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IS THERE AN EASTERN WAYANG TRADITION? SOME DRAMATIS PERSONAE OF THE MURWAKALA MYTH OF THE 'EASTERN' TRADITION¹

The Murwakala is a popular Javanese myth that tells of the origin of the demon god Kala. It is performed in the puppet theatre (*wayang*) as a form of exorcism for people who have fallen victim to personal disasters such as an inauspicious birth, a grave illness, or an accident, or to an agricultural calamity such as drought or crop failure. These people are said to be impure (*sukerta*) and, unless their impurities are exorcised, to be in danger of being devoured by Kala.

In the course of my research on the Javanese *wayang* theatre, I have come across many versions of this myth (Clara van Groenendaal 1985, 1987). The bulk of these were versions from Central Java, especially from the court cities of Surakarta and Yogyakarta and their immediate surroundings. Although these myths display many mutual differences, for the most part these concern minor points. They can, in fact, be said to be the result of the influence of the unifying trend and literary tradition of the courts, especially those of Surakarta. Thus they belong to a single tradition, namely the court tradition.

Alongside this court tradition there are many other traditions, which seem to have little in common except the fact that they all differ, to a greater or lesser degree, from the court tradition. They are described (also by the performers themselves) as rather crude, popular and provincial and are grouped together as a folk-tradition.

During my research in East Java among puppeteers (*dhalang*) of this folk-tradition in 1985-1986, I came across three versions of the Murwakala myth that gave a new dimension to this tradition. I was given these versions by three *dhalang*, two of them from Jombang, a district in the interior of the western part of the Province of East Java, and the third from Banyuwangi, a coastal district in the easternmost part of the same province – hence two districts quite far apart from each other. The two Jombang *dhalang*, in fact, had never heard of their colleague from Banyuwangi, and

¹ I would like to thank those who have helped me with the research on which this article is based. PRIS in Leiden, from which I received a grant for my research in Java from 1984-1986, and LIPI in Jakarta, who sponsored me. Also Pak Sartono of DepDikBud of Jombang and his staff, who accompanied me to Ki Saribi and Ki Tiar; Pak Sampurna of DepDikBud Banyuwangi, who took me to Ki Alimi; and Mas Sudarko and Mas Sriyanto, members of the staff of ASKI (now STSI) at Surakarta, for their help with the transcriptions of the tapes. And last but not least, Ki Alimi, Ki Saribi and Ki Tiar, who graciously received us and told me their story. I am also grateful to Mrs R.L. Robson-McKillop, who kindly corrected my English.

vice versa, and they clearly had not been influenced by each other's performances. Nevertheless, their versions of the Murwakala myth had some peculiar characteristics in common which I had never come across in either the Surakarta or Yogyakarta versions of the story. All three *dhalang*, moreover, claimed to perform in what is variously known as the 'Surabaya style' (*cèngkok Surabayan*), or the 'eastern wayang way' (*cara wétan*), as opposed to the 'western wayang way' (*cara kulon*) of the courts of Surakarta and Yogyakarta, that is, the court tradition. Hence their designation 'popular' *dhalang*.

The first of the three *dhalang* in question is Ki Alimi, from the village of Soklatan in Glagah, Banyuwangi. I had met this puppeteer in 1985 but had not had an opportunity of seeing him perform at the time. Of him I have a sound-recording of the first part of a Murwakala performance in 1983. The second is Ki Saribi of Megatruh, in Jombang, whom I interviewed concerning his version of the Murwakala story in October 1985. The third *dhalang* is Ki Tiar, of the village of Bulucawur in Plandakan, also in Jombang, whom I met with the same objective a week later. The versions of these three *dhalang*, though mutually differing in many respects, all three show an emphasis on homosexuality and, at least nominally, a strong Islamic influence, which, as I have indicated elsewhere (Clara van Groenendael forthcoming), they seem to share with many other East Javanese stories. They led me to wonder whether the expression 'eastern way' of performing might imply more, after all, than the mere negative and deprecatory labels 'crude', 'less refined', or 'folk-tradition' suggest, and whether this style might have a value of its own.

To illustrate my point I will first give a résumé of the way the demon god Kala is introduced, or introduces himself, according to these three *dhalang*. I will begin with the recording of Ki Alimi of Banyuwangi.

This performance opens with the usual descriptions of the heavenly abode, Suralaya, and then goes on to narrate the origins of Kamasalah Dipati, or Kala. Later on in the story these latter passages are repeated by Kala himself when, after meeting his parents and receiving from them a list of people he is allowed to devour, he repeats what his parents have told him to his companion, Kyai Sekar Jemèk.

His speech runs as follows: 'You know, Sekar Jemèk, Nabi Kitir, the guardian of the Southern Ocean, did not err in what he told me and did not deviate from the truth concerning my origin. It appears that my "female" parent misplaced "her" jewel (*manik*, which also means "semen"), so that it fell to the depths of the ocean. I did indeed emerge from this, but it is not where I belong. According to Nabi Kitir, my mother originated from my father. Through the power of his meditation, a beautiful male being was called into being. His name was Dyah Ayu Ni Dèwi Umar. He was desired by the Lord of the 'Spirits' (= Sang Hyang Guru Dipati), and promised to submit to his embraces. Thus it came to pass that a man married a man. The consequences of this act are felt to this very day. It has led to the strange practice of a man being attracted by another man, and also to men dressing up as women. This custom originated with my mother, who was a man but behaved like a woman. Therefore she was

cursed by the Lord of the Spirits. Henceforth it will not be possible for women to be genuinely cured except with pain, which will visit them once a month.'

I will for the time being defer the question regarding the identity of the various characters mentioned here. The homosexual and transvestite characteristics are quite overt, and they even refer to still existing practices. The relation between Guru and the mother of Kala is treated more elaborately in the story of the birth of Kala as told by Ki Tiar of Bulucawur, in Jombang. This story was related to me in the course of a free interview in which I hardly ever interfered with the flow of the *dhalang*'s speech. Some conversation was taking place in a corner of the room, however, and people kept coming in and going out, while the sounds of village life, such as the chopping of wood, the crowing of some over-excited cocks, and the barking of dogs were clearly audible. The quality of the sound-recording suffered from these disturbances. The local Javanese dialect posed another problem.

Ki Tiar's narrative runs: 'Opening scene, in Suralaya, with the upper god, Sang Hyang Wenang, and his four sons, born from one egg. They are Sang Hyang Punggung, Sang Hyang Buja, Sang Hyang Kanéka and Sang Hyang Samba. Sang Hyang Wenang orders his son Kanéka to perform asceticism by letting himself float with the current of the river (*ngiliraké*) and not stopping until he has run into the "seven bends" (*pitung tikung*).² He sends his youngest son, Samba, to the graveyard, Repat Kepanasan, to pay his respects to his uncle, Sang Hyang Sudarma, and ask him for his son, Sang Hyang Umar, in marriage.

In Repat Kepanasan, Sang Hyang Samba has arrived and makes a deep bow to his uncle. After the exchange of greetings, Sang Hyang Samba states his purpose and asks for Sang Hyang Umar in marriage. Sang Hyang Sudarma is more than a little surprised, especially as his child is a boy, like Samba himself. It is not the custom of the land to marry boys to boys. Because Sang Hyang Samba persists, he finally resolves to let his son decide for himself. Sang Hyang Umar is ordered to come forth, and his father repeats Samba's proposal to take him to Jonggrinsaloka (the abode of Sang Hyang Wenang) to be married off to his cousin. Umar refuses. Sang Hyang Sudarma thereupon washes his hands of the affair and retires to the inner palace, saying that his elder brother knows best. The two cousins stay behind, quarrelling. Finally, Sang Hyang Samba tucks his cousin under his arm and flies off to Suralaya.

Scene in the air. During Samba's flight back to Suralaya with his burden, the struggle between them continues. Samba becomes so excited that he cannot contain his jewel (*manik*). It falls to the earth, and out of this union is born the goddess Sri.³ Sang Hyang Umar's loincloth is caught by the wind as he struggles to get free, and his private parts are exposed. To his utter astonishment, Sang Hyang Samba sees that Sang Hyang Umar's sex organs are changing into those of a woman. He immediately falls in love with her and wants to embrace her. Umar does not want to succumb to

² This refers to seven secret formulas, the content of which I was not told.

³ Nothing more was said on this topic.

him, and once again Samba loses his jewel. This time it falls in the water of lake Tlaga Madirda⁴, which starts boiling. From its depths a monster is born.

Because Sang Hyang Umar has now changed into a woman, she no longer has any objections to becoming Samba's spouse, and they are married. Umar's name is changed to Dèwi Uma Dipati. Sang Hyang Samba succeeds his father as Lord of Suralaya under the name Sang Hyang Pramesthi Guru. The other three sons of Sang Hyang Wenang are cursed by their father for their jealousy on account of what they consider the favouritism he is showing his youngest son. The two eldest sons are sent to the Middle World to atone for their unbecoming behaviour. Sang Hyang Punggung is changed into Togog to serve the Korawas, and Sang Hyang Buja becomes Semar, the guardian of the Pandhawas. Because he has completed his asceticism (though his wisdom is still naught), Sang Hyang Kanéka is allowed to remain in Suralaya, but is transformed into a dwarf. As Narada, he will forever be the guide and protector of his youngest brother. Thereupon he is sent by his brother to Tlaga Madirda to guard the light (*nur*) that has fallen into it. When a monster emerges from its depths and asks Narada who his father is, he shows him the way to Suralaya to find out for himself.⁵

Although Ki Tiar's version of the story displays quite a few differences with the story as related by Alimi, there are some interesting similarities. Here also we find the male origin of Kala's 'mother' and the homosexual relationship of the first couple, albeit with a more definitive outcome. In this case Umar not merely dresses as a woman and behaves as one, but is actually changed into one physically. Besides, the guardian and adviser of the monster that emerges from the water in Tiar's version is Narada, whereas in Alimi's story this role is fulfilled by Nabi Kitir. Further down I will address the question of whether the two can be identified more closely.

First, however, I will continue with the tale as told me by the third *dhalang*, Ki Saribi of Megatruh. This interview took place under the most unfavourable circumstances. The *dhalang*'s narration was frequently interrupted and he became more and more confused. Nevertheless, the points I want to draw attention to are sufficiently clear. Ki Saribi began with the story of the origin of the egg out of which Togog, Semar, Narada and Guru were born. The egg sprang from the union between Rekatawati, who was originally a man [!] named Sang Hyang Rekatadéwa, and Jabaldhak (later on also called Jabalja, a figure I have not yet been able to identify), '*sing malokat ing bumi*'(?). At this point the *dhalang* was interrupted and thereupon started his tale of origin anew, now telling a different version, however.

At the time of the primeval forest (*gung liwang-liwung*), which still had no living being residing in it, Sang Hyang Wenang ordered his two sons to meditate. The elder, Sang Hyang Tunggal, was sent to Mrepat Kepa-

⁴ Tlaga Madirda plays a central role in the Murwakala myth, both in the 'eastern' and in the 'western way', as the lake (*tlaga*) in which the cursed (*sukerta*) must immerse themselves in the course of their exorcism ritual.

nasan, the younger, Sang Hyang Alus, to the top of Mount Resik. There they must remain until such time as they received a sign from Sang Hyang Wenang. Before the appointed time, however, Sang Hyang Alus was startled by the arrival of Sang Hyang Guru, who asked him to marry him. He refused but, at the invitation of Guru, went to sit next to him. Pointing to a beautiful woman sitting in Mrepat Kepanasan, Guru disclosed that in reality she was none other than Sang Hyang Alus [that is, his real nature]. Therefore he should go and immerse himself in Tlaga Madirda [to be cleansed of his false nature], leaving his clothes behind. Through the power of meditation, Sang Hyang Alus suddenly found himself already in the lake, where he splashed around like a frog, so that the lake overflowed. He escaped and fled to his father to complain. Because it had already been ordained that Sang Hyang Alus and Sang Hyang Guru must marry, Sang Hyang Wenang changed his younger son into a woman, giving her the name Dèwi Umawati. He then told Guru to take her back to Suralaya, but to refrain from sexual union with her for the time being. First he must extinguish the light that had been lost and lay sparkling in Tlaga Madirda. Guru thereupon created the Pantibaya (evil spirits?)⁵ and sent them off to the lake, guided by Narada, to extinguish the light. They failed, discovering to their horror that the light had changed into a monster [Kala]. The Pantibaya then fled home in panic, with only Narada still keeping his vigil. At the monster's asking him whether he was his father, Narada replied that he was only his guardian. He thereupon told him to look for his father, who was the 'King of the Spirits, without form', in the heavenly abode, Suralaya. Guru, seeing the consequence of his former action, divided himself in two, one part remaining as Guru, the other part becoming Dhalang Sejati. He descended to the Middle World and became the 'chain adorned with a precious metal lock that graces Mount Repah'.

I will leave aside this last, poetic description of Guru/Dhalang Sejati, of which I do not understand the meaning. It is impossible in the scope of a brief note to go into the many interesting aspects of the versions of the Murwakala myth given above, and so to go into the philosophical and moral issues they touch upon. Nor will I be able to discuss further the issue of the bi-sexuality and transvestism of Kala's parents, or their homosexual relationship. The questions of transvestism and homosexuality will be dealt with in my forthcoming book on trance and hobby-horse dances (*jaranan*) in East Java. I will confine myself here to the question of Islamic influence as suggested by some of the names of the dramatis personae, in particular Sang Hyang Umar and Nabi Kitir.

To start with the former: why is the name 'Umar', which is an Islamic name, used for the male aspect of Dèwi Uma? Umar, or in full Umarmaya, is a well-known *wayang* character. He does not occur in the *wayang purwa* (*purwa* = 'beginning' or 'origin'), the cycle of stories to which the Murwakala myth belongs, however, but is a character of the Muslim-based plays of the *wayang Ménak* or *wayang Ambyah*. These stories are performed with the three-dimensional wooden puppets (*wayang golèk*) of

⁵ A variant of *pancabaya*, 'all kinds of danger'?

Yogyakarta and Kebumen. In these *wayang* plays Umarmaya is always present. In the Kebumen tradition, Umarmaya is described as the adviser of the hero, Amir Hamza, and is a character possessing great magical power, not lacking in humour, and prone to embarrass his master (Van der Putten 1986:76). This does not help us very much, however. Nor does his role in the Yogyakarta Ménak tradition. Although Umarmaya does sometimes appear here as a woman (in the play Prabu Rara (Lara), for instance), and has some connection with water, changing into a lake to trick Queen Rara's female minister out of the magic weapon he is after (Seltmann 1980:46), he can in no way be likened to the male aspect of the Hindu-Javanese Dèwi Uma. Does the second part of this Islamic hero's name perhaps provide a better clue? Maya is one of the many synonyms of Guru, for instance in the Manik Maya myth. In the *wayang* tradition, however, Manik and Maya are sometimes two brothers; Manik later becomes the god Guru, and Maya (or Ismaya) becomes Semar. Although in Javanese etymology resemblances between words or parts of words often suggest new interpretations, the evidence in this case, in my opinion, still seems very meagre. This point will have to be investigated further.

My second question concerns the identity of Nabi Kitir. I have not yet come across this name anywhere in the literature. According to Pigeaud's dictionary, '*kitir*' means, among other things, 'bract', 'marker', or 'emblem' (Pigeaud 1938). This does not make much sense in the present context. If we read 'Kilir' instead of 'Kitir', however, we come closer to a solution. 'Kilir' (or 'Iilir') is the Javanese variant of the name of the Islamic mythological figure al-Chadhir, described as 'master of esoteric knowledge, connected with the sea' (Pigeaud 1927:329), and also known as Buta Ijo, the Green Monster (Pigeaud 1927:353). These two qualities do fit in well with the description of Nabi Kitir given by Ki Alimi. In the versions of Ki Saribi and Ki Tiar no mention is made of Nabi Kitir, but his roles as guardian of the sea (in these cases Tlaga Madirda) and adviser to Kala are performed by Narada. Is there any connection between this Islamic Nabi Kilir and Narada, the divine being of Hindu mythology? Who, in effect, is this Narada? In the Javanese *wayang* he shares many traits with Semar; physically, both are likened to dwarves, while their functions are very similar, too. Sometimes Narada even changes into the latter, for instance in *wayang* Murwakala performances. As a drum-player (*panjak*), he then follows Dhalang Sejati (Wisnu, or sometimes Guru) to the Middle World to perform the exorcistic *wayang* (a play within a play!) for Kala and his victims. Does Nabi Kitir/Kilir, notwithstanding his Arabic name, stand for a Hindu-Javanese deity, or must we go back even further and trace his origin to pre-Hindu-Javanese mythology? These, and other questions still await an answer.

The three versions of the Murwakala myth discussed above show that a study of the 'eastern tradition' poses some interesting problems and that this tradition is therefore worth investigating. Further research may also reveal other similarities between its local variants – which will strengthen my point that there is more internal coherence in the 'eastern way' than has generally been surmised.

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JAMES T. COLLINS

J. KATS AND INDONESIAN STUDIES: ACQUAINTANCESHIP

In 1984 *De wajang poerwa; Een vorm van Javaans toneel* by J. Kats, originally published in 1923, was reissued with the full panoply of a foreword, biographical introduction, annotated bibliography and period photographs (Ras and Poeze (eds) 1984). This rich assemblage not only has provided easy contemporary access to an important work on Javanese puppetry and art, but it also constitutes a fitting tribute to an indefatigable scholar and teacher who worked for more than forty years studying and explaining Indonesian languages and cultures. Although Grijns (1991:54) suggested that 'Indonesianists know Kats best through his . . . book [of 1923] and his writings on Javanese music, dance and theatre, mainly published in *Djawa*, and also through his edition of the Old Javanese *Sang hyang Kamahayanikan*', in this brief note another route of acquaintanceship is described – a route which was definitely *not* through Kats' work on Javanese literature and the performing arts. These rather autobiographical anecdotes are offered to emphasize another aspect of Kats' contribution to Indonesian studies, to supplement in an indirect way Poeze's bibliography (Poeze 1984) and to respond to Grijns' statement that 'Kats' textbooks have been widely used'.¹

Twenty years ago I undertook a shelf-by-shelf survey of the then meagre resources for language and linguistic study in Ambon's public library.

¹ I would like to express my thanks to C.M. Hogewoning of the KITLV library and Lan Hiang Char of the University of Hawai'i Hamilton library, who assisted me in obtaining some of the Dutch and Indonesian references needed for this note. I am grateful too to H. Maier, who lent me a pre-publication copy of Grijns' paper, and to Dr. C.D. Grijns, with whom I was able to consult after I had finished this brief note. In the published version of Grijns (1991), as Grijns wrote me (23 June 1992), page 57, line 7, should read: 'The planned wordlist was probably never realized, but Kats' textbooks have been widely used' (instead of: 'The planned wordlist was realised, but Kats' textbooks were probably never widely used').