



FIRST OF BANYAN TRESS

Anthology of Short Stories, Literature and Arts Award I Faculty of Cultural Sciences Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 190 pages

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The ever fascinating part of an anthology is found in its diverse writings, in both the theme and style. That is also true to *Rayuan Pohon Beringin* (*Flirt of banyan tree*), an anthology of short stories published by Gadjah Mada University Press. The anthology is a collection of short stories in the Literature and Arts Award I, held for the first time by the Faculty of Cultural Sciences UGM. The title is taken from one of the winners of the short story competition – “Rayuan Pohon Beringin” (Flirt of banyan tree).

The anthology opens with the first winner’s story, “Lamsijan Memutuskan Menjadi Gila” (Lamsijan Decided to be Crazy). It was written by Asef Saeful Anwar presenting various styles of storytelling using third person perspective about the main character, Lamsijan. Such a storytelling style is actually not new, especially in detective stories, for example on the testimony of several people on a case; but it becomes an interesting storytelling style as applied in this story because the people telling about Lamsijan --the main character-- is basically uncovering their own story such that their testimony on Lamsijan leads precisely into a self recognition. Lamsijan himself never does the talk until the story finishes.

In addition to its storytelling style, the theme is also interesting, i.e., about a man who is considered crazy with testimony from some people who knew him. Nevertheless, until the end the story never reveals the truth whether or not Lamsijan is crazy. Despite its open ending,

the story does not leave the readers disappointed since the readers are invited to think of the figures telling about Lamsijan. A unique storytelling style together with the theme on rethinking insane and insanity make this short story the winner of Literature and Arts Award.

The next interesting short story is a satire, “Broto Laras” by Arif Kurnia Rakhman, put in the final list of the content. It tells the irony of a jathilan performer, a formerly proud profession thanking to frequent request to perform at important events, but gradually over time the requests began to diminish. Pak Sronto, one of the busking jathilan artists, tries to earn some money by performing jathilan on streets in order to fulfill his daughter’s dream to register the Korean dance lessons. It is pityful that he was hit by a motorcycle and killed when he rushed to get to the stage to give another jathilan performance after performing jathilan on streets. Despite its simple theme, this story is interesting because it contrasts jathilan and Korean dance that is becoming a trend among young people of K-pop lovers today. The last line of the short story describes a comment by a young boy speaking slang who thought the victim of that hit and run accident a clown because the boy was unfamiliar with jathilan costume the man was wearing.

Another interesting short story is the deconstruction of Mahabaratha entitled “Ingatan Dimas Mandrakumara” (The Memory of Dimas Mandrakumara) by I Dewa Dewi Ayu Diah Cempaka. Mahabaratha in this story is told in the background of the 21st century. The descendants of Kauravas were trying to restore the good name of their extended family after their defeat in the

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Kurukshetra field against the Pandavas, a proper story of Mahabharata as widely known today. It presents a satire on the media in favor of the authority and also shows truth as seen from various points of view, and shows the power of interest to always affect the winner's discourse. It is a reminiscent of the tragedy in Indonesia, in which a particular group that is considered a traitor of the nation wants to present a history from their own standpoint.

Another story about the holder of the power authority is entitled "Cicak Wang Sanga" (Lizard Wang Sanga) by Gesang Joko Santoso. It tells an interesting story about a boy who thinks that his father died and became a lizard in a cave. His father, a journalist, is reportedly killed because of something that a child never understood the child's age.

Some other stories in this anthology bring criticism on the current state of Indonesia. One of the works is "Darban" by Cahyaningrum Dewojati. This short story tells the story of a country where more than half of the population suffer from deafness, and about the legislature that became the deciding institutions for legislation and state budget. The members of this board even lose the ears completely after trying to mark up the budget for importing hearing aids to people. The short story describes someone who can still hear well, named Darban. He was the one who gave input for the board members and then made an unlimited budget to import conscience. It mocks the indifference of not only board members, but in fact almost all the people which began to lose conscience to care for one another. All shout, wishing to be heard first and attentively.

Still revolving around the state, another short story on the theme of social criticism is "Menteri Membuktikan" (Proving Minister) by Agus Fahri Husein. This short story is a satire on the ownership of foreign capital and coercion against the people to sell land for the sake of large foreign-owned projects. One of the landowners who refused to sell his land is Ustad Haji. He was eventually imprisoned for treason. Meanwhile, an issue spread on the coast that the fish are contaminated with poisoning mercury. Ustad Haji's supporters suspected it as an attempt by the authority to get Ustad Haji's land. In fact, the news was confirmed

when the Minister himself who poisoned after eating grilled fish along with the locals.

A short story about a social critique on the state of the country's political entitled "Rayuan Pohon Beringin" (Flirt of Banyan Trees) by Robby Anugerah was selected for the title of this anthology. The banyan tree symbol in this story is similar to other stories on a ruling political party at the last era. On one side, this it criticizes the absoluteness of the ruling party in the past, which is bearing the banyan tree, while on the other side, it seems to also want to show the hardship of the followers of religious beliefs other than the six recognized by laws to get their rights to write the belief on their identity cards.

Another satirical story about social criticism is "Gojet" by Robby Anugerah. It scoffs at the society which is enslaved especially by smart-phone gadgets that turn them into individualist creatures. Although similar stories can be found in the mass media, especially social media, this short story is still interesting to read because it is told from the viewpoint of the main character Sinbad, which is known as a fairy tale character. The choice of Sinbad's character seems to have an intention to prevent this gadget addicted people not to get worse like in a fairy tale. It is seen as a warning for the public to immediately realize their addiction.

Another short story in this anthology is about the issue of women subordination, entitled "Doa Pencabut Nyawa" (Life taking Prayer) by Muhammad Hafidz Assalam. It tells about Larmi who wants to bring her husband to the hospital because of a strange disease. But her plan was swamped with suggestions from Ustad Usman that her family should hold tahlilan for the dying husband. A few days later, it is proven that there is an outbreak of illness caused by a fertilizer factory where Larmi's husband and most of the residents in the area are working. Larmi's husband died because of a delayed medical assistance. This short story criticizes people's blinded trust toward anybody called Ustad and also weak position of a woman who wants to find ways of healing her husband.

"Calon Istri Phu Chau Phu" (Prospective Wife of Chau Phu Phu), a short story by Royyan Julian, also pictures female subordination in which a woman is to marry to a man who was not of her

choice in order to pay off her father's debts, a sort of Siti Nurbaya story. But finally, her lover is able to make it up with miraculously acquired wealth through her teacher's recommendation.

Problems of women subordination is also contained in La Ode Gusman Nasiru's "Pengantin Purnama" (Bride Purnama), an adaptation of local story. The author gives a note at the end of the short story that he was inspired by the folklore of Wolio entitled "Wandiu-diu". This short story tells about a wife who murdered her husband after she was accused of having an affair, while in fact, she was just working for extra money to support the family. The impression of women subordination appears in this story in the wife's physical inability to resist anger that prompted her to kill her husband eventually. It is regarded to have the most interesting word choices, because it is presented in a poetic form and carefully calculated rhythm.

Slightly different from the story of women subordination, the story "Ra(b)bi" by Darma Romansha Kedung tells a story of a husband who was bought by his wife from his secret lover. This short story selects one piece of the lives of woman workers who migrate and become the family backbone.

A short story entitled "Kehidupan dan Kematian" (Life and Death) by Claudia Gretta Firstiasa personifies two stages of human life in the form of characters engaged in mutual friendship. With a simple story about the fate of humans when faced with death, the story wants to show the close distance between the dead and the life and that both are actually close friends.

Identity becomes the dominating theme in the rest of the stories. For example, "Matahari dalam Timangan" (A Sun in her Lap) by Saeful Anwar tells about a junior high school girl who gets her

first sexual experience of a rape by a wellknown cleric in the village. Rather than feeling victimized, she regards her rapist as a giver of pleasure. The following short story, "Presto Agitato" by Habsari Banyu Jenar, still revolves around sex experience at a young age. It depicts an incest father and daughter who committed intercourse many times without the mother's knowledge, and how it affects her personality. A similar theme is found in "Kuas" (Brush) by Galih Pangestu Jati. It also tells about a stepchild who gain sexual pleasure from her mother's husband. Entitled "Pawang Anjing" (The Dog Keeper) by Inung Setyami also deals with identity, i.e., a child who imitates her mother's behavior precisely because of her mother's lack of attention. It is similar to "Memburu Anjing Siluman" (Hunting a Demon Dog) by Julian Royyan which is about a child who witnessed his mother doing a sex ritual with a man who is not her father in search for pesugihan (evil power to earn wealth).

Overall, the anthology of short stories looks packed with different themes and styles of storytelling. As previously mentioned, some short stories applies some new ideas in the form of imaginary satirical parody which is very interesting about the people who lost their hearing ability, deconstruction of Mahabaratha story from the standpoint of the Kauravas family, the ghost of a minister who died from eating fish containing mercury, and the death of a jathilan performer while earning money for her daughter's Korean dance lessons. However, some of the stories seem to have a similar theme. Some of them can be developed into a story of self-identity debate of the characters who are met with their own consciousness about life that is not simply putting them as victims of circumstances.