

## THE EFFECT OF *PESANTREN* EDUCATION ON THE CREATIVITY OF *PESANTREN*-BASED WRITERS

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### ABSTRACT

Many people underestimate learning in *pesantren*. Muslim students are considered unable to keep up with the times because of the rigidity of the *pesantren* rules. Meanwhile, literacy learning and literary processing today seems to decrease with the development of modern art. The making of literary works by a writer is highly influenced by his/her environment. Despite the rigidity of the rules as considered by the people, there are many *pesantren*-based writers. This study aimed to determine the imagination and creativity of literary texts produced by *pesantren*-based writers. Heuristic, hermeneutic, and intertextual reading methods were performed eclectically to analyze the content, values, and language styles in literary texts. Literary texts that become the focus of the study were those written by *pesantren*-based writers i.e. poems written by Gus Mus, Ahmad Tohari's short stories, and Habiburrahman El Shirazy's novels. This study found that the imagination and creativity of the literature written by *pesantren*-based writers tend to be identical with the commitment and quality of the creator's religiosity. It can be implied that the aspects of religiosity and the atmosphere of *pesantren* that can blow up the imagination and creativity in literary processing can be adopted to support literacy learning and literary processing by public educational institutions outside the *pesantren*.

**KEYWORDS:** literary text, writer, *pesantren*, religiosity

### INTRODUCTION

In general, *pesantren* or pondok *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) is known as a religious education institution that has a core business to shape its alumni religiosity. To date, *pesantren* continues to make important contributions in the social religious field (Usman, 2013). As an educational institution that has strong roots (indigenous) in the Indonesian Muslim community, pondok *pesantren* can survive (survival system) (Solichin, 2018) and has a multi-aspect education model during its journey (Bin-Tahir, Atmowardoyo, Dollah, & Rinantanti, 2017). In fact, people are skeptical when discussing the functions and contributions of *pesantren* for the Indonesian people (Muhakamurrohman, 2014). Frequently-asked questions are arising about the function, relevance, and guarantee of the alumni's future in the discussion of *pesantren*. Modern society mostly assumes that education in *pesantren* is considered so rigid that it cannot keep up with the demands of the times. Based on its history, *pesantren* has been one of the important pillars in the education and culture of Indonesia since ancient times. *Pesantren* is one traditional educational institution that

plays a big role in the process of forming the identity of Muslim students through the learning of Islamic values (Fauzi et al., 2018). Supposedly, when there is an effort to revitalize and optimize some important elements in *pesantren*, the contribution of *pesantren* to the Indonesian people is unquestionable.

The development of literacy learning and literary processing today is less attractive to adolescents. They prefer modern art and social media which are currently developing. This leads to the low literacy ability of the Indonesian people. This low literacy ability needs to be addressed by caring for and fostering literacy in various fields with concrete efforts, both inside and outside the classroom, at home and outside the home, as well as in institutions involving all parties (Suroso, 2015) One solution is to introduce both old and modern literature to students, which can instill social and other important values in adolescents today (Endraswara, 2017).

Amid the problem of a low literacy culture and people's perceptions of rigid learning in *pesantren*, many writers who are highly taken into account in the worldwide constellation of Indonesian writers was in fact born from *pesantren*. Several studies related to the culture of *pesantren* learning reveal that there are innovations applied to its learning. Masrukhi (2017) revealed that there is *pesantren* creativity in translation learning, which is unique, namely the translation tradition typical to *pesantren*. It is said so because, through this tradition, the students can obtain knowledge from the KKBA (classical books of al-kutubul-mu`tabarah in Arabic) which are studied and from which the knowledge about Arabic grammar is gained. On the other hand, Suradi (2018) explained about the transformation of the *pesantren* tradition in the face of globalization. Unfortunately, none of these researches and studies have highlighted the fact that from the *pesantren* were born many world's famous writers. In fact, in the New Order era (1980s), there appeared Ahmad Tohari, who is famous for his Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk trilogy (Fuad, 2017). There was also Gus Mus (K.H. Mostopha Bisri), who is famous for his balm poems. Recently, in the Reformation era (2000s), Habiburrahman El Shirazy appeared with his Ayat-Ayat Cinta novel. There are still many names of *pesantren*-based writers which can be added and entered to the long list of Indonesian writers who are acknowledged worldwide.

Meanwhile, theoretically, it can be argued that the literacy skills of literary texts possessed by a person do not necessarily come down from the sky but are closely related to the tradition and reading habits. From reading activities, one can easily get a stimulus to write. At first, they only copy other people's writing. However, the more quantity and variety of writings they read, the more quantity and variety of stimuli and responses they will pour into their writings. Thus, the question is how the potential imagination and creativity can form as a capital for the creative process of *pesantren*-based writers to produce monumental literary texts. Thus, a critical study or analysis of the phenomenon of the emergence of monumental literary texts produced by *pesantren*-based writers becomes important and portrays another side of *pesantren* that needs to be revealed and presented to supplement the current information or issues about *pesantren*.

## METHOD

This research belongs to a descriptive study with a qualitative approach. The data used included literary texts sourced from *pesantren*-based writers such as poems by Gus Mus, short stories by Ahmad Tohari, and novels by Habiburrahman El Shirazy. The intertextual method was employed to analyze data in the form of literary texts. This is following the intertextual principle that there is no independent text. Each text can be understood properly because it is juxtaposed or associated with other texts. With this method, this study can place literary texts produced by writers from *pesantren* as something present in metaphorical, polyphonic, and intertextual characters in the language.

The interpretation of words and their meanings can be done freely based on an eclectic approach by determining the data sources for this study, including literary texts in the form of *pesantren*-based poems, short stories, and novels as well as deliberately reducing and determining selected data to maintain the focus of the study. Text analysis was done through (1) reading and checking selected data, (2) marking and classifying the data, (3) analyzing the data based on heuristics, hermeneutics and intertextual theory, (4) making descriptions and explanations of the research results, and (5) drawing up conclusions and recommendations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research are obtained from the characteristics of the three literary texts of *pesantren*-based writers are as follows:

### Characters in Gus Mus' Bangsa Ini (This Nation) Poem

Indonesian modern poetry experiences a change of theme in each period. In the initial period of its emergence, the themes written by poets included the struggle for unity and achieving independence, religion, social, social criticism, personal, advice, nature, and environment (Mahmud, 2011). In addition to the theme, the writer's background also gives its own effect on the spirit of his poem. The background of the writer is one of the extrinsic elements of literary works. Simply put, extrinsic elements can be interpreted as elements that come from outside literary works. The writer's background can form his habit or point of view when dealing with a topic. The results of this interaction process will later give birth to written literary works. The quality of the writer's understanding of a topic will also determine the quality of the written work and its usefulness to the community as the literary work lovers.

The religious background greatly influences the poems by Mustofa Bisri (Gus Mus) who is a *pesantren* graduate. Gus Mus as a Muslim poet has particularities in the verses of his poems, such as in the expression of social and spiritual problems using everyday language and straightforward speech. The language used is relatively easy to understand and simple, but behind the simplicity of the word is stored a deeper meaning or a deceptive simplicity. When examined with a heuristic, hermeneutic, and intertextual perspective, Gus Mus's poems seem to represent the desire for the

presence of a social environment of a faithful community, at least having a sense of shame when committing disgraceful acts. Heuristic and hermeneutic readings are two stages of reading that lead to the relationship of the poetic text with its predecessor (Hartati, 2019).

The aesthetic beauty of Gus Mus is distinctive because it arises from his intuition and obsession with objects that he is very familiar with in lines. He sticks to the object of the *pesantren* world, the world of mysticism, and the struggle of humans who seek the light of divinity. The attention of his poems which is centered on the world of *pesantren* and ulama (Muslim scholar) has colored the diction that is framed with local aesthetics. Many of his poems represent the expression of his turmoil over the nation's condition infected with the disease of corruption, collusion, and others so that the order of its government is shameful. With his distinctive language style, Gus Mus also wrote an autocritical poem entitled *Bangsa Ini* (This Nation) with a statement as if to praise, when in fact satirizing or venting confusion. In the first stanza, he brings up:

*“Here is a brave and incomparable nation  
The nation that is not afraid of debt nor slapping.”*

In the second stanza onwards, he spills reproach for the shameful deeds that have run rampant in his country:

*“Not afraid of mockery and accusations.  
Not afraid of smoke  
Not afraid of fire  
Not afraid of bribery  
Not afraid of tributes.  
Not afraid of corruption  
Not afraid of collusion  
Not afraid of the police  
Not afraid of demonstrations.  
Not afraid of stealing nor being tried.  
“Not afraid of mocking nor being hated.  
Not afraid of usury nor preying  
Not afraid of drugs nor syphilis.  
Not afraid of having an affair  
Not afraid of being accused  
Not afraid of being accursed  
Not afraid of being cursed.  
Here is a brave and incomparable nation  
Not afraid of devils nor God.  
This nation is only afraid of dandruff  
Doesn't believe the Javanese saying that life is just to come by to drink.”*

In the last stanza, he asks a rhetorical question about a nation that dares to be silly: “*This nation, what nation?*” A distinctive feature of Gus Mus's work is the use of religious diction to express social problems so that it looks like having a religious theme, when in fact he wants to voice a protest (Al-Ma'ruf, 2006).

## **Characters in Ahmad Tohari's Senyuman Karyamin (Karyamin's Smile) Short Story**

Ahmad Tohari is a writer who comes from a Muslim family (Fuad, 2017). If compared to Gus Mus who is an Islamic boarding school scholar, his work has a distinctive feature of a rural social background. Short stories by Ahmad Tohari voice his commitments as well as invites readers to sympathize and empathize with the suffering of life that occurs in the corners of the country. Karyamin's Smile short story collection, which contains 14 short stories, for example, according to Mahayana (1989), is an actualization of Tohari's concern for the fate of the weak who have to work hard just to find food, money to pay debts, and so on. In short, Ahmad Tohari's turmoil over the hardships or suffering of the lives of the poor people in this country seems to color the short stories he produced. Just for example, this can be seen in the short story entitled Karyamin's Smile. With a distinctive language style, Tohari expresses his sympathy and empathy to the hardship of the poor stone collector. This can be seen in the following table.

*.... Karyamin walked slowly and very carefully. The weight pressing down on his shoulders was a carrying pole with two stone baskets hung on it. The dirt road he was climbing was slippery with water dripping from the bodies of Karyamin and his friends, who returned home lifting stones from the river to the material base up there. Karyamin is so experienced that he is safe in each of his journeys, walking uphill while keeping the weight and bodyweight points on the sole of the left or right foot. The changing of the weight point from the left to the right legs had to be done well. Karyamin had to consider his breathing and hand swings for perfect balance.*

*However, this morning, Karyamin had slipped twice. His body fell down; then, he rolled down chasing with rocks that had spilled from his basket. And, every time he fell, his friends laughed at him. They, the stone collectors, like to find entertainment by laughing at themselves.*

*.... They laughed together. They, the stone collectors, were indeed good at fun by laughing at themselves. And Karyamin did not laugh but only smiled. For them, laughter or smiles were equally valid as the final protection. Laughter and smiles for them were a symbol of victory over the middleman, against the low price of the stone, or the slippery slope. That morning, Karyamin's smile was a sign of victory over his stomach which had begun to wrap around and his eyes spinning.*

*..... So, Karyamin only smiled. Then, he rose although his head was dizzy, and the sky seemed to spin. He took the basket and the pole and walked up the incline. He smiled as he walked up the slippery ground which had been gleamed by his body's slide marks before. On the back of the incline, Karyamin was stunned for a moment to see a pile of stones that had not yet reached a*

*quarter of a cubic but had to be left behind. Under the hibiscus tree, Saidah spread a mat selling her food, pecel rice. Karyamin's adam's apple was up and down. The intestine felt twisted.*

One of the distinctive features of the short story anthology, Karyamin's Smile, is it talks about social inequality which is critical (Suryadi & Nuryatin, 2017). In this short story, Tohari describes the character of Karyamin as a mason. His life was difficult, and he was starving. However, from that story, Karyamin is a hard worker and independent to support his family. A good literary work is one that directly educates the reader about character and moral values (Pradopo, 2007).

### **Characters in Habiburrahman El Shirazy's Ayat-Ayat Cinta (Verses of Love) Novel**

In the last decade, the world of literature was marked by the presence of literary styles that were wrapped with religious issues (Islam) (Wahyuningtyas & Widowati, 2017). One of them is a novel by Habiburrahman El Shirazy that presents a lot of student figures, set in a pesantren and Al Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. These works are inseparable from the topics of market tastes ranging from love and morality. What the public is interested in is captured by the author as a sweet opportunity to work and obtain profits. The novels by Habiburrahman El Shirazy turned out to be the best seller and favorite books for many readers. This is, among other things, because El Shirazy's work presents something that can build up souls and foster enthusiasm for the lives of readers. At the beginning of the Ayat-Ayat Cinta novel, for example, El Shirazy explains the aspect of humanization in the present context to the reader. In this novel, El Shirazy presents the figure of a young man named Fahri and his friends who are struggling to study in a foreign country with a very hot summer. With a distinctive language style, El Shirazy expresses an uncomfortable atmosphere, but the character does not give up but remains enthusiastic.

*This midday, Cairo City is like burning. The sun is glowing in the middle of the sky. Like a flame sticking out and licking the earth. The earth and sand are evaporating the smell of hell. The breeze of Sahara wind accompanied by rolling dust increases the heat of the air from second to second. Many of the residents take shelter in flats in cube-shaped apartments with doors, windows and curtains tightly closed.*

*In this terrible condition, I'm lazy to get out. The weather forecast announced: forty-one degrees Celsius! Isn't it crazy!? Southeast-Asian students who can't stand the heat usually have a nosebleed; their nose is bleeding. My flat mate who has a nosebleed at the height of summer is Saiful. These three days, by eleven in the afternoon until seven in the evening, blood always seeps from his nose. In fact, he did not come out flat at all. He just stayed in his room while keeping the fan always on. Sometimes he kungkum (bathes), cooling the body in the bathroom. With a strong intention, after getting away all the laziness, I prepared to get out. At exactly two in the afternoon, I had to be at the Abu Bakar Ash-Shidiq Mosque located in Shubra El-Khaima, the northern tip of Cairo, for talaqqi at Shaykh Uthman Abdul Fattah. From this great Muslim scholar, I learn qiraah sab'ah and ushul tafsir. He was a student of Shaykh Mahmoud Khushari, the legendary Moslem*

*scholar who was nicknamed Shaykh Maqari 'Wal Huffadh Fi Mashr or Professor of Al-Qur'an Readers and Memorizers in Egypt.*

Besides, El Shirazy appears to be skilled in presenting the value of Islamic religiosity in the aspect of liberation in the relation of Muslim-non-Muslim positions that can coexist naturally, even in harmony. Through the fictional dialog he creates (Fahri and Maria), he shows a portrait of friendship and intimacy between two people of different races, different nationalities, different genders, and different religions that can occur so beautifully. This can be seen in the next part of the story.

*"Hey, your name is Fahri, isn't it?"*

*"Yes, it is."*

*"You do know my name, don't you?"*

*"Yes. I know. Your name is Maria. The daughter of Mr. Boutros Girgis."*

*"You are right."*

*"What is the difference between Maria and Maryam?"*

*"Maria or Maryam is the same. Like David with Daud. What is clear is my name is written in your holy book. The book mostly read by human beings in the world throughout history. It even becomes the name of a surah. The nineteenth surah, Maryam surah. That's great, isn't it?"*

*"Hey, how can you say the Koran is the most read holy book by human beings throughout history? How do you know that?" I investigated with full of surprise and curiosity.*

*"Don't be surprised if I say that. This is called objective. That is the reality. Charles Francis Potter said so. Honestly, I say, Koran is far more glorified and valued than other holy books. It is more valued than the New Testament and the Old Testament. Reverend J. Shillidy in his book The Lord Jesus in The Koran testifies like that. And in fact, there are no books in this world that are read and memorized by millions of people every second beyond the Koran. In Egypt alone, there are around ten thousand Ma'had Al Azhar. The students are hundreds of thousands or even millions of children. They are all memorizing the Koran. Because they will not graduate from Ma'had Al Azhar unless they must memorize the Koran. I, who are Copts, really like memorizing the Koran. The language is beautiful and pleasant to be sung," she said casually without any doubt.*

Besides, El Shirazy is also successful in presenting the value of Islamic religiosity in the aspect of transcendence related to the divine awareness and longing for eternal life through the murmurs or monologues of the story's characters. This can be seen in the following part.

*"Do you also memorize the Koran? Didn't I hear wrong?" I wondered.*

*"Anything strange?" I silently did not answer.*

*"I memorized the surah of Maryam and Al-Maidah by heart."*

*"Really?"*

*"You don't believe me? Try to look carefully!"*

*Maria then recited Maryam's surah which she memorized. Strangely, she first read ta'awudz and basmalah. She knows manners and procedures for reading the Koran. Then, I spent the journey from Mahattah Anwar Sadat Tahrir to Tura El-Esmen listening to Maria's reading Maryam's surah from beginning to end. She forgot almost no single letter. The reading was quite good although it's not as good as Al Azhar's students. From Tura El-Esmen to Hadayek Helwan, Maria invited me for an extensive conversation. I ignored the eyes of the Egyptians who were surprised I was close to Maria.*

*Once we entered the mosque... Whoosh! Blowing cool air emitted by five air conditioners in the mosque welcomed friendly. Thank God. It feels good if you are already inside the mosque. Dozens of people have lined up neatly in shaf to pray together. I put my hat and my bag under the pole near me standing in the second row of shaf. Peace coursed through the nerves and the excitement of the soul as soon as I raised takbir. Blowing cool air was caressing my neck and face. Also wiping the sweat that had flowed profusely. I felt at peace in the love of the Almighty God. He felt so close, closer to the jugular vein, closer to the beating heart.*

The choice of words in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* is not only Indonesian that is easily understood, but there are also regional and Arabic languages such as kungkum and talaqqi. The use of the language will sound foreign to readers so that it can add to the knowledge of vocabulary and new culture both local wisdom and *pesantren* culture.

Based on the description above, it would be possible to formulate a paradigm in the perspective of literature, that literary texts, both in the form of monumental poems, short stories, and novels would undoubtedly be perspectives in literary writing that produce creativity of the writer. Therefore, literary works are born which are products of thought not born from empty imagination but connected directly with discourse in real life. In the perspective of creative writing, the turmoil in Gus Mus's poetic text, the specificity of the text of sympathy and empathy for marginal people in Ahmad Tohari's short story, and the prophetic values in Habiburrahman El-Shirazy's novel are not only a blow-up of imagination and creativity but also a transformation of the text of the hipogram in the holy book, the Koran, which he believes. The unique atmosphere of the *pesantren* and the religious aspects drive the blow-up of imagination and creativity of the writer to occur. The more religious the writer is, the more imagination and creativity will be blown up. Directly or indirectly, this phenomenon shows how positive the influence of *pesantren* religious atmosphere is on literacy learning and literary processing. Literary learning and processing in *pesantren* are not a taboo, instead, it becomes something that is done every day both in literature class and routine activities every morning. The teaching of poetry can contribute greatly to solving problems that are quite difficult to solve in students themselves. All problems with the students themselves can be written in the expression of making poems. The students feel the benefits they receive from reading literary works that can encourage them to do positive things and be a means of entertainment or recreation (Bin-Tahir et al., 2017)

Related to literacy learning and literary processing in schools, to support national education goals according to Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Article 3, the religious atmosphere typical to *pesantren* may be adopted by public educational institutions outside the *pesantren*. This is because in selecting literary teaching materials, teachers must pay attention to the cultural background of students who refer to the specific characteristics of a society with all its variations, one of which is related to religion. The *pesantren* learning environment is not strange anymore because *pesantren* established in many regions in Indonesia can be one of the references for teachers in formal schools to adopt literary learning strategies in *pesantren*. In general, students will be more easily attracted to literary works with backgrounds that are familiar with their lives (Hartati, 2019), moreover if the literary works raise figures who come from the social environment and have cultural similarities with them.

## CONCLUSION

The world of *pesantren* is the real world of literature. Muslim students not only read poems but also explore the meaning and values that can be applied in society. It is not surprising that the Muslim scholars of Islamic boarding school graduates have become writers with their own characteristics. The literary works of *pesantren*-based writers, which are a blow-up of their imagination and creativity, are identical with their commitment and quality of religiosity; the more religious the writer is, the more the blow-up of their imagination and creativity will be. The aspects of religiosity and the atmosphere of the *pesantren* which can blow up the imagination and creativity in the literature of students can be adopted to support literacy learning and literary processing by public educational institutions outside the *pesantren*. The works of *pesantren*-based writers can be a source of learning in formal schools because they contain social values and are rich in cultural information and new vocabulary.

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