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*To the Memory of my Father,
B. M. Parnickel*

TOWARDS AN INTERPRETATION OF THE METEMPSYCHOSIS MOTIF IN WAYANG PURWA LAKONS

The ability to marvel at unusual, extraordinary and exceptional phenomena is found even among higher mammals, like monkeys, who, foreshadowing archaic rituals of human society, display a whole gamut of different reactions to such an unusual event for a monkey herd as the birth of twins (see Ivanov 1977: 32 with reference to Tikh 1970: 126-127). At the same time as the category of the natural arose in the human mind, the opposite category of the supernatural and wondrous came into being (see Shakhnovich 1971: 29, etc.). Both of these categories came to be used with equal success in communication between individuals and in the collective memory of the nations of the world, particularly with regard to folklore. Miracles, or "phenomena which we are unable to explain in accordance with the laws of nature we know", or "unusual possibilities contrary to what is expected and hardly feasible" (Dal' 1882-IV: 612), are constituted first of all by various kinds of metamorphoses and changes, including the original phenomenon of *manjing*, which is frequently depicted in the *wayang purwa* shadow-puppet theatre in Java.

In the spirit of the Hindu-Buddhist traditions which they respect, the Javanese frequently interpret *manjing* (meaning "to enter, to go in, to penetrate, to adhere, to join") as a form of incarnation. This interpretation is occasionally in keeping with the context of the relevant scenes. One example of this is provided by the *lakon Wahyu Purba Sejati*, which is available in English translation. Here, on the in-

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structions of Guru, the divine ruler of Suralaya, the souls of Rama and his brother and follower, Leksmana, together with the god Basuki (the mythical king of snakes in the puranas), leave the heavenly kingdom for the final incarnation on earth of the five aspects of the god Visnu. Consequently they enter Kresna, the ruler of Dwarawati, his brother-in-law Arjuna, and his brother Baladewa.¹

Even though sanctioned by a god, this kind of transmigration of souls is in sharp contradiction with classical Indian ideas of metempsychosis, which is inexorably determined by *karma* (a person's deeds in his previous existence) alone, as is, for instance, the spontaneous entry of the soul of the defeated insurgent, the demoniac Brajadenta, into his victor and suzerain Gatotkaca in the *lakon Kraman Pringgondani* (*Brajadenta mbalela*), or the entry of the soul of the hermit Sukrarana into the fangs of Dasamuka (Rawana) in the *lakon Sumantri ngengger*.² On the other hand, the underlying relations between *wayang purwa* and ancient Indonesian ritual and mythological categories as established by W. H. Rassers (see Rassers 1925, 1931, and in English translation, 1959: 3-61 and 95-215) support the theory that the miracle of *manjing* is also an echo of local Indonesian beliefs.

The following analysis is an attempt to discover the historical roots of *manjing* on the basis of the rendering (*wawacan*) of the *lakon Sang Bomantara* (*Bambang Sitiija*). In the choice of this particular *lakon* I was prompted not only by a personal interest in this theme as developed in several *wayang purwa lakons* and reflected in literature in Javanese and Malay (see Mervart 1973; Parnickel 1974 and 1975), but also by the fact that, as I shall try to demonstrate below, ritualistic and mythological notions of the ancient Indonesians have found a uniquely authentic expression in this *lakon*.

There is no need to relate the entire *lakon*. Suffice it to say that it belongs to the class of secondary *lakons* (*lakon carangan*), which are the furthest removed from the Sanskrit tradition, and, according to the canons of *wayang purwa* which have been so often described, tells how Bomantara, the demoniac king of Trajutrisna, attacked Kresna's capital, Dwarawati, but was killed in battle.³ In addition to Bomantara himself, we are concerned with Bambang Sitiija (Sutija in the short version given by Kats 1923: 362-363), his main opponent, the cause of his death and the object of *manjing*. Bambang Sitiija is Kresna's son by Pratiwi, the goddess of the earth. He sets out for Dwarawati hoping to show his filial affection to the father he has never met. Kresna, however, is in no hurry to recognize Bambang as his son. Bambang

must first gain victory over Bomantara, who is approaching the town. The conflict between Bomantara and Bambang ends in a hand-to-hand fight. Bomantara, apprehending that he will not be able to overcome the young man, asks him to bite him in his only vulnerable spot, his left ear. Bambang Sitija complies with this request, after which Bomantara miraculously becomes one (*umanjing*), spiritually and physically, with his victor. As a result, Bambang assumes the terrible form of Bomantara and the subjects of Trajutrisna show him obedience. He then leads the troops against his father. At the end of the *lakon*, the prince is finally recognized by Kresna, who explains to him that he has now passed all the necessary trials for his recognition as the king's son. The prince then rules Trajutrisna under the name of Bomanarakasura.

One cannot help noticing how the story of Bambang Sitija (fully in agreement with the results of Rassers' research) resembles in outline the heroic initiation myth, where the trials of the young hero, which often include a struggle against a demon, lead to his transformation into a real man. Such myths also often describe the father's (a solar or other god) persecution of his son, cruelly testing him and seeming to want to destroy him, but in the end making peace with him (Meletinskii 1976: 228). But in this case confusion is created by the *manjing* motif, which gives rise to the following questions. Why does Bambang's transformation assume the form given in the *lakon*? What was Bomantara's purpose in passing into Bambang? How was he able to do this? And finally, why is it that Bambang's transformation is preceded not by his own temporary death, as prescribed by the canons of the relevant myth, but by his adversary's death? It is impossible to answer these questions without turning to an ancient stratum of religious notions and archaic ritual practices which were abandoned by the Javanese long ago, but which survived among some neighbouring related peoples until comparatively recent times.

Bomantara's merging with Bambang Sitija is described as *umanjing sajiwaraga*. Let us first consider the first component which Bambang took from his dead enemy. The Modern Javanese word *jiwa*, its equivalent Old Javanese *yatma*, occurring a line further down in our *wawacan*, and the more widespread Modern Javanese synonym *nyawa*, are all designations for the soul, the human spirit, psyche or *anima*, which leaves the body at the moment of death (see, for example, Wilken 1884-I: 8). The *anima* was the main, decisive condition of human life, and was regarded as a powerful and vital force. In many

cultures in various parts of the world there existed the custom whereby the closest relatives of a dying person tried to take in his last breath, so as to prevent its dissolution in the environment (see, for example, Tylor 1958: 17 and Birket-Smith 1956: 391). This same conviction served as a rationalization for head-hunting, which is supposed to have been widespread in Indonesia, including Java.⁴ In killing the member of another tribe, the victor and all his relatives and fellow-tribesmen acquired the dead man's vital force. The victor also adopted the name of the dead person,⁵ which was likewise considered to be an embodiment of that same spiritual substance. In this way the head-hunter "died", identifying himself with the dead person, but at the same time was revived with new vital force and endowed with a new name (see Volhard 1939: 433-445). Since this wholly magical activity was often associated with initiation, there is reason to believe that the taking of the soul (the vital force) of a dead enemy and the adoption of his name, as recounted in the *lakon*, are closely connected with one another and go back to an ancient Indonesian initiation ritual.

This assumption is supported by the additional fact that Bambang Sitija does not kill an ordinary mortal, but the bearer of the highest power, and becomes his heir. In a context where sovereignty was considered to be divine (a widespread notion, particularly in Indonesia) the defeat or death of a king or chief, who was held to be the incarnation of a vital force important for the whole state (*mana*, the state power, etc.) was in itself irrefutable proof that the divine force, which was in a certain sense related to the notion of happiness and bliss, had left its owner and had successfully passed on to his heir (*Le roi est mort. Vive le roi!*).

In J. G. Frazer's classical work there are numerous examples of the killing of a divine king. He cites accounts given by Joao di Barros and Tomé Pires of the lawful killings of kings in Pasai. These homicides were not opposed by the subjects (see Dion 1970: 146; Pires 1944-I: 143). The ideas behind them are in no way alien to medieval Java (see Schrieke 1957: 276; Moertono 1968: 73-76) and have remained relevant up to the present time. Even Sukarno's fall was related to the fact that his "bliss" or *wahyu* (Javanese-Arabic), which was identified with a certain glow, left his house before the eyes of witnesses and allegedly entered the new president (C.D. 1974: 16-17). Thus it is only natural that the killer of a divine king is permeated with his spirit. This also happens in the *lakon Alap-alapan Surtikanti*, where Karna inherits the Ngastina throne together with the soul of the killed ruler,

and in the *lakon Parta Krama*, which ends with the spirit of the dying raja of Dwarawati passing into Kresna and with Kresna's accession to the throne of Dwarawati. It should be noted that in both of these *lakons* it is a demonic king who dies, passing on to his victor the demonic qualities necessary to a ruler (cf. de Josselin de Jong 1980: 10-12). A young hero's accession to the throne may be regarded as the concluding stage of his initiation, because, following his "inspiration", he turns from a youth into a man and acquires a man's name. Correspondingly, the puppet on the screen depicting the young Raden Suryaputra is replaced by a larger puppet of Adipati Karna in royal dress, and Prabu Kresna appears before the viewers instead of Raden Narayana.

We must now try to understand why the transformation of our hero goes so far that he acquires not only the throne and soul, but also the appearance, of his dying opponent. One need not go far to find the explanation. The solution is provided by the only way in which Boman-tara can be deprived of his life, the method he reveals to Bambang. This strange, childish, or if you wish, atavistic biting of the ear acquires its true meaning when only one imagines that the deadly bite could not have been bloodless. Thus it is a surviving ciphered sign for a Javanese spectator, that is, an echo of cannibalism which disappeared long ago in Java (cf. Varthema 1963: 196-197), but which has lived on almost to the present day in certain other parts of Indonesia (see Volhard 1939: 279-297).⁶ It represents participation in the spirit and the blood of the ritual object in every sense of the word.

This argument is supported by the particular importance attached to the ears in the local ritual practice of cannibalism. In the literature on certain Batak tribes it is noted repeatedly that during the ritual eating of live criminals the ears were consumed first, after which the *coup de grâce* was administered in the region of the heart of the punished person (see Dumont d'Urville 1848-1: 202; Boudyck-Bastiaanse 1845: 70; Jagor 1895: 324; Van Dijk 1895: 310).⁷ It is not by coincidence that it is the left ear that is bitten in this *lakon*. In the Javanese-Balinese system of classification the left side was associated with the older lineage and with demonic qualities (see Swellengrebel 1936: 30).⁸ Finally, the decisive consideration is that the underlying idea of the ritual practice of the early cultivators, i.e. cannibalism, was the identification of priest and victim (see Freidenberg 1978: 90, 93). Both were members of the community of deceased ancestors who participated invisibly in the feast (see Volhard 1939: 422-445). At the same time

the vital element, the *mana* of the victim, which was also identified with cultivated plants, passed to the feasters, who thereby provided for its continued existence (Volhard 1939: 402-405, 485-491). In this respect ritualistic cannibalism can be regarded as the most consistent expression, if not the initial basis, of notions underlying the institution of head-hunting, as well as those of human sacrifice. The supreme manifestation of human sacrifice is, of course, the sacrifice of the divine king, which symbolized the temporary death and the revival of the dead person in the form of a new harvest (see Frazer 1949: 264, etc.).

In the light of this concept we can at last explain the supposed absence of Bambang Sitiġa's death as prescribed by the rules of initiation. His eating of Bomantara's flesh signifies his ritual death and his being classed with the deceased ancestors. This concept also explains the readiness with which Bomantara tells Bambang the secret of his vulnerability. His resultant death will secure Bomantara's spirit an honourable place among the ancestors, and his vital energy and essence a worthy continuation among the living.⁹

The above leads to the conclusion that the notion of *manġing* is vital to the interpretation of our *lakon* as an initiation myth which follows the well-known mythological formula of Lévi-Strauss ($F_x/a/ : F_x/b/ \sim F_x/b/ : F_{a-1}/y/$, Lévi-Strauss 1958: 252). Bambang plays the part of the intermediary */b/*, while the active person */a/* is Bomantara, and the role of his counterpart (*a-1*) is played by Kresna. *Manġing*, moreover, is the essential and decisive condition necessary for Bambang's mediation. While it represents a definite "complication" of the *lakon* (see Kuznetsova 1977: 124-125) by making the son take up arms against his father, it simultaneously provides the solution to the main conflict, because it is Kresna's own son who faces him in the shape of the terrible Bomantara, and thus it is not difficult for them to reach an understanding.

The archaic meaning of *manġing* is not, as was noted above, understood by modern Javanese audiences. They believe Bambang's unexpected and sad disfigurement to be the result of Bomantara's magical powers. The semantics of the transformation that takes place are not lost on the Javanese audiences in essence, however. This is because ancient Javanese notions concerning metempsychosis are still widespread among peasants (one should recall in particular the belief in werewolves which is widespread in Java as well as the other islands of Indonesia). Moreover, in the *wayang* performance, which has not lost its mysterious nature for the Javanese viewer, the intention is graphically

and clearly expressed by the dying Bomantara bending down to the ground, the victor and victim merging, and finally the dead enemy appearing in the place of Bambang. This is why I presume to conclude that in its new capacity of theatrical fairy-tale mystery, *manjing* declares, as does the archaic ritual from which it has sprung, that the old and the new, the priest and the victim, the predecessor and the heir are identical,¹⁰ that life is revived, and that death is a necessary condition for its revival. To feel the very essence of this miracle one must *partake* of it, i.e. partake of the high truths of Javanese folk theatre.

NOTES

- ¹ In the process Leksmana's soul divides into two. One part, containing divine truth, enters Arjuna. The other, containing Leksmana's chastity, enters Bala-dewa together with Basuki (Brandon 1970: 149-150).
- ² I learned of these two examples, as well as a number of others, in discussions with the Indonesian politician and journalist Soerjana (at present a member of the staff of the Nekrasov Public Library in Moscow), who was kind enough to advise me while I was working on this article.
- ³ The ancient Indian tradition of the confrontation between Bhauma (Naraka) and Krishna is described in Teeuw 1946: 13-16.
- ⁴ Thus according to a Javanese-Balinese romantic poem entitled *Wangbang Wideya*, which is supposed to have been written at the end of the 16th or the beginning of the 17th century, the victors of a particular battle put the heads of the enemy princes killed in a special basket (*sangka*) and presented them to their sovereign during an appropriate ceremony (see Robson 1971: 2.78b - 79a, 3 3a). For an analogy, cf. the often-mentioned Dayak baskets.
- ⁵ Until quite recently this was the custom among certain peoples of continental Southeast Asia, the Marind-anim of West Irian, and the inhabitants of the Marshall and Marquesas islands, etc. (see Stratanovich 1978: 97-98; Wirz 1922-1925 II: 99; Vogt-1873: 312).
- ⁶ Cf. analogously the roots of the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist, as discovered with horror and astonishment by Spanish conquistadors in the human sacrifices of Mexico, and as sarcastically exposed by Leo Tolstoy in his *Resurrection* (in the scene of a celebration of the Eucharist in prison).
- ⁷ It should also be mentioned that the South Sumatran Abungs believed that severed ears contained powers equivalent to those of the entire head (see Funke 1958: 217), and that among some mountain tribes of Luzon an initiated youth would include the ears of a person he had slain among the gifts he presented to his fiancée (see Blumentritt 1884: 75). From the point of view of comparative semiotics the loss of *one* ear means that the person concerned has become asymmetric and so tends to be transferred to the category of other-world inhabitants (see Nekliudov 1979: 133-140).
- ⁸ Turning to broader parallels, many peoples of the world associate magico-religious, hierogamous functions with the left side, as well as with the male principle (see Ivanov 1977: 37-39). Compare the Maori custom whereby chiefs were supposed to eat the left eyes of enemy prisoners (see Volhard 1939: 398).

- ⁹ The dual conception of the soul's characteristics among Indonesians is considered, for example in the works of Röder (1948: 109-110), and Stöhr and Zoetmulder (1965: 173-180). The latter work refers explicitly to *Lebensseele* and *Totenseele*.
- ¹⁰ This corresponds to the modern esoteric philosophy of *wayang purwa*, which resolves all oppositions, including the opposition between the Divine Puppeteer and his puppets, human beings (see Zoetmulder 1971).

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