Logika Bulan dalam Fiksi
- Hermawan Suro

Musik dan Komposisi Ditinjau dari Konsep Interkultural "New Age" "World Music"
- Dieter Mack

Melacak "Asal-Usul" Harry Roesly
- Iep Saepulloh Fitah

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Penanggungjawab
Ramlan, Drs., M.Sn.

Pemimpin Redaksi
Senny Suzanna Alwasilah, SS., M.Pd.

 Wakil Pemimpin Redaksi
Anne Nurfarina, Dra., M.Sn.
Iwan Dudy Gunawan, SS., M.Pd.

Penyunting Ahli
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Didi (Petet) Widiatmoko (Institut Kesenian Jakarta)
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Drs. Komar Hanafie (Universitas Pasundan)

Penyunting Pelaksana
Drs. Bambang Subarnas, M.Sn.
Sulaeman Abadi, S.Pd.

Setting & Lay Out
Adi Surahman, S.Sn.
Boy Irwan Budiman, S.Sn.

Sekretariat
Fakultas Ilmu Seni dan Sastra
Jl. Dr. Setiabudhi No. 193 Bandung
Tlp. (022) 2009513 Fax. (022) 2009513 e-mail: linguart@telkom.net

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THEORY OF WRITING? WHY SHOULD?
(A Case Study of Indonesian Fiction Writers)

Oleh
Seny Suzanna Alwasilah

Abstrak
Gagasan untuk menulis cerita bervariasi dari satu pengarang ke pengarang lain. Beberapa pengarang mempunyai gagasan untuk menulis cerita saat berada pada situasi yang berbeda dari kehidupan mereka, saat melihat rutinitas pasar, saat main di jalanan atau bahkan saat mengumati sesuatu yang biasa terjadi dalam kehidupan. Setiap pengarang mempunyai kekhasan masing-masing dalam menyajikan sebuah cerita. Terkadang sebuah cerita yang diangkat dari kejadian kehidupan yang dianggap wajar dan biasa, setelah tertuang pada sebuah cerita mampu membuat pembaca menangis atau tertawa terbahak-bahak. Dari sinilah kependanaan seorang pengarang meramu cerita sedemikian rupa sehingga berbekas di hati pembaca.

Key words: fiction, theory, creative process

Writing is a form of communication and a process of transferring ideas into a product of writing; translating out thought into language. Through writing we are able to share ideas, arouse feelings, persuade and convince other people. We are able to discover and articulate ideas in ways that only writing makes possible (White and Arndt, 1991). Writing is different from speaking, because writing involves work. For most purposes, to write the way one talk is not to write at all. In this case, McRoberts (1981) says that:

The difference between using talk and using writing to communicate is like the difference between snakes-and-ladders and chess: their objective is essentially the same but the degree of control, thought and style is radically different (1981:5).

In connection with writing, Byrne (1978:1) also mentions that writing requires some conscious mental efforts. Although when we write we use graphic symbols, that is, combinations of letters which relate to the sound, actually writing is more than the production of graphics symbols. The symbols have to be arranged according to a certain con-

vention, to form words, and words have to be arranged into sentences. Writing is one of the tools of communication. The writer is the sender of the message, the product of writing is the message and the reader is the receiver of the message. The act of writing initiates when the writer needs to inform or to send messages to others, to impart knowledge or to express ideas.

Different from the spoken language, writing has to be self explanatory without any further help because it involves the readers who are not physically present. Byrne (1979:1) suggests that:

...because our reader is not present, and in some cases may not even be known to us, we have to ensure that what we write can be understood without any further help from us. This is the reason for the care we have to take with writing. It is by the organization of our sentence into text, into a coherent whole which is as explicit as possible and complete in itself, that we are able to communicate successfully with our readers through the medium of writing (1979:1).
In accordance with what has been mentioned by Byrne, Green, and Morgan (1981) suggest that in writing, the writer must attempt to anticipate and forestall possible confusion at every step, because the reader is in no position to ask for explanations. It is obvious that to communicate by writing we have to write briefly anything we want to explain. McRoberts (1981) explores that the quality of the writing depends on the richness of source of material such as listening to people, watching good television programs, listening to the radio programs and talking to others constantly.

I. Objectives of the Research

Considering the problems discussed above, the objectives of the research are formulated as follows:

- To identify sources of ideas from which fiction writers develop their works.
- To describe the length of preparation required before the writer can write and finish their works.
- To identify the problems experienced by writers.
- To elaborate whether the writers need talent to be a fiction writer.
- To analyze whether the writers need theory of writing to write a fiction.
- To describe the intellectual sophistication needed for creative writing.

II. Significances of the Research

It is shared by many writers that to be a writer of creative writing one needs talent or aesthetic sense or feeling. Even though the process of learning plays a very important role, talent still contributes more or less in the process of writing.

In writing fiction, the writers usually use their imagination in the context of the story. They mention that imagination to produce fiction sometimes emerges uncontrollably. Besides counting on imagination, the writer should have a broad horizon of thought, read more and update knowledge in order that their writing becomes perfect. By conducting the present research, the emergence of ideas, the time preparation to write, the problems, and the intellectual sophistication are needed by them will be known.

III. Design of the Research

The present study investigates the creative process of writing fictions and poems. The respondents are prolific writers. The study was conducted using a case study where I. as the researcher, constitute the major instrument of the research.

The instrument:
The instrument used in this research is interview schedules.

The respondents:
The respondents of the present research are: YS, NLA, and OS.

The data:
The data of the research consist of:

1. Published short stories, and poem written by the respondents.
   - YS’s short stories is *Hari Esok buat Kami* (= Tomorrow for us).
   - NLA’s poem is *Dalam Kereta tak Berjurus* (= In the Train Going Nowhere).
   - OS’s short stories is *Monte Cristo di Kamar Kuring* (= Monte Cristo in My Room).

2. Transcription of the interviews.

IV. How Writing Emerges

The creative process to write fiction varies from one writer to another. But mostly, the writers do not wait for the ideas to come but instead, they search or look for the ideas. Previous paradigm seems to believe that the idea to write is to be waited. It was said that by sitting while smoking the ideas to write will emerge. But along with the development of thinking, the writers think that they have to look for the ideas.

Some writers clarify that by walking along the street, looking at the surroundings, observing what is happening in the market, along the river, or among people who are
struggling in the corner of the street can help generate ideas to write.

One writer has testified that the creative process to write started when once he went to the library to kill time. At the time he read various books, magazines, and newspapers. After all, he started to write words, paragraphs and finally he tried to write a fiction. And surprisingly five day after he sent his first fiction to one of the mass media in town, the fiction was published. He said that to be a writer was not his wish, but the first experience of being published is something worthy for him. He is now well known as a fiction writer.

One of the respondents mentioned that the creative process to write comes from the accumulation of her experience since her childhood. She remembers that when she was little, she was surrounded by situations full of mystery and fantasy. In the middle of the night she often heard the sounds of the trains passing near her house and the sound of the wind that dose down the hills.

The mountains which surrounded her village were full of mystery about the graves of scared people and heroes who ran to the mountain and never come back. Her parents often told about a genie occupying the dark and quiet place, and the myths about old woman who sucked children’s blood.

When she started going elementary school, she liked to read comic books, newspapers, even old newspapers she found anywhere. She also used to tell stories to her brothers. She believes all those experiences have sparked her drive to write. Especially when she went to university, her tendency to be a writer seems obvious.

From the differences of the emerging ideas and creative process described above, I can tell that all writers have different experiences which make them become writers. Bickham (1992) clarifies that one doesn’t have to be smart to write wonderful fiction if one is sensitive and caring enough. But I can see that the important thing to be a writer is that one has to read a lot. Searching the ideas will vary to one another, but without reading different sources, I believe that the writers will not develop and enrich their horizon of thinking.

V. Do We Need Theory of Writing?

From the literature we can find different writing theories put forwards by some experts of writing, but a question arises among the writers themselves whether they need those kinds of theories. Sumardjo (1997) himself as a writer, mentions that the literary products have existed long before the theory of writing was formulated. In other words, to be a writer one does not need any formal theory of writing. Theory of writing does not make productive writers, as a matter of fact; it only leads them into productivity.

The interview with the respondents revealed that they have never read theories of writing as they block their creativity to write. However one writer has told that to read theories of writing is important, although they do not improve the ability to express the ideas but at least one knows good criteria to write.

As one learn to swim, instead of merely listening to the instruction, he needs his own experience to plunge himself into a water. But by listening the instructions he knows free style, breast stroke, relay race, back stroke, butterfly styles and many more.

It seems writers have different arguments whether one needs or does not need theories of writing, but I agree with Sumardjo (1997) that novice writers probably need theories of writing while the experts do not need them anymore since their writing insight is already established.

VI. Overview of the Methodology

Patton (1980) suggests that qualitative methods consist of three kinds of data collection: in depth, open ended interviews, direct observation, and written documents. The data from interviews consist of direct quotations from people about their experience, opinions, feeling and knowledge. In addition, Goetz (1984:2) clarifies that ethnography is a process, a way of studying human life.
In this research I used qualitative method and conducted in-depth, open ended interviews, direct observations of one of the respondents, and also analyzed written works consisting of three short stories and a poem written by the respondents. In this case I agree with Goetz that ethnography is a way of studying human life since in my research, I was studying all the respondents in many ways. I got closer to them and knew most of their problems and activities because almost every single day I was with them, interviewing them and observing their activities at their homes and other places. Then I concluded that doing ethnographic study is learning people’s feelings, experiences, knowledge and opinions.

VII. Research Design

The main objective of this research was to describe the creative process of creative writing, especially in writing short stories and poems. This study allowed the researchers to obtain data most by using interview instruments. All interviews were conducted using a person-to-person interview mode and were recorded and then transcribed into written forms. All data were analyzed.

Written works are also part of this inquiry to enrich the data and to ensure that all respondents have produced writing products. In this case, I have chosen three writing products published in the mass media.

The involvement of the respondents in this study has an important role and worth. Without them, I probably would have problems conducting this inquiry as Maxwell (1996) suggest that research design is like philosophy of life; no one is without one, but some people are more aware of theirs, and thus able to make more informed and consistent decisions.

VIII. Respondents

This qualitative study investigated a creative process in creative writing. In this case, the creative writing is limited to short stories and poetry. In doing the research I collected the data of three fiction writers namely YS, NLA, and OS, by interviewing them, observing them and analyzing their published writing products.

The interviews were tape recorded. I, as a researcher have tried to be close to the respondents in terms of a researcher-respondents relationship to collect as much information from them. As Spradley (1979) mentions that rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people. And I agree with what Spradley has said since I have got many things and learned a lot from them.

Karnil (1985:51) says that in descriptive studies, the investigator decides the questions to be answered and the categories in which to distribute observations prior to data collection. Goetz (1984: 4) also clarifies that deductive researchers hope to find data to match a theory, inductive researchers hope to find a theory that explains their data. That would be true, since the questions I have prepared have match the purpose of the study which is studying how, when, and why they become writers of creative writing and producing more than a hundred stories. I got the answer from the interviews.

IX. Data Collection

A. Phases of Data Collection

The data was collected from February to October 2001. The data consist of transcriptions of interviews and transcriptions of product analysis.

B. Interview

Interview actually is a conversation between researcher and the respondent. As mentioned by Meriam (1988:71), that interview is a conversation with a purpose. Usually, interview is a person to person encounter which is one giving information to another. In this case, the information given by the respondents is the information needed by the researcher as research data. Somehow, the information is a respondent’s schemata about the matter. Let’s say, the researcher wants to read respondent’s mind.

Findings

The Process of Writing

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Category 1: The Creative Process in Writing Fiction

Writing fiction is inspired by social life, social reality, and empirical. By watching someone’s melancholic face, the writer suddenly thinks of the situations behind his sad face, the background of his family, and then the writer can create a fiction about a melancholic life.

The idea to write can be shaped from the pattern of thinking. The writer can organize the ideas using academic and experiment patterns. The idea to write does not emerge from midnight meditating in the silent place but from the richness of thought and reading literature.

Emerging feelings of missing the mother, father, previous teachers, and anybody the writers loves can create a short story. By thinking of parents, and teachers the writer immediately thinks of the ways they teach the philosophy of life.

Any condition is supposed to generate the ideas to write. Ideas to write will spark when the writer sees the situation that touches imagination. They cannot wait for the idea to emerge but they have to continuously search it. They have to set themselves to catch the idea anytime, any place, and any condition. They have to make a condition where they are always ready to get ideas by reading a lot and seeing the real life situation. As writers they have to observe carefully situations including a small thing that has never been observed by other people.

Category 2: The intuition which is encouraging to write

For ordinary people, the falling leaves could not mean anything, but for certain writers, the falling leaves and the sound of the wind can mean different things. It can create imagination. An ordinary moment can be switched into something extravagant. When seeing an old man sitting in the station waiting for the train for instance, suddenly the writer catches a mystery behind his face, a long journey of his life. And it could be created to become a novel. The intuition differentiates the writer who has beauty of feeling from ordinary people.

Category 3: The best situations to write

To write fiction there needs to be a certain time, in the middle of the night where nobody is bugging around. Listening to slow instrumental music and smoking encourages the flow of imagination.

Whether the situation around is noisy, the writers have to keep writing. Even the sounds of young children playing have to be an inspiration to write. If they have the mood to write, the situations around is not supposed to affect the imagination at all. They can keep writing.

Category 4: Time needed to write fiction

One to three hours is enough to write a five page long fiction, but if the writers do not have the mood to write it can take a few days, months, or even years to finish it.

Category 5: Satisfaction after writing fiction

Satisfaction after finishing a product of writing is having expelled the ideas from mind. The short story has been made will be read and appreciated by many people when it is published and in return the publisher will send payment.

They get satisfaction when they finish one literature work. It is not because of the money they will get, but it is more like delivering a baby after long pregnancy. The happiness comes from the bottom of the heart. Having earned money also make them happy, although they all know how much will they get from one published work.

Category 6: The (un)importance of theory writing

Reading theory of writing decreases the productivity of writing. Creativity is blocked by the rules. Reading a theory of writing make them dizzy. It is better to read articles about literature than reading tips on how to write. To learn the theory of writing is by
reading the fiction written by experts. In accordance with the respondents' statements, Sumardjo (1997) mentioned that: "Pengarang Amerika William Faulkner menasehatkan bahwa teori itu hanya penting bagi mereka yang baru mula, tetapi kurang bagi mereka yang sudah besar. Teori hanya sekedar pegangan dalam menulis. Dalam menulis sendiri tak perlu ingat teori. Menulislah seperti berenang." He also states that: "Bagi mereka yang baru mulai menulis, teori perlu dibaca sebagai pegangan. Tetapi harus diingat bahwa teori itu adalah jalan raya. Artinya itu adalah jalan yang telah dilalui banyak orang sebelumnya. Sebab teori menulis memang berasal dari tulisan-tulisan itu sendiri. Teori cerita pendek berasal dari mempelajari cerita-cerita pendek sebelumnya. Teori baru ada setelah cerita pendek itu sendiri ada jadi cerita pendek yang mula-mula lahir bukan karena teori, tetapi karena bakat-bakat pemulisanya."

Category 7: The role of talent in writing fiction

The fiction writer has to have a talent because not all people at the same level of knowledge and education have encouragement to write fiction. Talent and a process of learning play an important role. The talent can be detected when they are surrounded by the condition which did not influence them to write, but they wonder why they want to write fiction. If then later on they become writers, it is not only because they have talent but also learned, read literature theories and works, magazines, newspapers and so on. That is a process of learning.

Category 8: The obstacles and the problems is writing fiction and the solutions

The noisy situation and bad feeling can distract the mood to write. Anger will make them stop writing. By going for a walk to silent places, they will be able to find the lost imagination. Happy feeling do not necessarily lead to a good piece of writing. Thinking of people struggling for money on the street will raise emotions and imagination.

Category 9: The process of editing

They do not know whether it is strength or weakness of writers who do not reread and edit their works. But it happened to two respondents. In the line with the respondents' statements, Sumardjo (1997) clarifies that: "Menulis merupakan suatu proses melahirkan tulisan yang heris gagasan Rangkang yang melakukannya secara spontan, tetapi juga ada yang berkali-kali mengadakan koreksi dan penulisan kembali."

Category 10: Intellectual Sophistication

It is a must for all writers to have intellectual sophistication since it will reflect in their product of writing. The quality of the fiction will be seen from the choice of diction, the narration, the conflict created, the smooth flow of the story and many more. To have such a talent, the writers have to be well educated.

X. Discussion

The Process of Writing

From the interviews I have conducted, all of the writers respondents mentioned that the idea to write fiction is supposed to be searched by them. Midnight meditating is not the right thing to find ideas. The writers have to create conditions when they are always ready to get the ideas by, for example reading many sources not only literary products but also news, feature articles, and other. Ordinary people are not sensitive enough to see the situations from different points of view. On the contrary, by using and creating imagination writers can see something usual from a different paradigm to write a story. For instance, by watching falling leaves or listening the sound, writers can create a story. One of the respondents mentioned that: "Pada suat kita melihat seseorang yang menampikan sosok kepribadian, maka akan terbayang latar belakang kehidupan sehariharinya, sehingga dari melihat wajahnya secara intuitif kita memiliki imajinasi mengenai..."
suatu kehidupan yang melankolis. Suasana seperti itu mendorong kita untuk menulis suatu kehidupan yang menyedihkan.

All of the respondents clarified that they need one to three hours to write one single story, even though sometimes one product can be produced in a month or even a year, and sometimes it is left unfinished. This happens because the writers think that the story is not interesting anymore to continue. The situation can also distract the mood to continue writing. YS clarified that:

"Tiga jam cukup bagi saya untuk menulis cerpen, atau kalau sedang produktif dalam sehari bisa menyelesaikan novel kanak-kanak yang seratus halaman". While OS mentioned that:

"Sebuah karangan itu selesai tidak ada jangka waktuuny, jadi dari satu sampai jam enam itu sudah punya satu karangan. Satu jam kira-kira NLA said: "Memulis puisi ada yang sejam atau dua jam, ada yang berhari-hari, tergantung idenya. Tingkat kesulitannya dan suasana hati. Bisa banyak faktor."

Usually writers need a silent situation and good feeling to write, notwithstanding when the mood to write emerges any situation does not influence them. One of the respondents argued that:

"Suasana yang enak itu kasusnya individu saja. Saya senang merokok sambil mendengarkan musik yang slow atau instrumentalis. Biasanya hati itu yang mendorong aliran imajinasi kita sehingga akan menghasilkan yagusar baru atau kalimat-kalimat baru. Suasana sepi pada tengah malam akan memungkinkan kita untuk menulis dibandingkan siang hari dengan udara yang gerah.

They get satisfaction after finishing the product of writing because they have expelled the ideas from minds, and if is published, it will be read and appreciated by many people. Moreover hey will get money from a publisher, although the appreciation from the publisher is not really a good deal. NLA suggested that:

"Yang pasti kepuasan hati, materi yang lumayan tapi untuk di kita kan honor penulis itu ya gimana lah.

In writing fiction, they need "a teacher" to be a good writer. Some of the respondents said that theory of writing can be a teacher but it can also distract creativity. For them, by reading a quality product they will learn more. OS thinks that he does not need theory of writing as he asserted that: "Wah kalau baca teori pusing saya. Yang popular pun misalnya karya Arswendo Armowiloto "Mengangkat itu gampang", maaf ya menurut saya bullshit, omong kosong. Seperti itu saya enggak percaya." So far NLA thinks that she learns a theory from the products written by experts as she said that: "Saya belajar dari buku-buku yang ditulis oleh tokoh-tokoh sastra."

Having a talent to write the writer can produce quality products because not all people of the same level of education have such talent. Talent can be detected when ordinary people take the surrounding for granted while talented people can catch something unusual, significant, or extraordinary from it as it mentioned by NLA that:


In line with that statement, Sumardjo (1997) suggests that:

"Penulis itu hanya mamusia biasa, entah itu bernama penyair, dramawan, atau novelis. Memang harus diakui baik itu ada tapi Cuma 10% sedang 90% lainnya adalah wajar dan hasil pendidikan Siapapun bisa menjadi penulis asal dia mau melalui diri. Seorang bekas narapidana Henry Charler yang selama hidupnya tidak pernah menulis, pada suatu hari tergerak untuk menuliskan kisah hidupnya, dan hasilnya sebah buku berjudul 'papilon' yang laris di seluruh dunia.
XI. Conclusions

In connection with the major research problems such as creative process in writing fiction, the (un)importance of writing theory, role of talent in writing fiction, problems faced by writers and intellectual sophistication needed by writers of fictions, I conclude them all in five major issues as follows:

1. Ideas for creative writing can come from many different sources: It can be using full imagination, walking around to find unusual things, thinking deeply on past experiences, thinking what we want to do or to be, or remembering other people’s experiences. After having the idea to write, the writers think about the conflicts, settings, characters, plots, and many more, depending on the situation and mood to write.

2. Theory ranges from the most abstract to the most practical. The writers have their own theory of writing, but they are not necessarily able to state it explicitly. Theory of writing can help writers of fiction in many ways: it improves the horizon of thinking and knowledge in writing fiction. To learn the theory of writing is not meant merely to read the source of theory, but also to read the products of writing written by experts. For established writers, learning theory of writing is nonsense since they already have those kinds of knowledge in their head, but for novice writers it is strongly recommended to read the writing theory written by experts.

3. Talent plays an important role in writing fiction. Talent can manifest as having such a beauty of feeling, thinking unusual things that others do not even think about, and get easily catching something that happens in daily life which others even do not care of. Talent and the process of learning are like walking side by side. Those who have talent but hardly read sources and learn new things probably will be left behind. And those who learn a lot and improve themselves in such a way will think themselves that talent is less important for them.

4. Most writers, even the experts, have so-called problems in their writing-related activities. Most problems are related to the distraction of feeling. Feeling bad, anger, sad, disappointed, or even happy distract their desire to write.

5. Intellectual sophistication is needed for fiction writers since it will reflect in the products of writing. Intellectual sophistication is meant in broadened sense of not merely having academic titles or degrees. Hanika for example, is that of those who do not have academic titles but are considered having high intellectual sophistication.

Suggestions

Some suggestions for further related research and teaching learning are offered as follows:

1. In doing this research, I missed some observations of the respondents since it was hard for me to conduct them directly. All of the respondents were doing their writing-related activities in the night or dawn, which is not an appropriate time for me to observe them. For further research, it is much better—if possible—to observe them in such a way to make the research results better.

2. For novice writers, who feel that they do not have talent in writing fiction, do not hesitate to write more because the process of learning plays an important role in developing writers.

3. For those who feel it hard generating ideas to write, find the solution by walking around. Try to use the intuition to see the usual things from different or unusual paradigm.

4. Theory of writing is supposed to be read by novice writers. Although it will not make them become a famous writer, it will lead them to ways of becoming a famous writer.

5. The problems which distract the creative process in writing can be solved by going to silent places such as beaches, mountains, or a lake to refresh the mind.

6. Intellectual sophistication is needed for a writer, since it reflects in the product of writing. But I have to underline this: that
being intellectual does not merely mean having academic degrees, but also having broad knowledge and horizon of thinking.

7. Teachers should create imagination-generating environments.

8. Theory should be taught either deductively or inductively, depending on the students.

9. Talent is not the only requirement for being a writer. Efforts are more important than talent.

10. Creativity of writing is more persona-lized than generalized. Teachers should know the student personally.

11. General knowledge should be taught as part of writing curriculum.

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*) Penulis adalah dosen mata kuliah writing di Jurusan Sastra Inggris FISS Unpas. Artikel, tematik, dan cerpennya disusun di beberapa media.