



DISTOPIA

Distopia Antologi Puisi Anugerah Seni dan Sastra I Fakultas Ilmu Budaya UGM. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press

By Nuriadi*

Robert Frost, one of the most prominent American poets of the mid-20th century, once stated that “literature is a performance in words” (Barnet *et al.*, 1961: 1). The phrase “performance in words” specifically refers to the real significance of language in the presentation of a literary work. If there is no language, then there will be absolutely no literature or literary work. Language serves not only as a medium for the work’s existence but also for a work to be called a work of art. Related to this proposition, poetry as a literary genre certainly exists because of the language by which the poets or the authors pour out their artistic and creative craftsmanship, and through which readers can really read, enjoy, and concretize the poets’ ideas and messages.

This is clearly seen through a new poetry anthology entitled *Distopia: Antologi Puisi Anugerah Seni dan Sastra I Fakultas Ilmu Budaya UGM* (2014). There are eighteen poets whose poems are compiled in this book. They, as noted by Prof. Faruk in the *Epilogue*, are still very young—since they were mostly born in the 1980s and 1990s—yet so talented (p. 159). These poets use language artistically, freely, and creatively. In other words, in their hands, language seems to dance and develop freely following the wildness of their thoughts and emotions. Language thus works out effectively in its performance through the poems in this book. Through the performance of language, these poems can be called literary works not merely due to the fact that they are named as poems either by their authors or by experts, but more

essentially because they are able to use language in peculiar ways, as termed by Eagleton in his book *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983). In this sense, the poems presented are not really in line with how Professor Pradopo once defined poetry, saying that a poem should be performed through a ‘bounded’ language in the sense of the amount of lines in a stanza, the amount of words and syllables in each line, the use of fixed rhyme schemes, meters, melody or rhythms and so on. To be more exact, Prof. Pradopo (2007: 5) wrote: “*Puisi itu adalah karangan yang terikat oleh (1) banyak baris dalam tiap bait, (2) banyak kata dalam tiap baris; (3) banyak suku kata dalam tiap baris, (3) banyak suku kata dalam tiap baris; (4) rima; dan (5) irama atau ritme.*”

On the contrary, the poems in this anthology, in my eyes, do not care about or pay attention at all to the uses of the poetic elements mentioned above in order to be poetic. The poems in the book do not follow this definition. It seems to me that the poems have shifted from the previous definition and convention, that they have come into a new trend and conception of poetry known as ‘Free Verse’, as Sylvan Barnet coined in his book *An Introduction to Literature* (1961). To prove it, let us have a look at several examples of the poems such as: *Catatan Minggu Pagi Veteran Perang* written by Abimardha Kurniawan, *Macopat* written by Khairul Umam, *Musim yang Kembali Berulang Kali* written by Ayu Diah Cempaka, *Yang Aku Ingat* written by La Ode Gusman Nasiru, *Puncak Suroloyo* written by Latief S. Nugraha, and still many more. These poems seem to have no poetic elements if we still stand by the definition above.

* FKIP Universitas Mataram

They are presented in a freeform or, in my term, in a narrative-propositive-formed language. In spite of this fact, the authors of the poems have obviously used their poetic licenses more effectively if we follow Abrams' concept that a 'license' is held by any poet in utilizing their liberty upon language to propose ideas in verse form. They have used the language as truly a tool to communicate what they really think and sense. Instead, in the context of the poetic license, the poets even perform new and unfamiliar words as dictions for their literary works, such as: *distopia*, *freon*, *pediangan* in *Distopia* by Dwi Rahariyoso, *telembuk* in *Telembuk* by Kedung Darma Romansha, *kadi*, *pangkor*, *kasmaran*, *pengegges*, *panebba*, *mennyanyan*, *labun*, *rabunan* in *Mocopat* by Khairul Umam, *berdiang*, *termamah*, *dadung* in *Lembu Logam*, Abimardha kurniawan, *mangi-mangi*, *ketinting*, *majenun* in *Agas*, Dwi Rahariyoso, *bersitatap*, *ai mak ajang* in *Catatan Pantai* by Iqbal H. Saputra, and still many more.

Furthermore, in dealing with the contents of the poems, the poets present various kinds of objects to be discussed in each of their poems. In spite of that fact, the poems mostly present the reality of human lives and the poets' feelings and experiences as well. All the poems, in other words, are truly a combination of *imitative* and *expressive* aspects. As said by Abrams (1953 and 1957), the *imitative* (mimesis) theory refers to the fact that a work of art is an imitation, reflection, recreation, and representation of the universe or reality of human lives, and the *expressive* views a work of art as an expression of the authors' feelings, sublime thoughts, and personal experiences. William Wordsworth, in this sense, even underlines the concept of such expressive theory by saying that poetry is "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" (via Barnett *et al.*, 1961: 4).

In this context, both the imitative and expressive aspects take a very pivotal role in the presence and construction of the works; that is, the poets show their honest judgments through these aspects. In short, underlining Retno Iswandari's statement in *Prologue*, the poets actually present a manifestation of their own "gloominess" (*kegelisahan*) to the realities they have seen and experienced. She writes, "*Puisi senantiasa mengungkap kegelisahan penyairnya, baik*

mengenai dirinya sendiri maupun orang lain. Puisi-puisi dalam antologi ini merupakan sekumpulan kegelisahan orang-orang di sebuah Fakultas Ilmu Budaya" (p. ix). That sort of feeling, in fact, refers to the expressive aspect, whereas the causes of their feelings are the imitative aspect. Therefore, most of the poems in this anthology are representations of the poets' dystopias to the 'dark' phenomena of their societies. The title of the book, *Distopia*, is really in line with the themes or contents of the poems. It can be defined as a society which is in some ways undesirable or frightening because it exposes dehumanization, totalitarian governments, environmental disaster, and cataclysmic decline in society.

In the sense of dystopian situations, some of the poems portray such situations in a pessimistic mood, as seen, for instance, in *Telembuk* by Kedung Darma Romansha, *Bunyi* by Dwi Rahariyoso, *Catatan Pulang* by Iqbal H. Saputra, and so on. In *Telembuk*, Kedung D. Romansha vividly deciphers how a woman, working as a prostitute, does not care about the moral principle of life. Her body is a product and is consumed as "food" for men, as seen through phrases such as: "*menjilati, mengunyahnya, menelanku, melumat*" etc. The woman does so because to be a prostitute is the only way to survive as a human being, but through which she is positioned as a subordinate, as inferred through the line: "*[M]ereka akan kembali mengirimku ke Jakarta*" (p. 2). Similarly, in *Bunyi*, Dwi Rahariyoso blames the urban lifestyle. It has indeed taken human beings far from their nature as human beings. They are positioned as robots because their lives are directed only for work, as he says through the lines: "*Semua seperti arus sungai yang tajam/menyeret ribuan hidup yang hampa ke muara/kerja dan kerja/yang terlahir dari sajad manusia*" (p.3). Still in line with the context of Dwi Rahariyoso's poem, Iqbal H. Saputra through his *Catatan Pulang* criticizes modernization because it has eliminated the tranquility of rural life and lost the closeness of familial relations in his homeland. This occurs because of a materialistic view where money is very powerful. Of course, he does not agree with this situation and he really laments it with his lines: "*[S]elangkangan demi rupaih yang makin empedu/demi berhala pemekaran dan pembangunan/karib-saudaraku tumbal ritual*

kebijakan karib-saudara lainnya” (p. 16).

Unlike those poems above, other poems are presented in a more optimistic mood, although they are still in disagreement with the theme of dystopia. This sense, at least, can be measured from the atmospheres, the objects, and the vocalization of those poems. Some of the works that display such proposition are, for instance, *Musim yang Kembali Berulang Kali* by Ayu Diah Cempaka, *Puncak Suroloyo* by Fitriawan Nur Indrianto, *Macopat* by Khairul Umam, and still many more. In the first poem, according to the Buddhist concept of reincarnation, Ayu Diah Cempaka seems to say directly that we do not need to stand seriously by any worldly obsession, for life is only a repetition of our past lives, as she writes: “*Hidup ini hanya mengulang cerita/dirimu hanyalah masa lalu yang hidup kembali dengan nasib yang sama*” (p. 8). In this context, she invites us to live in harmony with nature because it can guarantee us real happiness and tranquility. Moreover, according to Fitriawan Nur Indrianto in *Puncak Suroloyo* (p. 6), life with nature not only provides tranquility or happiness, but it also serves as a sort of spiritual way to find “*jati diri*” (an essence of self). This mode of life has actually been developed by Javanese people. Even the tradition of *macopat* in Javanese society, as described by Khairul Umam in his poem, is directed only at developing spirituality in order to meet an essential meaning of human lives. Once

obtaining such a condition, one may view dystopia as an insignificant and ordinary fact of life.

Reading this anthology, we can finally conclude that a poem is not merely a performance of poetic words, but rather a portrayal of human lives and thoughts. They are, in fact, colorful. The dystopias serve as one such color of life. Portraying such a fact is not meaningless, but rather presents lessons for the readers. The smallest lesson shown by the poems in the book is that life is never plain. Therefore, this book is highly recommended. It is reflective of life which can then be a tool for us to really understand further how life should be conducted.

References:

- Abrams, M.H. 1953. *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 1957. *Glossary of Literary Terms*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
- Barnet, Sylvan et al. 1961. *An Introduction to Literature: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*. Second edition. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1983. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Pradopo, Rachmat Djoko, Prof. Dr. 1995. *Beberapa Teori Sastra, Metode Kritik, dan Penerapannya*. Cetakan I. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- _____. 2014. *Distopia, Antologi Puisi, Anugerah Seni dan Sastra I, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya UGM*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada Press.