

"KANCIL THE MOUSEDEER OF SUMATRA" AND "KANCIL SAVES THE RAINFOREST OF SUMATERA" : AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Tulisan ini melihat bagaimana Tamara Fielding, seorang *story teller* dari Amerika, menyajikan dua episode cerita Kancil versi Indonesia lewat acara TV "Tell Me a Story". Analisis berdasarkan konsep fungsi seni pertunjukan dan bagaimana sebuah sajian untuk publik Amerika diberi makna dengan perspektif Amerika. Dalam episode "Kancil The Mousedeer of Sumatra" Tamara Fielding menyuarakan nilai kesetaraan setiap makhluk hidup dan lewat episode "Kancil Saves the Rainforest of Sumatra", dia mengingatkan pentingnya menjaga hutan hujan dari pembalakan liar.

Kata Kunci : kancil, Amerika, kesetaraan

INTRODUCTION

Wayang Kancil is a new genre of Indonesian Wayang which emerged in the 1920s in Surakarta, Central Java and has undergone changes in popularity since then. At the end of the 1970s, this type of wayang was revived by Ledjar Subroto, a puppet maker who lives in Yogyakarta and becomes one of the Wayang Kancil *dalangs*. Although Wayang Kancil is not performed as often as any other types of wayang, we can still find Wayang Kancil performances in Yogyakarta and its surrounding area (Pursubaryanto, 2005). This genre has gradually been developing both in Indonesia and abroad, such as in Germany, the USA, and the United Kingdom (Bilby, 1997 and 1999; Pursubaryanto, 2005).

This paper examines how Tamara Fielding, an American *dalang* of an Indonesian and Dutch descent, worked out two episodes of Javanese

Kancil stories for performances for children on a cable TV program in the United States. More specifically, this paper attempts to observe the technique of the performance, the music, and the didactic values of the depicted stories.

TELL ME A STORY

Tell Me a Story is a program for children on a cable TV in New York. The TV Channel that featured Tamara Fielding as well as other story tellers was called "The Extra Help Channel". It focused on learning through story telling in the Arts-in-Education. "Tell Me A Story" was broadcast on Channel 1 and 45 and shown in 1995-96, from September through June. It was on twice every day, Monday through Friday at 10:00 am and again at 4:00 pm. It was recorded live in Cablevision Studios in Lynbrook, Long Island, New York where she presented Indonesian Folklore with Ledjar Subroto's

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Wayang Kancil puppets (e-mail from Tamara Fielding dated 26 November 2008, d.a. November 2008).

Through this program, Tamara Fielding — a puppeteer from North Port, New York — told stories about Indonesia to American audiences using her collection of Wayang Kancil puppets as the medium. Her puppet collection, made by Ledjar Subroto, includes, among others, a tiger, an elephant, Kancil "The Mousedeer", an ogre, *kayon* or *gunungan* (a puppet in a mountain shape), and a boss-like man..

Tamara Fielding is not only important in the dissemination of Wayang Kancil abroad, especially in the U.S.A., but she is also an important innovator because she performs Wayang Kancil using a technique different from the way Wayang Kancil is usually performed in Indonesia. Her scholarship in the field of drama and theatre and her experiences in acting in several films (Fielding: 1999) have influenced her Wayang Kancil performance in front of the TV camera.

This section presents the synopses of two episodes of Kancil stories that Tamara Fielding performed for a cable TV program and how she interpreted and performed them for the TV program. This is done on the basis of the recording of her TV performances of the episodes *Kancil The Mousedeer from Sumatra* and *Kancil Saves the Rainforest of Sumatra*, which she sent to Ki Ledjar Subroto.

For further analysis, two concepts will be used. The first concept is based on the functions of performing arts (including the televised ones) by R.M. Soedarsono (2002). He states that performing arts have two different functions: primary and secondary. The primary function includes the purpose of performing arts as a means of rituals, personal entertainments, and aesthetic expressions. The secondary function includes purposes other than that mentioned in the primary function such as for educational, economic, and political purposes. The second concept is taken from Bauman (1992 : 46), who argues that "[a]ll performance

... is situated, enacted, and rendered meaningful within socially defined social context."

"KANCIL THE MOUSEDEER FROM SUMATRA"

In Indonesia, the episode *Kancil the Mousedeer of Sumatera* is more popularly known as *Kancil dan Siput* (The Mousedeer and the Snail). Kancil is described as arrogant. When he is taking a walk, he stumbles on a small object which is in fact Siput, a snail. He is so mad with the little snail, which is crawling so slowly, and he boasts that he is the fastest runner. He even challenges Siput to race. Surprisingly, Siput accepts his challenge, only if Kancil agrees to do the race on the next day. Siput says that he has not participated in such a race for a long time, so he would need some rest that night. Before the two contestants separate, Siput asks that during the race, Kancil should stop running at particular intervals of distance and call out, "Siput, Where are you?" and Siput will respond to his call. Kancil agrees to this request. Before dispersing, they decide that the race will be held the next morning and that they will run along the bank of a river.

That night Siput asks all his friends to line up along the river bank, but they must hide so that Kancil will not see them. When Kancil calls "Siput. Where are You?", the nearest snail must give an answer. When Kancil is nearing the finish line and calls again, Siput will be standing on the finish line and will answer. In this clever way, Kancil will be tricked into thinking he is the loser of the race.

"KANCIL SAVES THE RAINFOREST OF SUMATRA"

In a rain forest of Sumatra, a prospector is ordering the wild man of Sumatra to cut down the trees in the forest. The timber will be used to make furniture. This illegal logging has caused all the animals in the forest to panic and run away. A number of animals are killed because of the Buto's action. The mousedeer Kancil asks help from Bogeyman, the good forest spirit, an ogre

who guards the forest. In a fight, the Bogeyman defeats the wild man of Sumatra.

THE TECHNIQUE OF PERFORMANCE

On the TV show *Tell Me A Story*, Tamara does not use a screen like in a Javanese shadow puppet show. To the right of where she is standing, there is a small table where she puts several puppets. Behind her (on the floor) there are two Javanese *gamelan* instruments: *gambang* (wooden xylophone) in *slendro* scale, a medium *kendhang* (two headed drum), and a pair of small cymbals (not visible on the TV screen). To her left, a row of puppets are randomly arranged on a log. This arrangement gives the impression of a forest. When she is performing, Tamara is facing the TV camera(s).

Each show begins with a theme song entitled *Tell Me A Story*. On the TV shows, Tamara always opens every episode by introducing herself as a *dalang* (puppeteer). In the episode *Kancil The Mousedeer of Sumatra*, after the introduction, she holds the *kayon* (a puppet in mountain shape) with her right hand and starts explaining the pictures on it. She uses her left hand to point to every picture she is describing. The following is an transcript of her introduction and the exposition of the *kayon*.

Hi! I'm Tamara. I'm a "dalang", an Indonesian storyteller. And do you know that in Indonesia we tell a story with puppets? I was born in Indonesia on the island of Java. But the story that I'm going to tell you now is not about Java. It's about another island, the island of Sumatera. And the island of Sumatera has a great big forest.

And here is a beautiful puppet of a great forest. And what do we see? About a golden tree, and out of the golden tree are the branches and it goes up and up. And in the branches are little monkeys and birds and what else do you see? I see flowers and beautiful leaves. And then we come down, we see great big birds. And in the center of it is the mousedeer, Kancil.

After introducing herself in the episode of *Kancil Saves The Rainforest of Sumatra*, Tamara describes a puppet with which a *dalang* is performing. With his left hand, the *dalang* is holding a *kayon* and with his right hand the

mousedeer Kancil. Tamara says that this is the way a *dalang* is doing his job. Then she describes the *kayon* on which there is a forest as the setting of the episode. The following is another transcript of her introduction and the exposition of the *kayon*.

Hi! I'm Tamara. And I'm a *dalang*. I'm a storyteller, an Indonesian storyteller. And do you know that in Indonesia when we tell stories, we always use puppets. And here I have a puppet of a *dalang*, an Indonesian storyteller. You see, he is sitting there behind a long screen. And he plays with the puppets and if you look well you'll see a tree of life. And you see a little deer that is part of our story. And I have more puppets with me that I bring along for you to see.

And here is a very beautiful puppet. It is a tree and we see in there a golden nutty tree with all kinds of leaves that grow around it. And there are animals in the branches. And when you look up, what else do you see? I see flowers and birds and then when we go all the way down we see great, big elephants. And this is the root of a great big tree of a rainforest because Sumatera has many rainforests which are very well good for the animals because they live there. That is their home. And look! Here are more animals who all live on the island of Sumatera. We have tigers and we have lions. And we have turtles and birds and we have alligators who bite. And we have monkeys and we have a snake with a very red poisonous tongue. And what else do we see? We have frogs and birds and great big trees and all of those mixed up in Sumatera. And all the animals live very happily in their home.

In performing the two episodes, when both of her hands are not holding puppets, she will make hand movements to support the narration or dialogues. In the episode of *Kancil The Mousedeer of Sumatra*, while holding Kancil, she is making a circular movement to show that Kancil is running.

In the episode of *Kancil Saves The Rainforest of Sumatra*, she is holding the wild man and approaching the puppets on the log to show the scene of logging. Her movement and her puppet movement indicate that the wild man is cutting the trees and creating chaotic situation in the forest.

In the two episodes, Tamara is wearing a piece of traditional sarong and a *kebaya* (a Javanese female traditional long sleeve shirt) and a *selendang* (long scarf). A large flower (a Star Gazer Lilly) accessorizes her curly black hair. The only *penabuh* (musician) is wearing a black jacket and a Balinese headdress.

THE MUSIC

There is no special *gending* (piece of Javanese gamelan song) that is used to accompany her two performances. The sound of the *gambang* (wooden xylophone), the Balinese *kendhang*, and the cymbals which give the tension to the movements of the puppets or *dalang*, or certain intonation is more illustrative.

DIDACTIC VALUES

In *Kancil The Mousedeer of Sumatera*, Tamara depicts the episode about the race between Siput the snail and Kancil. This episode is very popular in many parts of Indonesia. The message of the episode is that one should not be arrogant or underestimate other people, although s/he is superior. In the race, Kancil theoretically should have been the winner, because he has four legs, while Siput cannot run. However, Siput's smartness has made the four-legged Kancil the loser. In Tamara's hand, Kancil is described as not grown up yet, but naughty and arrogant. He says to Siput:

I am Kancil. The most wonderful, fastest, smartest animal of all of Sumatera. I run the fastest.

After Kancil has been defeated in the race, he asks Siput why Siput can "run very fast". Siput did not respond to his question. Instead, he says:

You are so arrogant. ... Kancil, it doesn't matter how I got here. What matters Kancil is that you must learn that no matter how big or small, how fast or slow, all creatures are important. And you, Kancil, should stop being so arrogant.

Through Siput, Tamara wishes to tell the children, her audience, that each person is

equal and has his or her own duty. The big animals have their own tasks, so do the small animals. The same is true with animals who can only walk slowly. The message Tamara conveys is that each person has his or her own role and every single role is important in its context. These messages are more than ethical in an Indonesian (Javanese) perspective. They contain the values of equality which in America are respected.

In the episode *Kancil Saves The Rainforest of Sumatera*, Kancil is portrayed as already grown up and no longer arrogant. When he is requested to confront the powerful and destructive giant, Buto, he does not use the tricks which are often found in the Javanese Kancil stories. He seeks out his friend, the forest spirit, Bogeyman, to help him defeat Buto. Here, Tamara does not present Kancil as someone who is always able to solve any problem. She does not want to put Kancil always on top.

Environmental issues, such as preserving the rainforest, are significant in the episode *Kancil Saves The Rainforest of Sumatera*. Her frequent trips to many parts of Indonesia, including Sumatera, have opened her eyes to the bad condition of rainforests as a result of illegal logging and forest burning. When Tamara is saying the following words, she does not only represent the animals of Sumatera but also people of Sumatera (and other people of Indonesia) whose forests have been destroyed.

But nobody wants to do that because everybody knows that that is very bad for the animals. We need the trees for the oxygen. The animals need the trees. Please don't cut them down.

This illustrates ways Tamara persuades illegal loggers and businessmen who exploit rainforests (including American businessmen) to stop illegal logging in Sumatera (and other places).

CONCLUSION

Tamara's technique of performing Wayang Kancil in the program of *Tell Me a Story* can be an alternative way of performing Wayang Kancil

in Indonesia. A Wayang Kancil performance does not necessarily use a complete set of gamelan instruments and a screen and its accessories like that used in Wayang Purwa performance. Her technique can be adopted as a model by story tellers (*dalang*) whose audience is children. However, good acting skills seem to be necessary for such performances.

Furthermore, it also seems necessary to include either local or universal didactic values in such performances. Tamara's Wayang Kancil story telling is certainly a way of utilizing and maintaining Indonesian animal fables which can be found even in the most remote place in Indonesia.

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APPENDIX:

TRANSCRIPTIONS:

“KANCIL THE MOUSEDEER OF SUMATERA” AND “KANCIL SAVES THE RAINFOREST OF SUMATERA”

Notes on the transcriptions:

1. The following transcriptions, by Eddy Pursubaryanto, are based on “Kancil The Mousedeer of Sumatra” and “Kancil Saves The Rainforest of Sumatra” performed by Tamara Fielding, in *Tell Me A Story* on a video tape of Ledjar Subroto's collection.
2. Tamara says every word in each transcription except the words in bold letters in brackets [...], e.g. **[Kancil runs]**. “**[Kancil runs]**” is added by the transcriber to tell that Tamara is holding Kancil showing movement that Kancil is running. “**[Fight between Bogeyman and Buto. Buto is defeated.]**” is showing that Tamara is playing two puppets, Bogeyman and Buto, who are fighting.

1. “Kancil The Mousedeer from Sumatera”

Hi! I'm Tamara. I'm a “dalang”, an Indonesian storyteller. And do you know that in Indonesia we tell a story with puppets? I was born in Indonesia on the island of Java. But the story that I'm going to tell you now is not about Java. It's about the other island, the island of Sumatera. And the island of Sumatera has a great big forest.

And here is a beautiful puppet of a great forest. And what do we see? About a golden tree, and out of the golden tree are the branches and it goes up and up. And in the branches are little monkeys and birds and what else do you see? I see flowers and beautiful leaves. And then we come down, we see great big birds. And in the center of it is the mousedeer, Kancil.

Ooh, Kancil is arrogant. He has a lot to learn. He is very young. And Kancil plays around in the forest and looks around to find his friends. Then he stumbles on something down in the grass. And he looks down and he says,

KANCIL : What!? What a miserable small creature is that? Who are you? (*A little snail looks up and says*).

SIPUT : Excuse me. What did you call me? Miserable and small? My name is Siput. I am very important. Who are you?

KANCIL : Ha..ha..ha.. (*Kancil says*). I am Kancil. The most wonderful, fastest, smartest animal of all of Sumatera. I run the fastest.

SIPUT : Well, well, well. (*The little snail says*). Can you run very fast? Would you like to start maybe a race with me?

KANCIL : Ha..ha..ha.. A race with a little snail? How could you possibly win? Of course I will be the winner.

SIPUT : Well. (*The snail says*). Would you like to try?

KANCIL : Of course. Well then. Let's start now. And not lose a minute. I will get it over with. Come!

SIPUT : Oh no, no, no. (*Siput says*). I haven't done a race for a long time. I have to rest.

KANCIL : Very well. How long will it take to you to rest?

SIPUT : Maybe all night. Would you like to start a race tomorrow morning at sunset or sunrise? Whichever is your pleasure?

- KANCIL : Sunset or sunrise? Sunrise will be fine.
- SIPUT : Very well then. But you must promise me one more thing, Kancil.
- KANCIL : What is it? Anything.
- SIPUT : Well, Kancil. When you run every so often at the riverside, you must stop and then you must look and call my name. You must say, "Siput, where are you?". And then I will tell you how far I have gotten so far. And the winner will be the one who reaches the other side of the river and reaches a stone and sits on top of the stone. Let us start tomorrow.
- KANCIL : Very well. (*Kancil says*). There will be no problem.

And he runs off having absolutely no doubt that he will be the winner. And what happens is that Siput that night called all of his friends. All of the other snails. And Siput told them that each one of you must sit under a rock on the river edge. Because Kancil will never know the difference between one snail and another. And when he calls, you must pick up your head and say, "Kluk ... kluk! I am here."

And in the meantime, the big snail started his journey and it took him all night long to reach the other side of the river. And he sat himself up on the rock waiting for daylight to begin. And so next day Kancil was ready for the race.

- KANCIL : Siput! Are you ready?
- SIPUT : Yes, I am.
- KANCIL : Very well. Let's not waste a minute. Let's go.
(*And Kancil is not very much in a hurry as he is sure to win this race. And as he goes, he stops, he looks and calls*).
- KANCIL : Siput! Where are you?
(*Then a little snail lifts his head from under the rock and says*).
- SIPUT : Kluk..kluk..! I am here.
- KANCIL : Ooh. (*Kancil says*). I must run a little faster because indeed you're catching up. I shall go a little faster this time. [**Kancil runs**]

- KANCIL : Siput, where are you?
- SIPUT : Kluk.. kluk..! I am here.
- KANCIL : Ooh?! (*Kancil says*). You're faster than I thought. This time I'd better hurry. (*And Kancil goes*) [**Kancil runs**]
(*Again he stops and says*).
- KANCIL : Siput, where are you?
(*And out comes another snail in front of him and says*).
- SIPUT : Kluk..kluk..! I am here.
- KANCIL : Ooh?? (*Kancil is very surprised*). How is that possible? I will run because I must be the winner. [**Kancil runs**]
(*And to his surprise, he sees, sitting on the rock, the snail waiting for him. And the snail is smiling*).
- SIPUT : Ha..ha..ha..ha ha ha
- KANCIL : (*Kancil is surprised*). How is it possible that you have already arrived?
- SIPUT : Ha..ha..ha.. You are so arrogant. (*Siput says*). Kancil, it doesn't matter how I got here. What matters Kancil is that you must learn that no matter how big or small, how fast or slow, all creatures are important. And you Kancil should stop being so arrogant.
Ha.. ha..ha.. ha ha ha

The End

2. Kancil Saves The Rainforest of Sumatera

Hi! I'm Tamara. And I'm a dalang. I'm a storyteller, an Indonesian storyteller. And do you know that in Indonesia when we tell stories, we always use puppets. And here I have a puppet of a dalang, an Indonesian storyteller. You see, he is sitting there behind a long screen. And he plays with the puppets and if you look well you'll see a tree of life. And you see a little deer that is part of our story. And I have more puppets with me that I bring along for you to see.

And here is a very beautiful puppet. It is a tree and we see in there a golden nutty tree with all kinds of leaves that grow around it. And

there are animals in the branches. And when you look up, what else do you see? I see flowers and birds and then when we go all the way down we see great, big elephants. And this is the root of a great big tree of a rainforest because Sumatera has many rainforests which are very well good for the animals because they live there. That is their home. And look! Here are more animals who all live on the island of Sumatera. We have tigers and we have lions. And we have turtles and birds and we have alligators who bite. And we have monkeys and we have a snake with a very red poisonous tongue. An what else do we see? We have frogs and birds and great big trees and all of those mix up Sumatera. And all the animals live very happily in their home.

Then one day a prospector comes to the island of Sumatera. And he wants all the trees to be cut down because he wants to make furniture of the trees.

PROSPECTOR : Cut them down! (He says to his helpers). Cut them down!

But nobody wants to do that because everybody knows that that is very bad for the animals. We need the trees for the oxygen. The animals need the trees. Please don't cut them down.

The prospector gets very angry and he looks for help from Buto. Buto is a Sumateran wild man. And he wants Buto to help him.

BUTO : Ha..ha..ha..ha..ha..ha.. ha.. ha..ha..ha

The prospector promises Buto gold if he destroys the woods and brings the trees down; so he can take them to the ship and ship them off to make furniture. Buto immediately goes to work.

BUTO : Ha ha ha ha ha ha(He grabs the trees.)

BUTO : Ha ha ha ha ha ha(And he rips them out.)

BUTO : Aah aah aah aah(And he continues on with more trees.)

BUTO : Aaah aah aaah aaah

He picks them up and more trees. The animals are in panic. What will happen? All the trees are falling down. They're cut down. And Buto tramples and tramples on everything that he sees. Someone must tell him.

SIPUT : Haah...The little snail. (Siput says). Kancil.. Kancil... Do you know what to do?

And the whole forest is calling out for Kancil. Haaah. Kancil now is a grown up deer. He is no longer arrogant.

KANCIL : What is it, my friend, that you want me to do for you?

SIPUT : Ooh.. Help us Kancil! The forest is being taken away from us! We're losing our home! We must go away! Please help!

Kancil realizes that he is too small to work for this big cause (?). He needs help. Quickly he must act. Kancil runs off into the forest in search of his friend, the Bogeyman, who is equally as strong and he finds him.

KANCIL : Ooh.. Bogeyman. Help us!
BOGEYMAN : Ha..ha..ha.. You want my help? Ha ha ha ha Where is Buto? Buto!

(And Buto knowing that the Bogeyman is looking for him, he begins to fight). [Fight between Bogeyman and Buto. Buto is defeated.]

BOGEYMAN : Ha..ha..ha.. I scared him! I scared him! And now the forest of Sumatera will no longer be taken down by the prospector. Ha..ha..ha.. Kancil, my friend! Come! We have one fight together.

And so the Bogeyman and Kancil leave to tell all their friends that all is well. And let us all go back to the forest of Sumatera. And so the dalang continues to tell his story about how Kancil saves the rainforest of Sumatera.

The End