, Spaces, and the characters often interact mentally (interacting without cause and effect that can be accepted by normal mind). The setting was full of symbol such as *Mannequin*¹ and wooden boxes. The storyline was performed by eight characters. Each character has different characteristics. There were also some actors who played multiple characters. Mahatma Muhammad also inserted an element to support the performance of *Randai*², which was *Anak randai*³. The *Galembong*⁴ pants clapping played by *Anak randai* was more expressive with new pattern and movement exploration.

Perantau yang terkutuk has no *Linier Plot*⁵ line, tends to be *Repetitive*, and the final *Conclusion* is unclear. It is an ironic, sad, and thrilling life portrait. The explicit form and the implicit form is not presented as

¹*Mannequin* is a statue that resembles human.

²*Randai* is the name of Minangkabau (Sumatera Barat) traditional theatre.

³*Anak randai* is the actors who move in circle and martial arts flower patterns in *Randai*.

⁴*Galembong* is special pants worn by *Anak randai*.

⁵*Plot* is a series of event in a theatre performance.

how it should be (not communicative). However, within those contradictory forms, there is a strong emotional condition, including sadness, depressed soul, and heavy burdens in the life of its characters.

"Art is a discourse that contains knowledge formulated by arranging symbolic forms that are not always verbal, but also non verbal, as a result found, thought, and worked by the artist towards the values. The form of knowledge is a scientific formulation with mono-interpretable characteristic, while art in the form of artistic formulation is multi-interpretable" (Sunarto, 2013: 9).

Mahatma Muhammad's unique skill in creating the characters of *Perantau yang terkatuk* by finding a weakness in the philosophical meaning and disentangle the mono interpretation to make new interpretation is what draws the researcher's attention to use this play as research object. Deconstruction, according to Derrida, denies that ratio is not everything and that the knowledge about the world is not always objective but sometimes it was born from ambiguous, existential, and dramatic experience. Mahatma Muhammad's dramatic expression resembles the ambiguous, existential, and dramatic experience stated by Derrida in this deconstruction paradigm. This research tries to uncover the myth of Malin Kundang in its exploration. This is important to do in order to add knowledge for the artist in art and non-art universities about theatrical performance that has post-dramatic staging style.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Each director has different message and staging style. Mahatma Muhammad in his *Perantau yang terkatuk* offers the myth of Malin Kundang that has been explored from the myths widely known by the society. With a staging style that emphasizes ambiguity in dramatic, Mahatma Muhammad also criticizes social reality by presenting *Tukang kaba*⁶ and three mother characters with poetic dialogues.

"Derrida tries to dismantle the unintentional order, which is the hidden assumptions behind the expressed idea. The deconstruction method points out the failed attempt to present absolute truth, it wants to expose the hidden agenda that contains weaknesses and flaws behind the texts" (Christopher Norris, 2006: 13).

Dissemination presents a unique strategy that shows text as an arena of play constantly transformed by substituting its old signifiers with the new ones. Text exploration and sign dissemination are the direct consequences of deconstructive reading. Deconstruction is a strategy to break the text (Al-Fayyadl, 2005: 79). Textual meaning is produced at various levels of relationships that are often ambiguous and not centered on just one orientation of interpretation (Al-Fayyadl, 2005: 80).

"The meaning is behind the scenes, but its form is not in the form of presence, but rather as a making process that constantly delays the adequate understanding and replace it with more open and ambiguous new signs" (Al-Fayyadl, 2005: 82).

Deconstruction is an active antithesis towards everything that literary criticism has achieved if its traditional values and concepts have been widely accepted (Christopher Norris, 2006: 13). According to the description above, in deconstructive reading, meaning is more of an interpretation and not a final result that we can simply enjoy.

III. METHOD

This research uses qualitative method. The method is chosen in accordance with the research object that is related to an ongoing idea happening in a theatre performance.

"Qualitative research is a research that tries to understand the phenomenon experienced by the research subject, such as attitude, perception, motivation, holistic behavior, and by describing them in the form of words and language, in a certain natural context, using various scientific methods" (Moleong, 2007: 6).

The examined event is the *Perantau yang terkatuk* play which acts as the basis, to understand the myth inspiring the play creation. Hadjar mentioned that qualitative research obtains a common understanding about social reality from participant perspective. This understanding is not determined in the beginning, but it was understood after analyzing the social reality focused in the research. From the analysis, a conclusion is drawn in the form of abstract common understanding about realities (Susilo, 2013: 2).

The data are categorized into two: (1) primary data and (2) secondary data. Primary data include documentation (audio-visual) of *Perantau yang terkatuk* theatre performance. This audio-visual documentation is needed to see the whole form and structure of the play. The secondary data include texts such as books, journals, articles (online and newspaper) which seem relevant to support the analysis.

Literature review was conducted to obtain written references close to the observed event in order to help the researchers analyze it more accurately and to write down the report following the research framework. Interview was done with Mahatma Muhammad and some actors to gain information about the primary data. Then, the interview results that support the research concept were taken to make clear analysis steps. Data analysis is the last step of the research process. It was done by analyzing data obtained from literature review, observation, audio-visual recording of the interview, and photos. These data were then grouped based on its importance and problem characteristics to be managed into writing materials.

⁶*Tukang kaba* is a storyteller.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theatre art is a part of performing arts. The focus of theatre art is not only on the actor skill to play his character but also to test the director's ability to form supporting aspects to develop the dramaticity. Cohen in Yudiaryani said that theatre is a place of artistic work with actors to enliven the characters, not recorded but directly played based on the script (Yudiaryani, 2002: 2). Theatre is another term of drama in a broader sense which includes the process of determining ideas, selection of play scripts, interpretation, making, presentation, viewing, understanding, enjoyment, study, analysis, and review (Iswantara, 2002: 1). Theatrical event is an interface, a connectivity in a space where actors and audience can be all out, gather, and be connected by various artistic implusions (Benny, 2017, 10).

A theatrical drama is often interpreted similarly, even though the two words have borders in their etymological and terminology. The word *Theatre* comes from *theatron* which refers to a place where actors perform plays and people watch them (Soemanto, 2001: 8). On the other hand, *drama* comes from the Greek word *draomai* which means doing, acting, behaving, reacting and so on: and drama means: acts and actions (Harymawan, 1993: 1). From the description above, it is very clear that theatre and drama can be understood in a broad and narrow sense.

The phenomenon of Malin Kundang myth which is passed down through generations by the community became the starting point for Mahatma Muhammad to explore its contents and covered in different staging styles, namely the conventional drama. In this case, Mahatma Muhammad obscures the myth by breaking its events and insert criticism towards the reality of nowadays society. This view believes that there is no stable center other than a series of signs.

"Besides exploring Minangkabau oral literature, the performance of *Alam Takambang Jadi Batu* (*Perantau yang terkutuk*) also covers the reality of nowadays society where the generation no longer believes in traditional, mythical and *Kaba* things" (Khairy Ra'if Thaib, Haluan: 2017).

Deconstruction is a method of reading text (Cristhoper Norris, 2006: 12). The first step is to dismantle logocentrism of the text, which is a view that controls the truth appearing in a phenomenon. Logocentrism is displayed in the presence of author or subject who have authority of the meaning (dismantling the idea that author has an authority over the meaning). The second step is to compare two texts (story ideas that are inspired by the myth of Malin Kundang) to find (internal contradictions) hidden behind the logic and speech of the text (Al-Fayyadl, 2005: 16). "

The deconstruction concept formulated by Derrida believes that there is no absolute interpretation in a text. This view is in line with postmodern thinking which focuses on open mindedness and embrace different interpretations. This is in accordance with postmodern character that celebrates diversity and plurality and refuses to reduce everything into a certain understanding or pattern (Al-Fayyadl, 2005: 24).

The first reading is Mahatma Muhammad's idea as the author to reduce the proverb *Alam takambang jadi guru* (*Alam takambang* becomes teacher) into *Alam Takambang Jadi Batu* (*Alamtakambang* becomes stone) to represent three sub-titles of the play. The proverb *Alam takambang jadi guru* is Minangkabau people's view of life. For Minangkabau people, natural phenomena give them insight, knowledge, and experience. The grand and virtuous philosophy about the nature's ability to inspire people's lives was reduced to represent the trilogy play containing absurd series of events. This valuable thing was manifested into a dramatic that was not built in a good and logical series of events.

PHILOSOPHY	TRILOGY
<i>Alam takambang jadi guru</i> People's View of Life	<i>Alam takambang jadi batu</i> The Big Title of Trilogy Play
Teaching, ethics, ideology, norm, and principle.	Artistic visual dominated by markers, poetic, and character's scripts that are often <i>Absurd</i> .

The second reading is the dramatic internal contradiction in the myth of Malin Kundang. As a theatre style that is no based on conventional performance, Mahatma Muhammad showed three characters who admitted to be Malin Kundang in *Perantau yang terkutuk* play. The following scene shows that the figure of Malin Kundang is universal. Every boy born in the Minangkabau land is admitted to be Malin Kundang. This view is based on the tradition of migrating in Minangkabau. The name Malin Kundang is perceived not only as a person cursed for his insubordination, but also an expectation of a successful life in the foreign land. In the same minute, the mother figure is considered as *Kaba*⁷. Malin Kundang dialogue that admits his mother as a

⁷*Kaba* is a story. The term *Kabaa* above refers to the mythical story of Malin Kundang.

Kaba means that the myth is told by mothers to their children. The dialogue about Malin Kundang is general and mother is believed to be a *Kaba* as in the following scene.

A scene where three characters admitted themselves to be Malin Kundang in minute 00:53:53.

Malin 1

Let me introduce myself. I am Malin Kundang (giving hands for handshake).

Malin 2

I am also Malin Kundang (perplexed).

Malin 3

I am another Malin Kundang.

Malin 2

Who is your mother? (pointing at Malin 1).

Malin 1

Kaba (story).

Malin 1

Your mother? (fisting at Malin 3).

Malin 3

Kaba (story).

Malin 1 & 3

Your mother? (pointing at Malin 2).

Malin 3

Lie! (shouting).

The dialogue above shows an understanding of women's (mothers's) power as a *Kaba* to pass curse to their sons. Every child conceived in mother's womb has been handed a sin of Malin Kundang *Kaba*, so he or she will be born along with the curse. The scene below shows that the curse of Malin Kundang is universal to boys born in Minangkabau. Sin is a *Kaba* of MalinKundang myth told by mothers to their children later. Some of the scenes are parts of scenes that show the domination of woman (mother) as a power holder to control the curse.

This scene of two mothers shows that her son Malin's departure is an attempt to save woman's pride as the power holder in minute 00:26:14.

Mother 3

Won't you pick him up?

Mother 2

My son will come home today, you know that's the reason he left home, which is to save woman's pride as the power holder.

Mother 3

Who said that?

Mother 2

Not the old *kaba*.

This scene shows how mother one says that the sons of mother two and three will receive the same curse as her son in minute 00:31:59.

Mother 1

Whether you want or not, whether you like it or not, you sons will arrive there (pointed at the intended direction).

Mother 3

Where?

Mother 1

At the same fate as my son (gloomed).

Mother 2

Heeey ... who said that it has to be like that?

Mother 1

Your mother ..my mother .. haa ..your mother. my mother (pointing)."

This is a scene where Malin three said that every girl born will pass a curse to her children, in minute 00:57:01.

Malin 3

And in the end, she was born to be a mother, conceiving sin, and giving birth to a curse.

Curse becomes a phenomenon of social game when women's (mothers') power prepares exterior positions and curses. In this case, mother is represented as *Kaba*, the power to give curse. Cursing is not done willingly by the mother, but more by the community's traditions and culture. Women (mothers) in *Perantau yang terkutuk* play can also be perceived as the legitimation agent of the widely-known Malin Kundang curse for every boy.

"The self-withdrawal that Kant attaches to the feminine natural characteristics is contained in the deepest foundation of the dispositions that compose habitus. Habitus is the second naturalness that does not present many natural traits except when the institutionalized *libido* is manifested into a certain form of *libido*, or desire in general term. Differential socialization positions man to like power games, while woman is positioned to like man who plays those games" (Bourdieu, 2010: 114).

Minangkabau culture is also influential enough in the myth of Malin Kundang. An example is the dialogue that says *Merantau bujang dahulu di kampung tidak berguna selamanya* (move while you are young, living in the village forever will not be useful). As a director, Mahatma Muhammad offered a curse story to be a tradition of perception generalization that has entrenched with the migrating tradition. The curse myth becomes systemized legality about young man's obligation to leave home, similar to what Malin Kundang did. His return was disastrous because it was covered with arrogance, thus he was cursed. In this case, the curse is an entrenched inheritance as shown in the scene below:

This is a scene in minute 00:29:55 where mother three asked mother two about her son who had migrated.

Mother 3

Aaah ... so the problem is, he moved out while he is still young because staying in the village forever is not useful, how cool your son is, cutting the mother's lineage.

This is a scene in minute 00:36:28 that illustrates how a story influences people to have similar understanding about a curse.

Storyteller

This is so tiring. Of course... They have been uniformized into robots, to tell varied news. Look at those working people, who are trapped in that news, they are trapped from one person to another, from one mouth to another, from one stuff to another, from one hand to another, sometimes in happy moments they feel sad, they... they work and tell seriously, but in my generation, they are of no use.

The story of a man called Malin Kundang is not originated from a certain period of people's lives where the time span, time, and fact are clear, but from people's various assumptions about his life. The understanding of this myth does not finalize its interpretation because it keeps changing time to time. The literary generation's interpretation is expressed in many differing stories while Mahatma Muhammad and other theatre artists express the different story into visual aspect and idea of creation.

The curse myth in this play is shown in the form of events about the modern children behaviours and the rampant corruption committed by political elites. The message is a criticism on how the younger generation is too carried away with technological progress and the political elites who enrich themselves by committing corruption, as illustrated in several parts below:

A scene where the storyteller asked her friends to take a selfie in minute 00:42:33

Storyteller

(The mother character held a handphone) hey ..hey ..hey ..the descendants of King Iskandar Zulkarnain. Tell your mom that we are on a beach (while directing the phone to the crowd). Heey ..mom, we are on a beach (with a loud voice). (The mother character moved her position) hey ..hey ..hey ..the descendants of King Iskandar Zulkarnain. Tell your mom that this is Malin Kundang stone (she directed her phone to the crowd with the stone in the middle of them). Mom we are in Malin stone (with a loud voice).

This is a scene in minute 00:54:34 where mother three criticized corrupt political elites.

Mother 3

That's how you and I looked for mother. The overly pedagogic doubt is trapped in the civilization trapped in the civilization, refuses to lose its base. The yearning is sleeping Ooh... storm and eyes. In his head, sailing from one island to another creates a land work, burial ground from corruption, ocean resources and poison remedy tail ancient metropolitan.

This is a behind-the-scene act that tells about the curse for modern child who disobeys his mother because she could only buy him cheap motorcycle in minute 01:10:54

(Voices behind the stage)

What is the topic today. A boy living in his motherland suddenly turned into a stone. Based on the evidence of the witness, it started when the boy asked for a ninja motorcycle, but his mother could only afford a matic one. The kid got angry and went against her while she was praying, and so he became a stone. It is believed by our descendants, this is a mother's curse. However when interviewed by this media, the mother denied it, saying that it was God's decision. This news is a fact and not a story, not a random news. Tag and share it to your Facebook friends to make it viral and people can learn from it. Don't forget to type number one or A- on Instagram column so that it can be prevented from our kids.

"Modern theatres are characterized by a narrative and logically intertwining core plots with sequential patterns. The postmodern theatre tries to change the ways of perceiving the world and the human self. Postmodern plays are used more as events or process where the audience, things, objects, and spaces interact mentally. The main focus is awareness of emotional experience, political criticism, or simply an entertainment. Postmodern theatre interaction is to deconstruct reality, not to interpret or find the "authentic" contact with the audience" (Fathul, 2013: 178).

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"Derrida tries to dismantle the unintentional order, which is the hidden assumptions behind the expressed idea. The deconstruction method points out the failure of the attempt to present absolute truth, it wants to expose the hidden agenda that contains weaknesses and flaws behind the texts" (Christopher Norris, 2006: 13).

The costumes worn in *Perantau yang terkutuk* play are quite functional in several scenes. In a scene where the mothers were cooking, the costumes were home dress and *sarong* that are similar to what female villagers usually wear. There is also a scene where the storyteller gave beach clothes to the working characters and a scene where some characters admitted themselves to be Malin Kundang and a scene where Nilam character was at a night club. The costumes worn in those scenes were very logical and suitable. However, the costume in the beginning part was not. The costume at zero point scene was *Galembong* pants and each character was covered with a mask. Although the majority of the scenes did not use mask, this beginning part has led our understanding toward aesthetic convention of absurd theatre performances. A mask is a representation of human awareness that life does not always give a clear meaning.

"Absurdity is a trait that emerges from existentialism philosophy branch which views life without a thrilling and repulsive meaning. If humans are aware of their own existence, they will feel that this life is *Absurd*" (Lutters, 2018: 57).

The masks worn by the actors represent abstract figures. A mask is a character whose existence represents certain purpose. Its presence no longer represents characters from the corridor of social behavior in a community. Instead, it represents paradoxical characters, behaviours, and social institutions.

"For Derrida, Saussure's theory of sign is static. The relationship between the signifier and the signified, between the form and meaning is dynamic. A meaning is derived not only from semiotic "difference" but also from its "delay" (In Benny H. Hoed, 2014: 140).

V. CONCLUSION

Mahatma Muhammad in his *Perantau yang Terkutuk* play reduced Malin Kundang myth artistically and dramatically through the trilogy sub-title *Alam Takambang Jadi Batu*. Viewed from its artistic visual, the play is very symbolic and presents certain sign, and it is not motivated by a logical sign and meaning. The visualized signs are represented by other meanings or vice versa. Aesthetically, the acting was shown through various scenes that has no dramatic framework with good and neat sequence. Some parts of the scenes tend to stand alone, discuss unclear problems non-objectively, often use poetic language, and the characters interact mentally (cause and effect). It tells about a mother's longing for her child, but when the longing is perfect, she is demanded to pass the catastrophe to her child. It also tells about a mother's struggle to oppose the curse tradition by refusing to tell *Kaba*. *Perantau yang Terkutuk* play basically does not provide a dramatic frame with a message that refers to a single thing, but instead, it criticizes many things with many messages to deliver.

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