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Pipit Rochijat's Subversive Mythologies The Suharto Era and Beyond

Abstract

This article examines Indonesian émigré Pipit Rochijat's attempts to adapt and renew the tales of the traditional shadow theatre, the *wayang*. The significance of Pipit's subversive mythologies lies in the historical context in which these reinterpretations occurred: at the height of Suharto's New Order regime in the mid 1980s. At a time when censorship and self-censorship had virtually crippled the critical impulse of Indonesian cultural expression, the return to mythology was in a significant sense an attempt to evade, critique, and undermine the authorities. By appropriating the very same symbols and language in which the New Order authoritarian regime had manipulated so effectively, Indonesian dissidents such as Pipit discovered the perfect symbolic weapon with which to radicalize their opposition.

Keywords: Pipit Rochijat—Modern Indonesian literature—Javanese *wayang* shadow puppet theatre—*Mahabharata*—*Ramayana*

*The contents of [Baratayuda di Negeri Antah Berantah], on the whole, can be regarded as a “plesetan” [pun] on various parts of the Baratayuda tales. What it does is not merely invite us to laugh, but rather it tends to reflect the sociopolitical conditions of Indonesia since the 1960s to the present day.*¹

GAUNG

IN THE late 1990s, Henk Maier expressed his concern at the sterility of literary life in Suharto’s New Order Indonesia. So complete and pervasive was the Indonesian state’s emphasis on censorship and self-censorship that, according to Maier, the authors themselves were no longer aware of how much they had been muffled,² “leaving the writing of explicitly offensive and confrontational poetry and prose to madmen and clowns who should not be surprised when sooner or later they are arrested, punished, and shovelled away under the epitaph: “Communist.’ Like Wiji Thukul.³ Like Pramoedya Ananta Toer” (MAIER 1999, 257). This article will explore the prose of another writer of the New Order era that Maier could easily add to his list of so-called Communists: Pipit R. K., or Pipit Rochijat Kartawidjaja, an Indonesian writer, émigré, and activist based in Berlin.

The discussion in this article will be based on Pipit’s one and only literary publication, a collection of brilliantly satirical parodies of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* mythologies popularized by the Javanese *wayang* shadow puppet theatre. Entitled *Baratayuda di Negeri Antah Berantah* (PIPIT 1993), this collection of tales was first written in the early 1980s. With the exception of an unpublished paper by Amrih WIDODO (1988), and a brief discussion by Benedict ANDERSON (1998, 293–95) as far as I am aware Pipit’s extremely humorous collection appears to have failed so far to attract any major scholarly attention. One explanation for this is that in an aesthetic sense Pipit’s stories are little more than seditious parody. Another explanation for the lack of critical attention could be that when compared to the richness of the *wayang*’s theatrical effect in performance, the presentation of *wayang* plot, themes, and characterization through

written words alone may seem to be but a pale imitation of the real thing. According to Widodo,

In writing these stories, the author does not seem to think about *wayang* performance—the night-long presentations accompanied by the gamelan ensemble. Gamelan—the Javanese music orchestra—is never mentioned. There is no indication that Pipit’s *wayang* stories are to be performed, or are in any way related to ceremonies or rituals of which *wayang* is usually a part. This is *wayang* without a stage, without spectators, without musical accompaniment, and without ritual significance in the conventional sense
(WIDODO 1988, 14).

After spending much of the last three decades in West Berlin, with a number of those years without his Indonesian passport (“Ditawari Suaka Politik, Masih Cinta Indonesia,” *Jawa Pos*, 19 July 1998), it would be an understatement to say that Pipit had not witnessed very many *wayang* performances during the creation of his collection. Furthermore, Pipit’s style of *wayang* storytelling derives from the *wayang* comics of R. A. Kosasih, of which Pipit is an avid reader, and the comics of Kho Peng Ho, based on the “Tales of the Three Kingdoms.”⁴

Nevertheless, in many respects Pipit’s collection symbolically draws on some of the most common assumptions regarding the *wayang*. For example, many observers argue that the original purpose or function of the *wayang* shadow theatre was as an animistic rite in honor of the spirits of the Javanese ancestors. With its close links with ancestor or spirit worship, the *wayang* shadow theatre has for centuries represented a key element in Javanese exorcistic rites, and many Javanese still hold *wayang* performances in order to appease the local *danyang*, or spirits. In recognition of the presence of the local spirits and the belief that the souls of ancestors are brought to life as the puppet’s shadows, before a performance has begun offerings and incense are always placed under the screen and banana log. Consequently, the image of the *dalang* as a medium between the world of the spirits and the gods and the human audience shares significant similarities with the popular image of the shaman or, in the Indonesian context, the *dukun* (NESS and PRAWIROHARDJO 1985; SEARS 1996).

Just as the *dukun* has the ability to call back the spirits of the deceased to ask for advice or help in overcoming problems related to disharmony in the spirit world, sections of PIPIT’s *Baratayuda di Negeri Antah Berantah* (1993) also symbolically resurrect the spirits of the deceased, primarily as a means of giving rise to the various spectres of the New Order regime. Therefore, this paper will argue that through the literary medium, Pipit synthesizes the aesthetics of the *dalang* with the world of the shaman in, what one could argue, a far more deliberate manner than the typical *dalang*, who would be aware that the majority of

the Javanese spectators at a *wayang* performance today do not look upon the shadows cast upon the screen as the spirits of their ancestors. The first section of this paper will examine the ways in which Pipit consciously—or unconsciously—draws upon the *dalang* figure, with a particular emphasis on his shamanistic potential. By examining the ways in which Pipit synthesizes the figure of the *dalang* with the figure of the shaman, it will become increasingly evident that Pipit's satirical mythologizing can be conceived not only as a rhetorical *wayang* "performance," but also as a symbolic *ruwatan*, or *wayang*-based exorcism.

RUWATAN

Significantly, Sears observes that in *ruwatan* performances, which are held for exorcistic purposes, the ancient connections between aesthetics and shamanism are emphasized, "as it is the aesthetic power of the shadow puppeteer expressed through his art that enables him to heal the psychic imbalances that prompt families to hold exorcistic performances" (SEARS 1996, 238). One aesthetic characteristic of a *ruwatan* performance is that the puppets in a *ruwatan* are disconnected from their usual roles, all the usual associations are displaced, and any linearity of plot development is more uncertain and the meanings more complex than normal. Similarly, Pipit's *wayang mbeling* (mischievous *wayang*) also favors disconnection and spontaneity over structure and stability, allowing the writer to creatively weave any number of threads between the *wayang* world and the world of contemporary Indonesia. Furthermore, just as the *dalang* of an exorcistic *ruwatan* performance attempts to heal the psychic or spiritual imbalances of the context in which he is performing, Pipit's text can also be considered as a rhetorical attempt to rebalance the social and spiritual disharmony engendered by the New Order regime's violent rise to power.

Throughout the narratives set in the afterlife, Pipit also exploits another common assumption of the *wayang*: that the *dalang* uses every opportunity available to engage in sociopolitical commentary. This assumption is based on a belief—held by some—that much of the *wayang*'s true "meaning" lies in its potential to act as a medium for the expression of social criticism in a society that has otherwise severely restricted political comment. Consequently, many observers claim that *dalang* commonly make covert political references, either by thinly veiled allusions in the storyline or by both sly and explicit comments through the mouths of the clown servants (attendants to the knights, princesses, or other members of the *wayang* ruling class, distinguished by their lewd and slapstick humour and insightful political commentary). Nevertheless, Keeler tempers such observations by arguing that

it would be an exaggeration to think that most *dalang* engage in the risks of political controversy today, that they did so routinely in the past, or that

spectators expect to find examples of such resistance to established authority in many performances they attend. To treat *wayang* as a form of political expression would also be unduly reductionist, since it would explain a complex art form with reference to only one kind of meaning. . . . More central to the *wayang* tradition than any essential “meaning” is the aesthetic pleasure it affords its spectators by means of the compelling quality of its images, the beauty of its music, the complexity of its stories, and the enveloping atmosphere of a night-long, deliberately paced entertainment

(KEELER 1992, 65).

Meanwhile, in Pipit’s *wayang mbeling*—which is unashamedly stripped bare of the atmosphere, sound, and quality of images of a typical *wayang* performance—political criticism is virtually its *raison d’être*. We will see that Pipit’s appropriation of the performance techniques of the shadow puppeteer is radically imaginative, totally unconventional, and blatantly political. After briefly presenting a few background details on Pipit himself, the remainder of this article will argue that by drawing upon, exploring, and expanding the shamanistic and socially engaged tendencies of the *dalang* figure, Pipit’s rhetorical “exorcism” of the New Order ensures that his fiction can be ranked alongside the “explicitly offensive and confrontational” fiction of subversive “madmen and clowns,” such as writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer and poet Wiji Thukul.

PIPIT ROCHIJAT KARTAWIDJAJA: EMIGRÉ, ACTIVIST, AND WRITER

Before discussing the content and implications of Pipit’s fiction in more detail, it should be noted that Pipit is regarded as a man of some complexity. For example, Amrih Widodo observes that “[Pipit] is notoriously difficult to classify, and [he] never lets himself be grouped into any ‘ism’” (WIDODO 1988, 13). Perhaps it is no coincidence that Pipit is most well-known for his essay, “Am I PKI or non-PKI?” (ROCHIJAT P. 1985) (translated with an afterword by Benedict Anderson). Through this essay, one of the few public Indonesian accounts of the anti-Communist massacres of the 1960s, Pipit explores the question of whether he truly deserves to be labelled as a member of the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia), or in other words, a “Communist.” In his response to this question, Pipit takes great care in recounting his childhood, which was spent in the environs of various sugar plantations in East Java, where his father worked. After his transfer in 1959 from a sugar factory in Jember, Pipit’s father, M. Kartawidjaja, served as the director of the Ngadirejo Sugar Factory in Kediri until 1967. In the following year, Kartawidjaja became an inspector of sugar factories in Semarang, before relocating to Surabaya where he was appointed Director-in-Chief of a sugar plantation and factory in Situbondo. As a child, Pipit experienced the full benefits of his father’s high position, which included luxurious residences with

the full complement of servants, cooks, and chauffeurs. As employees of the sugar factory in Ngadirejo, Pipit's family also enjoyed membership of a former Dutch club, complete with a swimming pool, tennis courts, ping-pong tables, and movie nights. Other "perks" included free transportation to the state senior high school in Kediri, free transportation to the sugar factory's hospital, and occasional visits by "top" entertainers. They also benefited from the extravagant "gifts" that their father received from Chinese businessmen, who were keen to monopolize either the sugar trade or the right to sell car parts, rice, and cloth to the sugar factory's workers.

Pipit fully recognized the difference between treatment he received as opposed to that of the children of the factory workers, who often needed to ride long distances to school or had to pay for their own transportation. The factory workers were also very much aware of this difference in treatment. Furthermore, in the early 1960s the formation and politicization of various labor unions became strongly evident, with polarities divided between PKI-aligned unions and their Islamic and Sukarnoist counterparts. Not long afterwards, simmering tensions arising from the obvious socio-economic differences between the factory employees and the PKI-aligned hired workers came to a head. In 1962 the wrath of the PKI—along with its mass organizations—was invoked when the Department of Agriculture's plan for unifying separate plantation land holdings involved the relocation of some local residents. When their demonstrations had no effect, a PKI-aligned crowd buried a bulldozer driver and killed a policeman. In turn, troops were brought in, and they fired upon the crowd. The conflict between the PKI and Pipit's father, meanwhile, was heightened when Kartawidjaja dealt harshly with the increasingly strident demands of PKI-aligned workers. For example, when pro-Communist workers went on strike, Kartawidjaja reacted by cutting their wages and giving bonuses to the workers who did not strike, who were "naturally" workers associated with Islamic and Sukarnoist groups. Consequently rallies and demonstrations were often held in the lead-up to the abortive military coup of 1965, and slogans criticizing Pipit's father always appeared. These slogans included "Retool Karta," "Karta Kabir," "Karta Ex-Masyumi," "Karta Tujuh Setan Desa," all Communist terms popular at the time.⁵

Both Pipit and his four brothers and sisters all encountered abuse at school, and not surprisingly Pipit developed a strong sense of antipathy for the PKI. Partly as a reflection of this, and partly as a show of admiration and support for his father and for President Sukarno, Pipit actively participated in the activities of a youth group affiliated with the pro-Sukarno PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia) [Indonesian Nationalist Party]. Later, between 1965 and 1967, he observed the destruction of the PKI with the accompanying anti-Communist massacres. But in the ensuing destruction of the PNI, of which Pipit was still an active member,

he in turn became a victim. Partly due to the fact that in the New Order era Sukarno and the PNI were perceived to be too left wing in their ideological leanings, Pipit eventually found himself in jail. However, Pipit's father, who was once the PKI's local "Enemy No. 1," had long received the sympathy of the local military and Islamic leaders, and Pipit was soon released. Several years later in 1971, disillusioned and distrustful, Pipit left Indonesia for West Berlin, where he studied electrical engineering at the Technische Universität.

In his afterword to Pipit's "Am I PKI or non-PKI?," Benedict Anderson provides an excellent social and historical overview of postwar West Berlin, which goes some way to explaining the attraction this city may have held for Pipit:

For well-known reasons post-war West Berlin has been an unusual city, a haven of students and spies, artists and tourists, radicals, refugees, and gasterbeiters. Because of its physical separation from the rest of the Federal Republic of Germany, its status under the Four Power Agreement of 1945, and its would-be status as a beacon of Western freedom in a sea of Communist tyranny, it enjoyed a good deal of political autonomy from early on. Even in the heyday of Konrad Adenauer's Christian Democratic Party, the city's long-standing leftwing traditions assured that it was a bastion of the Social Democratic Party, and it remained so right up until the early 1980s. Since the Federal Republic was by treaty barred from deploying troops or enforcing conscription there, West Berlin rather quickly became an asylum for radical and pacifist German youths anxious to escape the draft. In the 1970s, moreover, many survivors of the radical student movements of the late 1960s found refuge within its environs. This political ambience made it an attractive place for Third World leftists exiled from their homelands and out of favour with the various ruling groups in the Eastern bloc. This attraction was further enhanced by the relative powerlessness of local consulates and by the Bonn government's generous support for and subsidization of foreign students (ANDERSON 1985, 54).

Accordingly, in the mid-1970s in West Berlin there was a significant group of Old Left Indonesian exiles who were very critical of Suharto's New Order regime, as well as increasing numbers of young Indonesian students. The Old Left Indonesian exiles were people who had earlier been stranded in China, the former Soviet Union, and the states of Eastern Europe. The Indonesian students were either on government scholarships, or, more often, private funds. According to Anderson, "in the aftermath of the massive student protests of 1977–1978 in Indonesia, and the Suharto government's violent, and eventually successful, suppression of these protests, youthful opposition sentiment found its freest outlet overseas, in Western Europe generally, but especially in West Berlin and the

Netherlands” (ANDERSON 1985, 54–55). Pipit’s outspoken presence amongst the Old Left exiles and the radical students, who were united in their antagonism towards the New Order, was reason enough for Indonesian diplomats based in Germany to view Pipit with extreme suspicion. Unconcerned, Pipit also became highly involved in student political activism in West Berlin, working with various international student organizations throughout the former West Germany.

WIDODO (1988) has observed that Pipit seems to have an “obsession” with writing, and he traces the way in which Pipit became the instigator of a variety of publications in West Germany—news bulletins and ephemeral magazines—which discussed the Indonesian students’ own problems as well as Indonesia’s. After serving as an editor-in-chief from 1978 to 1979 for *Gotong-Royong*, issued by the West Berlin branch of the Perhimpunan Pelajar Indonesia (Indonesian Student’s Association) of the Federal Republic of Germany, Pipit participated in the founding of a number of news bulletins and magazines. These included *Dialog* (1978), *Berita Tanpa Analisa* (1979), *Berita Dan Analisa* (1979), *Berita Tanpa Sensor* (1980), *Berita* (1980), *Berita Organisasi* (1980), the German-language *Über Indonesien* (1982), and *Berita Tanah Air* (1982). Widodo observes that in these publications Pipit covered a great variety of subjects, often controversially, distributing his photocopied or printed material personally among his fellow students. Apparently, Pipit became so active and influential that the term “pipitism” was coined by the Indonesian students and Old Left exiles to refer to behavior or writing styles considered to have originated from or been influenced by him. Because of Pipit’s outspoken attitude, and in particular his consistently critical attitude towards the New Order regime, the Indonesian government viewed him as such a threat that after 1983 they required that he seek an extension on his passport every three months rather than giving him the normal extension of two years. Eventually, in 1987 the Indonesian Embassy in West Germany withheld Pipit’s passport altogether. Consequently, regardless of whether he was a Communist or not, for almost three decades Pipit did not return to Indonesia. However, after ten years Pipit’s passport was returned, and soon after the resignation of President Suharto, Pipit briefly returned to his homeland (“Ditawari Suaka Politik, Masih Cinta Indonesia,” *Jawa Pos*, 19 July 1998).

One of Pipit’s defining characteristics is his penchant for writing, and, in particular, the writing and publication of *Baratayuda di Negeri Antah Berantah*. Since its first appearance as an unpublished manuscript in the early 1980s, *Baratayuda di Negeri Antah Berantah* has become a cult classic amongst Indonesian political activists and left-wing intellectuals. As noted earlier, this collection consists of a number of *wayang* parodies typical of the *wayang mbeling* genre, each of them extremely humorous, characterized by subversive allusions, puns, and innuendoes. Consequently, just as the epithet *dalang edan* (crazy puppet master) has now become a common description of young *dalang* distin-

guished by their radical innovations in defiance of “traditional” *wayang* performance conventions, so too can Pipit be seen as a *pengarang edan*, a “crazy writer” who has both lived and written radically and mythically, in defiance of convention. By analyzing the style, structure, and content of a number of the narratives in *Baratayuda di Negeri Antah Berantah*—in particular, the series of tales based in the *wayang* afterlife—this paper will now show the ways in which Pipit has attempted to symbolically cast out the demons of New Order Indonesia.

COMMUNISTS AND KURAWAS

Baratayuda di Negeri Antah Berantah is a collection of interconnected narratives that operates primarily as a playful appropriation of the characters and plots of the indigenized *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* tales. Pipit’s appropriations of these epic tales are rich in content and vision, parodying the originals in a variety of imaginative ways. For example, in Pipit’s version of the climax of the *Mahabharata*, the Baratayuda, the great duel between Arjuna and Karna is fought, not from chariots, but rather from rally cars. Karna loses the upper hand in the duel when his driver, Salya, manages to get their car bogged in the mud. In another revamped tale, one of the greatest Pandawa knights, Bima—usually revered for his fearless nature and his highly developed combat skills—betrays a scholarly leaning. In fact, Pipit’s Bima has written a thesis entitled “Negara dan Penguasa di Negeri Kerajaan dan Republik” [State and ruler in kingdoms and republics] (PIPIT 1993, 23). Pipit’s stories are characterized by colorful caricatures, complex and intriguing plots, word games, and puns, particularly black humor, and a keen awareness of the absurdity of Indonesia’s social and political realities. Thus the tales of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* act as a kind of screen onto which Pipit projects his own concerns. These concerns seem to be numerous, yet they undoubtedly revolve around an explicit attack upon the foibles of Indonesia’s ruling elite.

Despite the highly confrontational aspect of a large number of Pipit’s *wayang mbeling* narratives, many would agree that the most amusing chapters, and for that matter the most powerful in terms of their sociocultural implications, are the chapters depicting the fate of the shadow theatre’s *ksatria* (warriors) in the afterlife. It is these chapters above all that highlight the techniques, and the aims, of Pipit’s adoption of the *dalang* persona. As mentioned, many Javanese believe that the shadows of *wayang* puppets embody the spirits of the ancestors, and by broaching the topic of the afterlife, in particular the afterlife of the evil Kurawa, Pipit is in a sense lighting a *blencong* (traditional lamp used to cast shadows on the *wayang* screen), arranging the incense offering, dusting off and lining up the puppets, and allowing the ancestral spirits to come to life once again. Their “new” lives, however, are far from pleasant. In the case of the deceased Kurawa,

as depicted in “Kapan Revolusi Bisa Selesai, Kalow Mulainya Saja Sudah Susah?” [How can the revolution be finished if just starting it is difficult?], “Seri Kurawa Protes (I): Tingkatkan Taraf Penderitaan” [The “Kurawa protest” series (I): Increase the suffering level] and “Seri Kurawa Protes (II): Sial Betul Menjabat Sebagai Kurawa” [The “Kurawa protest” series (II): What a bummer serving as a Kurawa], their fate is to spend eternity in “nerakaloka” (hell-ville). In the case of the deceased Baladewa and Kumbakarna in “Aku Sengaja Tidur Melulu, Karena Aku Pengen Netral” [I deliberately spend all my time sleeping because I want to be neutral] and “Katanya Keliru Melihat Manusia Los dari Masyarakatnya” [They say I was mistaken viewing people as being free from their society], their fate is to spend eternity in the pigsty of *kayangan* (wayang heaven).

The most outrageous aspect of these chapters is the absurd reactions to the suffering and indignity of life in hell-ville and the heavenly pigsty. Initially, in “Kapan Revolusi Bisa Selesai, Kalow Mulainya Saja Sudah Susah?,” the deceased Kurawa despair at their inhumane treatment. In hell-ville they live in shabby huts made out of old newspapers and cardboard beside a filthy river, overflowing with the excrement of the “*elite kayangan*” (heavenly elite). Apart from the intense heat of the sea of fire, the *Kawah Candradimuka*, the Kurawa also suffer from an inability to buy anything to quench their thirst, as they do not have any money. Revealing a certain intimacy with his audience in the manner of a typical *dalang*, the narrator notes that the Kurawa did try to smuggle some rupiah into the afterlife: “*dasar namanya juga Kurawa*” (what else would you expect from Kurawas?) (PIPIT 1993, 10). However, in one of the many absurd cruelties of life in hell-ville, all the bars, restaurants, and food stalls only trade in dollars. Soon the Kurawa petition the gods, threatening revolution and begging for more humane treatment. The gods give no response whatsoever. Then the Kurawa appeal to the Pandawa heroes, who normally detest suffering in any form. However the Pandawa also ignore the Kurawa’s pleas, as they are too busy enjoying the pleasures of heaven: women, whisky, marijuana, and extravagant holiday resorts. Thus the juxtaposition between the Pandawa’s endless heavenly pleasure and the Kurawa’s eternal angst in hell-ville is acute.

At this point it becomes overwhelmingly apparent that Pipit is developing much more than a humorous take on Java’s much-loved *wayang* mythology. In fact, Pipit’s focus on the Kurawa in the afterlife brings to life and humanizes the “non-humans” of contemporary Indonesia, the spirits of the tens of thousands of the massacred Communists of the 1960s, the suppressed and demonized “Other” of New Order Indonesia.

This is not the first time that the Kurawa have been associated with the Communists of the 1960s. G. J. Resink describes the ways in which both before and during the sociopolitical chaos and anti-Communist massacres accompanying the change of power from Sukarno to Suharto, the Indonesian political world was

often associated with the characters and events of the *Mahabharata*, the violent fratricidal conflict between the warring Pandawa and Kurawa cousins (RESINK 1975). When placed alongside the Indonesian political milieu of the mid 1960s, the predominant interpretation was that the “leftist” Communists—mostly lower-class Javanese—were represented as the greedy and arrogant Kurawa, the side usually arranged to the left-hand side of the *dalang*. In contrast to this, the “right-wing” nationalists and the traditionalist Muslims were represented as the heroic Pandawa, who are usually arranged to the right of the *dalang*. This interpretation is supported by Pipit. In Sears’s *Shadows of Empire*, Pipit is quoted as follows:

Referring to the chaos of ‘65–’66, my parents had some maidservants who believed that the Bharatayuda had truly begun—only there was no gamelan. And it was clear that the Communists were the Kurawa, and we non-Communists were the Pandawa. They told me, and I was still a kid, that the behavior of the Kurawa was exactly like that of the Communists: they grabbed things, they were coarse, they didn’t know the rules, etc. (demonstrations, demands, uproar, boycotts, etc.). This was pretty much the public perception among the people in the villages around the Sugar Factory of Ngadirejo, fourteen kilometres south of Kediri (East Java). You may know that at that time we Pandawa were continually harassed by the Communist Kurawa. They liked to grab land, just like the Kurawa took the land of the Pandawa. Thus it was fitting or “normal” to kill the Kurawa, even to slaughter them in brutal ways (remember the story of Sangkuni’s mouth being ripped apart, Duryudana alias Suyudana’s head being smashed or Dursasana’s throat being slashed and his blood gulped down a wide-open mouth and then pissed out until it was all gone, just like Johnny Walker).

(SEARS 1996, 228)

In similar fashion other scholars have observed that Sukarno’s Foreign Minister, Dr. Subandrio, who maintained a reputation of being supportive of policies favorable to Communist China and the PKI, was associated with Durna, a sly and two-faced mentor to the leaders of both the Pandawa and the Kurawa (HUGHES 1968; RESINK 1975). Yet Communists or pro-Communist figures were not always represented as Kurawas, especially when Communist leaders were representing themselves. For example, Ruth McVey presents the testimony of Sudisman, one of the five leaders of the PKI, who as late as 1967 described the Communist leaders as the five heroic Pandawa brothers (MCVEY 1986).

Sukarno himself had long used the *wayang* as a powerful political metaphor, and his speeches often refer to *Mahabharata* characters or contain phrases

common to *wayang* narratives. As a boy, Sukarno was named after the great *ksatria* of the Kurawa, Karna:

My name at birth was Kusno. I started life as an unhealthy child. I had malaria, dysentery, anything and everything. Father thought, "His name is not good. We must give him another so that he may start fresh." [...] Father was a devotee of the *Mahabharata*, the ancient Hindu classics. I had not yet reached puberty when father said, "We shall name you Karna. Karna is one of the greatest heroes in *Mahabharata*." ... It has always been my prayer," he declared, "for my son to be a patriot and great hero of his people. You shall be a second Karna" (PENDERS 1974, 5).

Nevertheless, Sukarno rarely identified himself with his namesake, who was, after all, born out of wedlock to Dewi Kunti and Batara Surya, abandoned at birth, and then went on to fight on the side of the Kurawa in the Baratayuda. Instead, Sukarno chose to associate himself with Pandawa heroes, such as the swarthy Bima, the ladies' man Arjuna, or the flying Gatotkaca. However, Sukarno was never able to completely shake off the enigmatic association with his Kurawa namesake, Karna. Through his keen interest in a Socialist worldview, and his government's land reform promises that eventually resulted in what Sears describes as "a land-hungry, war-weary, and starving peasantry receptive to Marxist rhetoric that promised land, food, and clothing in abundance," by the mid-1960s Sukarno was perceived to be highly supportive of the PKI (SEARS 1996, 230). As a result, in the aftermath of the violent backlash against the Communists initiated by General Suharto in October of 1965, Sukarno found himself on the wrong side of the political fence. Furthermore, Resink argues (somewhat tenuously) that many Communists may have submitted to being killed so easily because

after all, they had aligned themselves with the "left," and taken the side of Karna, and, by inference, that of the Kurawas and hence the *raja sebrang*, that is, the inevitably losing side. It was no use fighting against the tragedy of fate (RESINK 1975, 220).

Likewise, Sukarno's eventual compliance with the wishes of Suharto and his supporters betrayed a much greater similarity to the stoic heroism and fierce loyalty of the doomed Karna than the head-strong bluster of a vengeful Bima. Like the Communists as described by Resink, perhaps Sukarno had quietly come to the realization that he too, like Karna, had been fighting on "the inevitably losing side." Just as Karna was defeated by Arjuna in the *Mahabharata*, Sukarno was forced into gradual withdrawal from political activities and eventually house arrest. Suharto and the army, meanwhile, who claimed that they

had put an end to the massacres, represented themselves as the saviors of the Indonesian nation. It is therefore no coincidence that in one of Pipit's *wayang mbeling* narratives, the narrator refers to the transition from the "Orde Laloe" (Past Order) to the "Orde Barusan" (Brand New Order) as a shift from the *kekurangwarasan* (insanity) of the "Kurawa era" to the *kebijaksanaan* (wisdom) of the "Pandawa era" (PIPIT 1993, 117–24).

Pipit never states specifically that the purpose of his narratives set in hell-ville is to resurrect the spectres of the past as a means of contesting the New Order's conception of itself as the wise, fair, and just "Pandawa era" of contemporary Indonesia. However, the following discussion will reveal a number of the literary devices that Pipit utilizes to make this intention beyond doubt. For example, in terms of structure alone, Pipit's conflict between the Pandawa and the Kurawa does not appear to be structured as a horizontal conflict between left and right in the manner of a typical *wayang* dramatic arrangement. Instead, it appears to be much more along the lines of a vertical conflict between the agrarian proletariat—the Kurawa—roasting in hell-ville, and the bourgeoisie—the gods and the Pandawa—enjoying women, whisky, and wine in Heaven. Not only are the Kurawa representative of the masses, but their ideological leanings, as expressed in their worldview and language, are decidedly Socialist. For example, Citrayuda, one of the unfortunate Kurawa heroes, observes that the Kurawa should never have hoped that the "middle-class" Pandawa would bother to help the Kurawa in hell-ville, "*sebab, hidup kelas menengahnya tergantung sama birokrat-birokrat kayangan*" (because their middle-class lives are dependent on the heavenly bureaucrats) (PIPIT 1993, 12). Consequently, the narrator observes that with no hope of re-igniting the tensions between the classes, the members of the Kurawa promptly lose their group solidarity, and beginning "the revolution" for greater class mobility seems an impossibility. Considering that some in the past have seen a synthesis between the Marxist worldview and the "feudal" characters of the *wayang* as contradictory (MCVEY 1986), it could be argued that a *wayang* puppet's invocation of the Marxist discourse of the struggle between mass political organization on the one hand and an oppressive state power on the other is mere humorous parody. Certainly it is humorous, but as with all the humor throughout his collection, it is also deadly serious.

The serious nature of Pipit's humor becomes most evident when one considers the language style of Citrayuda and his fellow Kurawa. The fact that their vocal delivery is highly reminiscent of the Communist jargon of 1960s Indonesia is both humorous and sinister. For example, Citrayuda expresses his hope in the formation of *kader-kader baru* (new cadres) (PIPIT 1993, 12) to rescue the Kurawa, where "cadres" commonly refer to small groups of Communist activists or officials. As mentioned earlier, the Kurawa also send petitions to the gods, demanding better treatment. Their petitions, accompanied by frenzied crowds much like

the Communist crowds that demonstrated against Pipit's father in the 1960s, carry demands such as "*Hancurkan Rezim Dewata antek Kobo!*" (Down with the regime of the gods, cowboy cronies) (PIPIT 1993, 11), a phrase highly reminiscent of the anti-Sukarno language and demands of the 1960s Communists. Furthermore, the governing body of the gods, the "*Politbiro Dewata*" (Politburo of the gods), is clearly a throwback to the Politburo of Stalinist Russia.

Like their Communist forebears, the Kurawa spend a great deal of time criticizing the ruling elite. The Kurawa subvert the gods by using narrative techniques common to *wayang* narratives such as word plays and *djarwa dhosok/kérata basa*, defined by A. L. Becker as "etymologizing as an explanatory strategy" (BECKER 1979, 236). In the *wayang*, by etymologizing, or explicating the etymology of a word, the *dalang* uses *kérata basa* to relate the words of the text or performance to the current context. Ward Keeler observes that the mechanics of *kérata basa* involve "dividing a word into syllables, then fitting together other words containing those syllables in a phrase that illustrates or is otherwise connected to the meaning of the original word" (KEELER 1989, 158). In Pipit's *wayang* set in the afterlife, by explicating the "intrinsic" meaning of the gods' names, *kérata basa* is used to satirize and undermine the authorities. For example, Batara Guru, the supreme god, is said to be a shortened version of the Javanese words, "*Gu-yune Sa-ru*," that is, a dirty joke, or the laughter one hears after a dirty joke. Batara Guru's wife, Batari Uma, is a shortening of "U-ang Ma-kannya jangan lupa lho!" (Don't forget my shopping money!) (PIPIT 1993, 64), which humorously suggests that the supreme god and his wife are just like any other married Indonesian couple on a single income, where the husband is harassed for more spending money. Meanwhile, Batara Guru's girlfriend, Sri Laksmi, is said to mean "Sri Lak-inya S-engah M-iring" (Sri's Man is half-mad) (PIPIT 1993, 64), which further debases the *wayang* ruler. Just as the deceased Kurawa are brought to life and humanized in hell-ville, their acts of linguistic resistance ensure that the gods are "de-deified" and rudely placed, symbolically, on an equal level to the Kurawa.

Elsewhere, linguistic tools of the *dalang*'s trade such as *plesetan* (puns) are used to synthesize the *wayang* world with the world of communism, once again simultaneously highlighting the Socialist tendencies of the Kurawa.⁶ For example, the narrator observes that the Kurawa entertain themselves in hell-ville by reading comics—entitled *Proletar Wiwaha* [Proletarian wedding parties]—characterized by stories depicting "mighty warriors" and "writers of the revolution," that is, Batara or "gods," such as Batara Mareg, Batara Engsel, Batara Lenong, and Batara Maut (10). These "warriors" and "writers" are a sly reference to the "gods" of the Communist movement. For example, "Mareg" may refer to a combination of the Javanese word *wareg* (full), and the Indonesian word for indigestion, *maag*. However, in the context of a "mighty warrior" of the proletariat,

Batara Mareg can be read as an ironic reference to Karl Marx who, of course, was very much concerned with filling the stomachs of the masses, despite the often “upsetting” consequences. In a similar vein, *engsel* may mean “hinge” in Indonesian, but in the context of a “writer of the revolution,” Batara Engsel obviously refers to Marx’s counterpart, Friedrich Engels, who can be seen as the unheralded intellectual “hinge” of Marx’s social theory of dialectical materialism. Furthermore, one could add that Marxism itself revolves around a “hinge,” in the sense that according to Marxism all forms of human society in any given era are “hinged” by the prevailing methods of production. Likewise, although *lenong* is a form of traditional drama of the Betawi region in West Java, Batara Lenong is clearly a pun on Vladimir Lenin, who can be seen not so much as a man of literature but as a primary “actor” of the Marxist cause, an organizer and activist. Finally, Batara Maut can be seen as an extremely dark reference to Chairman Mao of China, where the use of *maut* (death) reminds the reader that as a result of communism, many have been prematurely dispatched by Batara Maut, the “God” of Death, otherwise known as the Grim Reaper. This is especially the case in China, not to mention Indonesia. Again, just as the Kurawa challenge the gods and bring them down to their own level, the fact that the Kurawa read comic versions of the tomes of Engels et al. also pokes fun at the so-called “gods” of Marxism, who also appear quite human and mundane when read as comic-book heroes and related to *lenong* drama, door hinges, and the spectre of death.

The reference to Marxist comics can also be seen as a sly reference to Pipit himself, whose knowledge of the *wayang* world is based largely on the *wayang* comics of R. A. Kosasih (WIDODO 1988, 14). As evidence of this, consider the following passage, which displays a keen sense of self-consciousness, a metafictional narrative device often adopted by the more progressive *dalang* of contemporary Indonesia:

Baladewa’s position is a bit of a problem. His wife is the sister of the wife of Duryudana, the ring-leader of the Kurawa. Meanwhile, according to the comic book version by R. A. Kosasih, Baladewa is neutral. However, in the tales of the Javanese *wayang* shadow theatre, Baladewa sides with the Kurawa. Now, in order to fit in with our story, we’ll just take our version of Baladewa from the Javanese *wayang* tales.⁷ (WIDODO 1988, 33–34)

Here we find the narrator deliberating over which version of Baladewa to draw upon and, significantly, he chooses the Javanese shadow theatre version. This is more as a means of sending himself up than indicating any great respect for the *wayang* itself. Of course, the very mention of the comic book version further emphasizes the self-conscious humor of Pipit’s *wayang mbeling*, not to

mention its constant interaction with contemporary Indonesia. Such an emphasis on humor also reminds the reader that Pipit's aim is as much to parody the *wayang* as to appropriate it for social commentary.

The playful nature of Pipit's *wayang* world extends to Pipit's idiosyncratic style of contemporary Indonesian. It is peppered with what the publisher terms as "*Bahasa Indonesia tempo doeloe*" (colonial-era Indonesian) (v-vi). That is, words with unusual spellings such as *naek*, *keok*, *kalow*, *walowpun*, *rame*, *mow*, *sowak*, *aer*, and *laen*, to mention just a few. These spellings could possibly be seen as an attempt to mirror the archaic, obscure, and esoteric language of much of the *wayang*, a particular form of Javanese language drawing upon Sanskrit and Kawi (BRANDON 1993, 31-33). However, I would argue that Pipit's version of Indonesian, which adopts the Sino-Malay spelling of the colonial era, is not based on an attempt to mirror the *wayang* at all, let alone a sense of nostalgia for the colonial era. Instead, Pipit's idiosyncratic language reveals an attempt to rescue the Indonesian language from the New Order bureaucrats and return it to the colorful and gritty language of the common people. As sometimes seen in the informal communication of contemporary Indonesian activists such as Amrih Widodo, Ariel Heryanto, and Halim H. D., these spellings indicate a desire to make the bland and sterilized Indonesian language more "real" than is possible in its official form.

Pipit also plays with concepts or "reality" by placing a tongue-in-cheek emphasis on history and authenticity. At one point the narrator, in another metafictional moment, breaks the narrative frame to explain his choice of words:

[T]he concept of the ruler and the people of Astinapura has remained as authentic as possible, just like in their ancestors' era, even more so since they've become obsessed with digging up the ground of Astinapura. Therefore, this concept was labelled as "the digging concept" (*konsep galian*) from the word "digging" (*menggali*). (Note: just now I wanted to call it the "excavation" (*ngebor*) concept, but excavation sounds too modern, inauthentic).⁸ (PIPIT 1993, 121)

This emphasis on the authenticity of the past certainly emphasizes the image of Pipit's *wayang* characters as ironic representations of ancestral spirits. Furthermore, like the subversive presence of the larger-than-life Kurawa in hellville, an ironic emphasis on the past is very much a means of rhetorically contesting the unquestioned present of the New Order. As an example of what Ariel HERYANTO (1995) terms as the politically subversive qualities of some *plesetan*, Pipit's use of *menggali* (digging) in the passage above is a pun on *gali* (criminal), which when combined together refers to the Petrus killings of the early

1980s, where the Indonesian military, under the orders of Suharto himself, killed thousands of *gali*, which is actually an acronym for “gabungan anak-anak liar” (gangs of undisciplined youths) (KROEF 1985; PEMBERTON 1994; SIEGEL 1999). Ironically, it was these very same *gali* that the Indonesian government had previously used, that is, *menggali*, as an intimidatory presence during earlier election campaigns. Meanwhile, the argument that the *menggali* model for the relationship between state and society is more “authentic” is a sly reminder that from the very beginning of its tenure the New Order was established upon bloodshed and burial, that is, the anti-Communist massacres of the 1960s. James SIEGEL (1999) explores a similar point in arguing that the Indonesian government launched the Petrus killings as a means of setting itself apart from not only criminals, but also the *rakyat* (“the common people”) and a closely related term, “Communists.” However, in killing these criminals, the agents of the state made it a point to stab the victims repeatedly and then display their corpses. In so doing, argues Siegel, the state became as criminal as the criminals themselves, creating what Siegel refers to as the “nationalization” of death. Or, to use Pipit’s *wayang* metaphor, by adopting *menggali* as a basis for the state’s authority, the state becomes little more than a petty criminal, and the gods and the Pandawa become as deserving of eternal damnation as the Kurawa.

Pipit explores this concept further in a number of the latter narratives set in the afterlife, the *Seri Kurawa Protes* [The Kurawa protest series], where the gods find that life in paradise, or as torturers of the Kurawa in hell-ville, can be even more painful than life in hell-ville itself. The gods experience this anguish when the Kurawa decide to undermine the gods by taking pleasure in the heat, starvation, thirst, deprivation, and torture of hell-ville. For example, as a technique of psychological torture, the gods periodically offload trucks full of rotting corpses. However, the Kurawa, who are busy drinking some scavenged beer and molesting female movie stars, are quite undisturbed by this, and they cheerfully cook up some “corpse satay.” Frustrated, the gods use every imaginable form of torture conceivable: they mix up deadly cocktails of petrol, beer, and sleeping pills; they fill swimming pools with sharks; they equip electric chairs with lightning bolts; they let loose hordes of poisonous snakes; and they release swarms of bees. In fact, the torture sessions are so shocking that Legal Aid officers faint upon reading the “Amnesty Intercontinental” reports, as the sessions are “*bukan saja di luar batas kemanusiaan, tapi malahan tembok pembatasnya pun sudah dibongkar*” (not only beyond the limits of humanity, but even the limit itself has been knocked right out of the ground) (PIPIT 1993, 62). Meanwhile, the Kurawa laugh and smile.

However, not content with merely laughing their way through their endless torture sessions, the Kurawa actively taunt their torturers, making life hell for them too. For example, it is not unusual to hear taunts such as “*Kok cuma sebegini*

saja nyiksanya?” (C’mon, is that all the pain you can give me?) and “*Minta tambah dong siksanya.*” (Hey, c’mon, can’t you increase my suffering a bit?) (63). Furthermore, when they are actually given some food apart from rotting corpses, they refuse to eat it, mocking their oppressors with lines like “*Enggak makan lebih enak kok, mulut bisa prei dan nggak usah gosok gigi*” (It’s nicer not eating you know, you can give your mouth a break and you don’t need to brush your teeth!) (PIPIT 1993, 63). If the Kurawa happen to tire of taunts such as these, they amuse themselves with providing their oppressors with more work. For example, when a delegation of inspectors from the heavens is asked to increase the temperature of the lake of fire to one thousand degrees Celsius—“*supaye kite nikmat mandinya!*” (so that we can enjoy our swims!) (63)—the Kurawa, paradoxically, decide to make the most of their dire situation. Ever eager to increase the level of suffering, the inspectors spend days cutting down trees and looking for other combustibles, and they even recruit Batara Bayu to blow so that the wood burns quicker. It is only after several days of making the inspectors sweat and toil that the Kurawa, feeling sorry for them, yell out: “*Dewata bego! Enggak pernah belajar fisika ya? Mana ada aer bisa mendidih lebih dari seratus derajat? Belajar dulu dong sayang!*” (Dopey gods! Haven’t you ever studied physics? Where are you going to find water that can boil to a temperature greater than a hundred degrees? Do a bit of a study first darlings!) (63). In a fit of anger, the gods order the Kurawa to perform a thousand sit-ups. Almost predictably at this stage, a Kurawa wag shouts back: “*Kenapa cuma seribu kali? Minta sepuluh tahun!*” (Why just a thousand? I want ten years!) (64).

Thus, the Kurawa literally thrive on their pain, suffering, and marginalization, and eventually “Batara Guru & Co.” become so tired of the Kurawa’s endless requests to turn up the heat and increase the level of torture that they abandon the heavens with no forwarding address. Free at last, the Kurawa souls escape hell-ville and enter into the bodies of unsuspecting earthly hosts, who appear uncannily like the Javanese of Indonesia. For example, uncaring that in their human incarnations they are poverty-stricken peasants, a favorite Kurawa aphorism is “*makan enggak makan asal ngumpul*” (whether we eat or not, the main thing is to get together) (PIPIT 1993, 67), which closely resembles the well-known Javanese phrase “*mangan ora mangan, asal ngumpul*,” which has the same meaning. However, unlike the feisty Communists we have become accustomed to in hell-ville, it appears that the “liberated” Kurawa, in their earthly (Javanese) incarnation, are very much opposed to rocking the boat: they do not want to have anything to do with class mobility, and they certainly do not want to antagonize either the rich or the powers-that-be. Why? Well, if the rich or the powers-that-be disappeared in the manner of the gods, “*lha di mana lagi mereka bisa memperoleh kenikmatan dalam penderitaan?*” (where on earth else would they be able to find pleasure in suffering?) (67). Nevertheless, as argued

by SIEGEL (1999), the New Order state in Indonesia was haunted over three decades by the fear of revenge, particularly given the absence of any culture of revenge among the children of those victimized during the 1965 massacres.

SUBVERSION, MYTH, AND THE POST-SUHARTO ERA

As I have argued in this article, in *Baratayuda di Negeri Antah Berantah* Pipit has radically embraced the figure of the shadow puppeteer or *dalang*, as shown by his adoption of a number of the narrative techniques, tales, and characters common to *wayang* shadow theatre. Furthermore, Pipit has also humorously reanimated the shamanistic elements of the *dalang*, by using images of deceased *wayang* characters to resurrect the ghosts of New Order Indonesia's past. Ultimately, by exploring the extremely provocative image of the deceased Kurawa enjoying life in "hell-ville," Pipit not only contests the New Order's "Othering" of the Communists but also explores what it means to be a human in New Order Indonesia. In short, by embracing the image of the *dalang* with his shamanistic tendencies, in *Baratayuda di Negeri Antah Berantah* Pipit has not only brought to life the spirits of Indonesia's past as a means of renegotiating conceptions of the present, but he has also drawn upon and interrogated the powers of the ruling authorities of the New Order, rhetorically tapping and taming their power.

The question we can ask now is, has this trend towards the subversive appropriation of mythology continued in the period after Suharto's resignation in 1998 and the subsequent demise of the New Order regime? The answer is an emphatic yes, to the chagrin of some. For instance, in October 1999 the Javanese writer, cultural critic and academic, KUNTOWIJOYO, wrote an emotive essay in the Jakarta-based daily newspaper, *Kompas*, entitled "The politicization, commercialization and autonomy of culture" (1999). In this essay Kuntowijoyo denounces the way in which cultural expression in Indonesia has been overly-politicized throughout the post-Independence era. Kuntowijoyo observes that during the Old Order of President Sukarno and the New Order of President Suharto, certain domains of Indonesian cultural expression were blatantly co-opted and politicized from above. For instance, one of the most obvious examples of politicizing culture has been the use of the *wayang* shadow theatre for imparting political messages. Under Sukarno's presidency all political parties had been known to use the Javanese *wayang kulit* shadow puppet theatre for propaganda purposes. As observed earlier, each party attempted to portray itself as the righteous, victorious one and hence identified themselves with the "righteous" Pandawas of the *Mahabharata* cycle of tales, using them as their mouthpiece. Later, during Suharto's New Order regime, leading *dalang* openly supported the government's political party, Golkar, and *wayang* performances were often used to convey

government propaganda. From time to time Suharto gave speeches suggesting that the *wayang* was to be used to convey messages such as the importance of economic development and family planning (SEARS 1996). Furthermore, Sears observes that in the late New Order period in particular:

The government has greater control over the shadow puppet tradition than ever before, through monitoring what stories are performed, channeling the tradition into the government sponsored fine arts academies, and having the academies take an increasing role in the development of the tradition outside the academies. *Wayang* competitions (*lomba*) are frequently sponsored by city and village government organisations, and judges for these events are inevitably drawn from the fine arts academies. The government also oversees the stories that are chosen for the monthly performances that are broadcast on the national radio station (SEARS 1996, 258).

Clearly the co-optation of the *wayang* had much to do with the New Order's efforts to impose and retain its social and political authority. Repression, intimidation, and censorship were just some of the New Order's methods of establishing and retaining power. Furthermore, PEMBERTON (1994) has argued that the New Order's adoption of a cultural discourse routinely anchored in constructs like "tradition," "origins," and "ritual"—and its subsequent co-optation and promotion of "traditional" forms of cultural expression—was part of an elaborate privileging of stability and order as dominant characteristics of not only Javanese culture but also the "Indonesian culture" of the New Order. In this sense the *wayang* became one further site for the production of new forms of state domination.

Of course, the *wayang*, and the figure of the *dalang* in particular, has long acted as a means of conveying social and political comment. Furthermore, according to Lindsay, "the worlds of performance and politics have always been closely intertwined in Indonesia," and as discussed earlier, politicians such as Sukarno and Suharto have long drawn on traditional performance genres such as the *wayang* for their own oratorical style (LINDSAY 2005, 40). The close interaction between arts and politics is clearly seen in the established Indonesian practice of artistic involvement in election campaigns. According to LINDSAY (2005), this trend has escalated in the post-Suharto era. With the opening-up of the Indonesian media since the fall of Suharto, Indonesian elections have increasingly become media events. Due to the fact that artists and celebrities are incredibly marketable, and are not media-shy, many media personalities have been recruited to perform and campaign for one political party or another. At the same time, many politicians have presented themselves as "performer-

celebrities” by singing, reading poetry, attending rock concerts, and so on, all with the aim of media exposure. According to Lindsay:

Since the fall of the Suharto regime in May 1998 and Golkar’s loss of influence, the link between performing artists and political parties has become at once sharper and more fluid: “sharper” in the sense that, in the legislative elections of 1999 and the two rounds of the 2004 direct presidential election (July and September), celebrity-artists were more likely to make clear public declarations of party or candidate support; “more fluid” in the sense that lesser-known performers have been able to move more flexibly between political parties (LINDSAY 2005, 40).

Other scholarship, such as this article, has examined the oppositional counter-culture of prominent and lesser-known dissidents, emphasizing the engaged nature of Indonesian artistic expression. “Many of Indonesia’s artists,” according to the editors of *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, “feel that their art is only of value if it expresses the feelings of society and communicates with it” (HOOKER and DICK 1993, 2). Pipit’s humorous *wayang* tales are an excellent case-in-point.

Meanwhile, praiseworthy books such as *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia* have contributed in an important way to our expanding understanding of Indonesian artists. Nevertheless, we are only skimming the surface of understanding the dynamics of the production, content, and reception of recent Indonesian artistic expression, not to mention its relationship to the rapidly changing political and cultural contexts preceding and following the fall of Suharto in 1998. Indeed the first, and most important, duty we must now perform is to reframe the socially engaged image of the Indonesian artist outlined above—and epitomized by Pipit Rochijat—in the context of the twilight years of the New Order regime and the years immediately following it, where the speed and scale of social and political change has been breath-taking and rapid. The starting point for this reframing process could well be, for instance, an examination of the incredible efflorescence of artistic solidarity in response to the tsunami disaster in Aceh and North Sumatra in December 2004. Such scholarship, I believe, would then help us to further reflect on the ongoing nexus between Indonesian cultural expression and traumatic episodes in Indonesian history, such as the tsunami or the 1965–1966 anti-Communist massacres, so imaginatively evoked by Pipit.

NOTES

1. “Isi [Baratayuda di Negeri Antah Berantah] secara umum boleh dikatakan ‘plese-tan’ dari berbagai bagian cerita Baratayuda. Tendensi yang dibangunkannya bukan seka-

dar mengajak kita tertawa, tapi condong merefleksikan kondisi sosial-politik di Indonesia semenjak tahun 1960-an sampai sekarang” (“Wayang Pun Bisa Menyindir Kita,” *Gaung* 2: 33 [1994]).

2. They were probably very well aware but could do little about it without risking their livelihoods and their families also.

3. During the late New Order period—that is, from the mid 1960s to the late 1990s—Wiji Thukul was widely regarded as one of Indonesia’s leading poets, and he was also an outspoken critic of the authoritarianism of the New Order regime. The fact that in 1998 Wiji mysteriously disappeared reflects the serious, and dangerous, nature of expressing anti-government sentiment in the New Order period. See Richard CURTIS (2000).

4. My thanks to Benedict Anderson for pointing this out to me.

5. These terms refer to the official and Communist terminology of the Guided Democracy period (1959–1965). “*Retool*” meant dismissing or transferring a politically unsatisfactory official; “*Kabir*” is an acronym to denote “capitalist bureaucrat,” referring to army officers who had become the managers of confiscated and nationalized Dutch and British properties, and who had as a result amassed great wealth; Masyumi was a large political party of Islamic reform, founded in 1945 and banned by Sukarno in 1960 on the grounds that many of its leaders had been involved in the regional rebellions of 1958–1959; *Tujuh Setan Desa* [Seven Village Devils] was a PKI phrase denoting the seven different types of village-level exploiters.

6. For more on the subversive role of *plesetan*, see Ariel HERYANTO (1995).

7. [P]osisi Baladewa cukup repot. Istrinya masih kakak kandung istri Duryudana, gem-bong Kurawa. Lalu, menurut cerita R. A. Kosasih, Baladewa itu tak berpihak. Sedangkan dalam cerita wayang Jawa, Baladewa itu memihak Kurawa. Nah, supaya cocok dengan jalan cerita di sini, maka yang diambil adalah posisi Baladewa dalam cerita wayang Jawa saja.

8. [K]onsep hubungan penguasa dan warga Astinapura dibiarkan asli seperti pada zaman nenek moyang mereka, apalagi sehabis mereka gila-gilaan menggali bumi Astinapura. Makanya, itu dikenal sebagai “konsep galian”, dari “menggali.” (Catatan: tadinya mau dibi-lang konsep “ngebor,” tapi ngebor berbau modern, tidak asli).

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