

Understanding the World of Seno's Contemplation

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Diterima 14 Juli 2013/Disetujui 28 Agustus 2013

Abstrak

Sena Gumira Ajidarma merupakan salah satu sastrawan Indonesia yang produktif. Cerpennya mengajak pembaca untuk berkontemplasi dan merefleksikan aneka peristiwa yang dituangkan dalam cerpen-cerpennya. Cerpen *Maria* merupakan salah satu karya Sena Gumira Ajidarma yang mengajak pembaca untuk berkontemplasi mengenai hubungan antarmanusia khususnya anak dengan ibu yang berlandaskan kasih dan harapan. Maria mengalami luka batin sangat mendalam karena kehilangan dua putranya, Gregorio dan Ricardo. Maria menaruh harapan masih akan berjumpa dengan Antonio yang tampan dan menawan. Harapan akan Antonio tersebut menutup mata hati dan pikirannya ketika menyaksikan anaknya tidak seperti yang diharapkan, yaitu kondisi fisiknya rusak akibat siksaan yang dialaminya.

Kata Kunci: cerpen, kontemplasi, tokoh, harapan.

1. Introduction

Reading the works of Seno Gumira Ajidarma, we have to take part in his contemplation through his stories. This time, the writer would like to discuss one of his works, a short story entitled "Maria".

From the title we know that the main character of the story is Maria. The name Maria indicates that she comes from a certain social class, not from the lower class but from the upper middle class. So do the other names in this story, beside expressing a strange impression like her late husband Gregorio, her late eldest son Ricardo, her youngest son Antonio whom she was waiting to come back home, and her younger sister Evangelista who was loyally accompanying her. The names used in the family strongly indicate that they come from the upper middle class with the modern social life.

Reading this short story reminds us to their life condition in exploiting their son for the sake of prestige and ambition. On Saturday, February 6, 1993 the parents of the students rushed to the kindergarten or elementary school to get the rappers of their children. Leaving the school the parents, especially the mothers would give various comments on their children: by asking their children's achievements, especially at school. They often also asked what ranks their children had got at school. If one student got the high rank his parents would tell it proudly. But if he got the low rank he was the subject to blame for his parents. Of course it can not be generalized, because some parents are realistic and wise, and will find the reason why the student got the low achievement. They also will treat him lovingly and not terrorize or interrogate him harshly.

2. His Works and Contemplation

Contemplation is an English word. If one is contemplating, there must be something he contemplates for. In Christian tradition there is the term contemplative for the members of a group to unite in one unity of life with one main duty of praying. They are said to be

contemplative because their main duty is praying. In Javanese there is the term *nyepi, bertapa*, or *bersemadi* usually in a quiet place and isolated from the noise. In that place one contemplates and concentrates his mind to find something he is longing for.

A work of literature as a means of expressing the experiences of life of someone (the writer/poet) often presents the behaviour of a character, events, situations, and experiences appealing to the reader to be involved in thinking, feeling, hearing, seeing intensively and deeply in the plot of the work he is reading.

Springing from the concept of expressionism a work of literature can function as a medium to express an opinion, feeling, will, and all feelings of the writer/poet. It is in line with what Putu Wijaya said how implicit a work of literature (drama) certainly there is something the writer to communicate to the reader.

The thing the writer to communicate to the reader can be an idea, plan, feeling, situation, and the like, and the way to communicate can be in various forms: explicitly like the tradition of old Malay, symbolically like the works of literature during Japanese Occupation, dogmatically like the works of Hamka, problematically like the works of AA. Navis, and communicatively and individually like the works of a group of writers of a certain period.

The works of Tagore, Matsnawi, Khalil Gibran, Muhammad Iqbal, Amir Hamzah, Leon Agusta, and Rendra are lyrical and philosophic containing something they want to communicate to the readers.

Kooong, a novel by Iwan Simatupang invites the readers to contemplate on the behaviour of Sastro many people thought strange by making an adventure only to find a turtle dove unable to kooong (sing beautifully), whereas actually he can afford to buy the better one with his wealth. However in one's life one tends to find something. In Christian tradition man is created to live happily, but the man often falls into getting the false happiness. When does one stop seeking something? Man always seeks something during all his life, and what he seeks sometimes is strange and meaningless.

Harimau! Harimau!, a novel by Mochtar Lubis invites the reader to contemplate on the meeting of tigers disturbing, threatening, and springing upon them to make their lives uneasy, feeling threatened. Their stubbornness and courage may be able to beat and kill the tigers facing him, but what about the tigers living in his hearts.

According to the statement of Luxemburg formulated by Abram as the receptive approach, the contemplation by the reader will present interpretations. It is possible because in applying the structural, rhetoric, and stylistic techniques the writer still spare the room for the reader to give the meaning, such as the unfinished story, mysterious character, open ended plot employed by the writer. This enables the reader to be active in reading (Luxemburg, 1986:64)

Formerly a short story was said to be a humorous story, pioneered by M. Kasim and Suman HS. According to Sumardjo, their pioneering has no followers. It turns out the benchmark by Hamka and Idrus to present the contemporary social problems and that by Armjin Pane to present the human problems psychologically has many followers. Up to now, many short stories still deal with the various and complex problems of life, like the ones by Seno Gumira Ajidarma.

The short stories by Seno Gumira Ajidarma if placed in the frame work by Jacob Sumarjo will come up with the third indication pioneered by Amrjin Pane. This can be seen from this works entitled such as *Bayang-bayang Elektra*, *Hidung seorang Peagawai Nwgeri*, and *Helicopter*.

This paper will reveal the contemplation in *Maria*, one of the works of Seno Gumira Ajidarma.

3. Characters

Every story, especially short story always involves a character, an imaginative figure experiencing an event or doing things in the story (Sujiman, 1988:16). The character plays an important role in a story, because the character enables the events to happen in the story. The writer employs various methods to present the characterization of the figures. William Kenney divides the presentation into two: the discursive and dramatic methods (Kenney, 1966:34). Whereas S. Tasrif SH divides it into 7 methods: physical description (describing the physical appearance of the character), portrayal of thought stream or of conscious thought (portraying the thought of a character or what happens in his mind), reaction to events (how the character reacts to an event), direct author analysis (the writer directly describes the behaviour of the character), discussion of environment (portraying the environment around the character), reaction of others to the character (how the other characters think about the character), and conversation of other characters (the other characters are discussing the main character). Implicitly the reader will get a certain impression of the main character (Tasrif, 1981:18)

In terms of the intensity of the involvement, characters can be divided into two: the main and the sub characters. The main character is an imaginative figure having a high intensity in the story, and the sub character is the existence of the character supporting the main character.

Thus, to identify the main character from the sub character is to see how high his intensity is involved in the story.

4. Understanding *Maria*, a Short Story by Seno Gumira Ajidarma.

In *Maria*, Seno invites the reader to contemplate on the existence of a child, of the relation between the child and his mother, the existence of the mother, and how to think and greet someone.

The characters in *Maria* are Maria, Evangelista, and Antonio. Seno employs various techniques of presentation to reveal the whole characterization of the three characters clearly identical. For example in revealing the fate of Maria he describes it as follows:

Kehilangan Gregorio menghancurkan hatinya, kepergian Ricardo mematikan jiwanya, dan kehilangan Antonio menghancurkan kerja otaknya.

(the loss of Gregorio destroys her heart, the going-away of Ricardo kills her soul, and the loss of Antonio destroys her mental work)

So solid and effective is the portraying of the characterization by Seno. The solid expressions appeal the reader to contemplate on the events falling on Maria, Evangelista, and Antonio. Through the characters involved in the events Seno presents it so precisely and identically that he is able to pass his implied message effectively to the reader. In this short story, Seno discusses the relation between the human beings horizontally, and the real problem in depth and straightly.

In this short story Maria is waiting for the coming of Antonio, her son who has been away for about a year. Maria imagines how Antonio, who is naughty, lively, knowing only playing guitar, and stubborn, will run back home and kiss her while calling her *Mama*. Maria has to be separated from her husband and two children, because of the accident falling on her family. Now only Evangelista, her sister accompanies her. Maria is so sure that Antonio is still alive and one day will come back to her. The loyalty of Evangelist to accompany her is a great misfortune.

In the novel the writer does not mention what accident falling on her and other families, yet the accident seems great. However, it can be assumed that the accident brings a great change on the family life of Maria. The social or physical revolution has fallen greatly on the family of Maria. Here is the quotation:

“Maria tahu ia akan menyediakan segelas bir yang dingin untuk buah hatinya, menyediakan pakaian terbersih baginya, dan ia akan minta Antonio bercerita. Tentu, tentu Maria tidak akan minta Antonio bercerita tentang darah dan air mata itu, cerita duka semacam itu sudah tidak menarik lagi, karena sudah menjadi bagian hidup sehari-hari.

(Maria realizes that she would give Antonio, her beloved son, a glass of cold beer, the cleanest clothes for him, and would ask Antonio to tell a story. Of course, Maria would not ask Antonio to tell about the blood and tears, because that kind of story is not interesting anymore, and it has already become part of her daily life).

The habit of drinking cold beer is not the habit of the lower class people. The quotation shows how strong the habit has planted deeply since the time of prosperity. Yet, the people tend to preserve that habit in their life that has already changed. The daily burden of life is presented through the quotation, and the sad story has become a part of the daily life. Becoming a part of daily life means conditioning the family to attempt to overcome the problem. Maria further says:

“Perasaan tertindas, terlecehkan, dan terhina itu Maria tidak ingin mendengarnya lagi. Perasaan yang sudah terlalu lama hanya membangkitkan perlawanan dan tiada lain selain perlawanan, dari masa ke masa, yang selalu dan selalu dibayar dengan kesakitan dan nyawa, o betapa mahalnya harga yang harus dibayar supaya bisa berjalan dengan kepala tegak itu, semua itu Maria tak ingin mendengarnya”.

(Maria does not want to hear the feeling of oppressed, despised, and miserable anymore. The feeling has only long made her to fight, and no more than to fight from time to time, and she has repeatedly to pay with suffering and soul. O, how expensive she has to pay the price in order that she is able to walk erect. Maria does not want to hear it anymore)

In the quotation it seems there is something to struggle for by the family of Maria, that “being able to walk erect”. Symbolically and imaginatively Seno employs the expression to express the oppression falling on the families of Maria and the others. Their struggle is to free themselves from the oppression. That is the cause of the separation of Maria from her husband and two children.

The hope and pray of Maria are answered. Antonio really comes back home.

“Mama! Aku telah kembali Mama!”
(Mother! I am coming home, Mother!)

But Maria does not show her reaction. She only rustles.

“Antonio?”
(Antonio?)
“Ya, aku Antonio, Antonimu! Mama tidak mengenalku?”
(Yes, I am Antonio, your Antonio! Mother does not recognize me?)

Maria does not recognize Antonio, who knelt in front of Maria, as her handsome and longing Antonio, anymore like the Antonio in her imagination. Seno portrayed Antonio kneeling in front of Maria analytically as follows:

“...kepalanya penuh pitak seperti hutan gundul, dengan cukuran yang tidak teratur. Matanya yang sebelah kiri tertutup sedangkan yang kanan meskipun masih terbuka tapi juga terpicing-picing setengah tertutup. Wajahnya penuh dengan bekas luka, codet yang diagonal dari kanan ke kiri, dari kiri ke kanan. Ia tidak bertelinga. Hidungnya seperti pindah dari tempatnya semula. Mulutnya mencong dan gigi depannya ompong. Bajunya lusuh, tidak bersandal, dan segenap kuku jari-jari kaki dan tangannya tampak telah dicabut dengan paksa. Ia sangat kurus dan kering. Hanya dari matanya yang setengah terpicing-picing itu terlihat tanda kehidupan yang membara – selebihnya adalah rongsokan”.

(His head is full of scars like a bare wood, with uneven shave. His left eye is closed, whereas right eye, even though still open, is winking half closed. His face is full of scars with a diagonal cross from right to left and from left to right. His nose seems moving from its former place. His mouth is crooked with no teeth. His clothes are dirty, he wears no sandal, the nails of his feet and hands seem to have been pulled out forcibly. He is this and dry. Yet, from his half winking eye gives the sign of strong spirit – the rest is worn out)

Imaginatively Seno invites the reader to be with a figure of human being who has endured the suffering from the torture beyond the endurance a man could bear. Seno describes it analytically and descriptively. Yet, it shows that Antonio is successful in fighting against freight and torture, even though he has to pay highly with his broken body causing other heavier burden upon him.

Maria and Evangelista has not recognized him as Antonio, and they drive him away. Symbolically, here, Seno indicates that recognizing someone is not enough to rely on the power of eyes illusion and hallucination may effect, and the physical appearance that may change from time to time.

Implicitly, Seno invites the reader to contemplate on recognizing someone not enough through the eye of the sense, but the eye of the heart, and greeting someone not enough through the words of the mouth, but the words of the heart. Driven away by Maria and Evangelista, Antonio has no other choice than to leave. Yet before leaving Antonio says to Maria and Evangelista as the following:

“Mama, Evangelista, aku akan pergi, meski aku tak tahu tempat yang paling baik untuk kembali selain ke mari. Barangkali memang belum waktunya bagi kita untuk merasa bahagia. Rupa-rupanya bumi ini memang sudah bukan rumah kita lagi. Kalian tidak mengenalku, tapi percayalah tidak Antonio lain selain aku yang menjadi keluargamu. Selamat tinggal. Jagalah dia Evangelista, atas nama cintamu padanya”.

(Mother, Evangelista, I will go, even though I do not know the better place to come back then here. May be the time has not come for us to feel happy. It seems this earth is not our home anymore. You do not recognize me, but believe me there is no other Antonio than me who becomes part of your family. Good bye. Take care of her Evangelista, for the sake of your love to her).

Antonio becomes the victim of egoism of Maria who still retains the image of the good and handsome Antonio. Antonio has no other choice than to leave, and does not feel despised and desperate. The hope to live happily together still is reflected in what he says:

“Barangkali memang belum waktunya bagi kita untuk merasa bahagia”.

(May be the time has not come for us to feel happy)

The tone of his voice is so optimistic through the rest of his hope. The happiness he has been longing for is not impossible to get, it only has not yet come. It is this that enables Antonio still keeps on living with high spirit. Antonio still has a hope, the beautiful perspective of life in his horizon of hope.

Driven and tortured, Antonio does not want to take revenge, but he loves them sincerely, and never speaks a single dirty word to them. On the other hands, Antonio hopes that Maria, his mother is always safe and in good health, like what he says:

“Selamat tinggal, jagalah dia Evangelista, atas nama cintamu padanya”.

(Good bye, take care of her Evangelista, for the sake of your love to her)

Even though driven, Antonio shows his modesty, and hopes Evangelista to take care of Maria, her mother for the sake of her love to his mother. Antonio does not want to force Maria, his mother to be effected to recognize him.

5. Message Implied in *Maria* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma

The message seems clearly expressed through the characters, as the following:

1. Maria is a mother who, unconsciously, wants to exploit her son to fulfill her dream, even though, at the end, her hopes become deceit entertainment.

Through the character of Maria, Seno invites the reader to recognize someone not only rely on the eye of the sense that illusion and hallucination may affect. Further Seno invites the reader to recognize someone not only through the words of the mouth, but also through the words of the heart. Through the character of Maria, Seno invites the reader not to keep the deceit images that finally results in tragedy and hurts the feeling deeply.

2. Evangelista is the character that is able to think more clearly than her sister.

The clarity of her mind shows that she is rational, because she does not have the stronger emotional relation with Antonio than Maria, her sister, and she is sure that Antonio has died,

so that she does not believe anymore that the man in front of her is Antonio, her nephew. Evangelista only uses her eyes of sense, not eyes of the heart in greeting Antonio.

Through this character Seno invites the reader to make decision in rush, but in making decision we have to think of the alternatives clearly, to confront it to other possibilities to get the reliable decision.

3. Both Maria and Evangelista do not want to see what lies behind the broken and rotten physical figure, do not want to see the great spirit of Antonio that oppressor has treated cruelly, because Maria still keeps the good and handsome image of Antonio.

Through this character Seno invites the reader to be realistic, brave to face the sad and torturing life.

4. Antonio is consistent, his life realistic, even though he has to risk his life. Antonio is successful in facing the freight, because he is sure that what they have destroyed is only his body, but the terror and heavy torture can not destroy his spirit.

The love of Antonio toward Maria, his mother is never faded, even though Maria treats, rejects, and even drives him away. Antonio still loves Maria, his mother and still hopes that one day the time will come to be happy together. Antonio does not want Maria, his mother that he loves sincerely, becomes sad.

Through this character, Seno invites the reader to realize how high the value of honesty, prestige, and love is. For the sake of all of these, Antonio is brave to face the cruel torture on his body and soul. His soul is depressed, body tortured and broken. His suffering is added by the reject and drive-away by Maria, his mother, and Evangelista, his aunt.

6. Conclusion

This is the study on the world of contemplation by Seno. Solidly, the expressions are employed effectively. The behaviour of the characters are presented to invite the reader to contemplate on the right of a child, of a parent, of love, and of suffering. Hopefully, these can be the mirror and means for the reader to cleanse himself from the shyness they experience. Seeing the tragedy falling on the character we can make a decision in facing the trial and challenge sensibly and wisely.

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