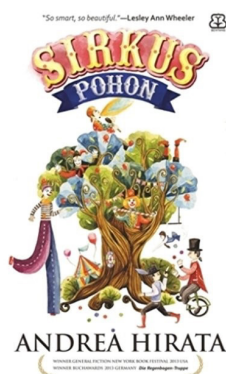


BOOK REVIEW

***Sirkus Pohon***

Author : Andrea Hirata

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Muhammad Hafidh Al Mukmin

Universitas Gadjah Mada

E-mail: muhammadhafidh19@gmail.com

“Fiction is the best way to narrate facts”

-Andrea Hirata

Andrea Hirata is probably one of the most productive fiction writers in Indonesia at the moment. His works are not only popular and frequent, but also receive a lot of praise from various literary institutions. His magnum opus *Laskar Pelangi* (*The Rainbow Troops*) has won many awards such as Germany BuchAwards 2013 and New York Book Festival 2013. It is fair to say that his nationwide sensation has become an international one, since *The Rainbow Troops* has been translated into thirty-four languages around the world.

Andrea Hirata is back. It has been two years since his last novel, *Ayah* (2015), was published until very recently *Sirkus Pohon* (*The Tree Circus*, literally) was announced. *Sirkus Pohon* marked Hirata's 10th work in Indonesian literature. Moreover, the book is said to be the first installment of its own series. Over the course of thirteen years, we might know Hirata for his tetralogy (*Laskar Pelangi*) and duology (*Padang Bulan*) along with other separate works such as *Ayah* and *Sebelas Patriot*. *Sirkus Pohon* itself is intended to be a trilogy.

Unlike *The Rainbow Troops*, *Sirkus Pohon* was aimed at more mature and serious subjects. However, younger readers may still find it appealing, especially those who enjoyed Hirata's writing styles. Hirata promised that *Sirkus Pohon Trilogy* is situated in the same 'universe' as *The*

Rainbow Troops. That being said, we can look forward to seeing more of Ikal and Lintang, two iconic characters from the novel, to be seen in the next installment of the trilogy.

There are at least three things that made this book different from his previous works. First, the book was published almost spontaneously due to piracy issues. There were cases where faux books titled *Padang Bulan* were available in markets, claiming to be Hirata's work. For that reason, not even a synopsis was given when the publication for *Sirkus Pohon* was announced. Nonetheless, the book racked up the best seller for fiction category.

Second, Hirata took two years to finish the novel. Accuracy seemed to be his priority, since he dedicated four years alone for research, including a special visit to Tahiti to get his facts right about pomegranate, an essential element of *Sirkus Pohon*. Finally, Hirata introduced a new storytelling style that was completely different to any other works he has ever written. *Sirkus Pohon* was written in a synthetic style, in which he beautifully incorporated first-person and third-person point-of-views into unity.

Sirkus Pohon tells a story about Hobri, an unemployed bachelor struggling to find approval from his family. Having a history with his criminal friend Taripol made it practically impossible for him to find a stable job. Lucky for him, the girl he loved, Dinda, supported and motivated him to find a job, which he eventually did... *as a clown* in a travelling circus. It was not as bad as it sounds, since Hobri's family appreciated it very well

and Dinda's family approved them for marriage. Everything went well until Hobri's pomegranate tree messed everything up. His engagement had to be called off, his yards were filled with enthusiastic people hoping to get their wishes granted, and he had to be dragged in a pathetic political rally.

Interestingly, this book incorporated two main arcs into unity. Besides Hobri, there were two other main characters as well, Tegar and Tara, two fine young boy and girl. The two met in a park in a divorce court while waiting for both their parents' trial. Unbeknownst to one another, they fell in love with each other, and sadly, however, parted without even knowing each other's name. Both spent years trying to find each other after a series of failures.

Reading *Sirkus Pohon*, the readers are tempted to sympathize with the characters and intrigued in finding how the complexity will unravel. Will Hobri get away with his problems and finally marry Dinda? Will Tegar and Tara find each other and confess their love?

Sirkus Pohon incorporates many figures and events that make the story more colorful. Besides Tegar and Tara, characters introduced played essential role in the storyline. The scene in the police office, for example, is a classic representation of how our people deal with authority. We can also see that Gaſtori, an ambitious man that wanted to be a village headman, reminds us of petty politics that we find in our everyday life. Dukun Daud, a local shaman, signifies Belitong culture that is still filled with mysticism.

Once again, Hirata successfully enrich Indonesian literature with his iconic Belitong Malay culture. He is still consistent with his "everyday people" formula: everything told in *Sirkus Pohon* feels unique, yet relatable to all of us. Issues such as love, marriage, superstition, and politics were cleverly intertwined into not only meaningful, but also a humorous work of literature. As the title suggests, *Sirkus Pohon* will be the most festive work compared to Hirata's previous works.

As a reader, I know for sure that there are books that are great and meaningful, but take long amount of time to finish. *Sirkus Pohon* is not one of them. The book consists of 86 tiny chapters –only a few pages each– organized into an integral work of fiction. Readers can feel the plot falls through not too fast, but not too slow. Most chapters are

closed with a twist, sometimes funny, sometimes melancholic, and sometimes tragic. Andrea Hirata himself suggested the readers to "read it at least twice: one for the content and another one for the sake of sensing the writings". That way, the novel can be experienced more completely.