

Symbol and Meaning of the *Gunungan* of Surakartanese *Wayang Wahyu* in the Study of Gadamer's Hermeneutics

IF. Bambang Sulistyono¹

¹(Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia)

ABSTRACT : The world of wayang (puppet) has developed not only to refer to performances that cast shadows, but also arts related to stories, plays, and dramatic structures, such as in the performances of wayang beber, wayang golek, and wayang wong (Guritno, 1988: 41 and Mulyono, 1978: 10).

In the puppetry map, "wayang wahyu" is a new type of wayang that appeared in the 1960s, as a new version of puppet creation that more or less refers to the pakeliran (show) of wayang purwa. Wayang wahyu originated in a church environment (Surakarta) motivated by the openness of the church towards the traditional arts of the local community. The church's appreciation of local culture has created cultural tolerance strengthening the emotional well-being of the local community. This type of puppet is a manifestation of the church's tolerance and adaptation. Its existence is even expected to serve as a mediator between the church and the people, as well as the Christians (Catholics) and the Javanese community. An 'odd phenomenon' occurs because wayang wahyu was born several years before the Second Vatican Council, which has raised many substantial questions about the problems behind its existence.

Hermeneutics, which is used as a theoretical approach in this study, departs from the thoughts of Georg-Hans Gadamer, which is often called Philosophical Hermeneutics (Muzir, 2012). Hermeneutics is not a methodology of science, but an attempt to understand what is produced by science itself, that is something that goes beyond the 'self-consciousness' of the methodology, as well as the relationships that occur between the various human experiences (Gadamer, 1989: xxiii). Hermeneutics is a strategy for critically questioning a culture's order and carrying out cultural reconstruction based on the psycho-cultural characteristics of a society of people replicated in the form of cultural buildings (Wijayanto, 2013: 12-13).

KEYWORDS -Symbol, Wayang wahyu, Gunungan, Hermeneutics

I. INTRODUCTION

The word "wayang" means "shadow", and originated from the shadow play, because the puppets appearing in this performance cast shadows and the phenomenon supports its name. However, hundreds of years ago, the dolls were colored and did not rely solely on shadow effects. The patterns of shapes and colors evolved over time until they reached the standardized form in the mid-nineteenth century to what we can see today. The world of p gradually developed not only to refer to performances that cast shadows, but also arts related to stories, plays, and dramatic structures; as in the performances of wayang beber¹, wayang golek², and wayang wong³ (Guritno, 1988: 41 and Mulyono, 1978: 10).

¹Wayang beber is a type of shadow puppet that is played by revealing or unfolding a screen or paper in the form of an image.

²Wayang golek is a type of wayang (puppet) art made of wood; it originated from Sunda, West Java, Indonesia.

³Wayang wong is a kind of shadow puppet performance where the puppets are replaced by human dancers.

Surakarta holds an important place on the travel map of traditional Javanese arts as a development and cultural heritage area. The palace's position as the center of royal art and the legitimator of folk art has formed and given birth to various (traditional) arts, one of which is *wayang purwa*⁴, which is capable of reaching a classic point. Several new puppet creations emerged over the next one and a half century, the majority of which were still based on the *wayang purwa* show. Moreover, the vestiges of the palace's prestige, as well as cultural patterns familiar to traditional art, have enabled several forms of new *pakeliran* creations to live and be accepted.

Wayang wahyu, in the puppetry map, is a new type of *pakeliran* emerging in the 1960s, as a new version of puppet creation that more or less refers to the *pakeliran* of *wayang purwa*. *Wayang wahyu* was born in a church environment (Surakarta), encouraged by the sincerity of the church towards the traditional arts of the local community. The church's appreciation of local culture has developed cultural tolerance that empowers the perceptivity of the local community.

Wayang wahyu is a manifestation of the church's tolerance and adaptation. Its presence is expected to bridge the church and the people, as well as the Christians (Catholics) and the Javanese community. This is peculiar because this shadow puppet was born several years before the Second Vatican Council, which has triggered a number of important questions regarding the issues underlying its existence.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

A work of art is ein *Vorbild* (a model) (Gadamer in Krajewski, 2004: 6), namely that understanding a work of art is interpreting the pattern of thought and pattern of feeling (expression) underlying it. In the world of science and philosophy, hermeneutics is a term that often appears in the fields of theology, philosophy, and the interpretation of literature (art). It is essentially a methodological study in the field of philosophy that seeks to achieve understanding through interpretation and explanation (Palmer, 1969: 4).

Some of the works of art from Javanese culture, especially those belonging to "classical art", are not easy to study by implementing any Western paradigm as the basic theory of the studies. More careful thought is required in determining the approach of study so that the universality of the conception that underlies the work, as well as the quality of taste involved in the artistic process, can be comprehensively revealed. Likewise, to reveal the symbols and meanings of belief (religion)-based cultural artworks, which are rich in nuances of traditional arts, namely *gunungan*⁵ or *kayon* from the *pakeliran* of Surakartanese *wayang wahyu*, a philosophical study approach of Hermeneutics was chosen.

The hermeneutics used as a theoretical approach in this study is proposed by Georg-Hans Gadamer, which is often called Philosophical Hermeneutics (Muzir, 2012). Hermeneutics is not a methodology of science, but an attempt to understand what is produced by science, that is something that goes beyond the 'self-consciousness' of the methodological, as well as the relationships that occur between the various human experiences (Gadamer, 1989: xxiii). Hermeneutics is a strategy for critically questioning the order of a culture, as well as carrying out cultural reconstruction based on the psycho-cultural characteristics of a society replicated in the form of cultural buildings (Wijayanto, 2013: 12-13).

The four steps of Gadamer's hermeneutic dialectics (1989: 3-37) used to study the *gunungan* of *wayang wahyu* are:

- 1) *Bildung* (forms of cultural building), namely examining the initial idea of the creation of Surakartanese *wayang wahyu*, as well as the cultural context behind it, especially regarding the existence of *wayang kulit purwa* as a reference and a comparative conception.
- 2) *Census communis* (desire or purpose of the group), which is examining the main goals and orientation of the development of the Surakartanese *wayang wahyu* to investigate the basic conception of the creation of *pakeliran* by the community and Catholic church leaders in Surakarta.

⁴*Wayang purwa* is the oldest type of shadow puppet

⁵*Gunungan* is a conical or triangular structure influenced by the shape of a mountain.

- 3) *Urteilkraft* (judgment - the limitation of aesthetic norms), which is the stage of interpreting the *gunungan* of *wayang wahyu* based on aesthetic propriety, social ethical boundaries, and religious norms, so that this religious art and cultural artifacts are seen as implementations of the religious conceptions embodied in works of art.
- 4) *Geschmack* (taste – aesthetic taste and religious taste), to place the *gunungan* as a moral decision of the Catholic faith through traditional Javanese (Surakarta) aesthetic tastes, so that all the symbols, meanings, and values represent the ideology of faith in the context of adaptation to local culture.

In principle, hermeneutic studies do not apply methods like scientific investigations in general, although in practice they still pay attention to the ethics of study as ideally a science because the main foundation is to achieve understanding and truth. Therefore, this is not only about the object of study, but what views can be obtained (Gadamer, 1989: xx). Thus, the study of *gunungan* of *wayang wahyu* is a seek for the meaning of a puppet that is more than just sheets bearing symbols that encompass meaning, but an effort to seek for new enlightenment in the area of the Catholic faith.

III. THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE *PAKELIRAN* OF *WAYANG WAHYU*

Wayang (puppet) is a fairy tale, fantasy, and myth, which develops into an irrational synthesis (for modern people). The world of puppets is a myth or symbol that can evoke mystical powers in its adherents. The Western interpretation that *wayang kulit* is only a shadow play is not suitable, because a puppet is not merely a visual object. For the Javanese, the performance of *wayang kulit* is a disclosure of *wewayanging ngaurip* (a picture of life) which has nothing to do with black shadows (silhouettes) on the screen (*kelir*) (Haryanto, 1995: 161).

"Art is art created by genius" means that for artistic beauty, there is no other principle of judgment, no criterion of concept and knowledge than that of its suitability to promote the feeling of freedom in the play of our cognitive faculties (Gadamer, 1989: 48).

It is undeniable that the emergence of *wayang wahyu* cannot be separated from the existence of *wayang purwa* (Surakarta), because the process of its birth was heavily influenced by the *wayang purwa*'s traditional style. *Wayang wahyu* developed as an experimental effort of new *pakeliran*, in terms of initial style, *pakeliran* systematics, and appearance, which referred much to the *pakeliran* of *wayang purwa*. Therefore, the study of *wayang wahyu* cannot be separated from the pattern or standard of *wayang purwa*; although *wayang wahyu* cannot be compared with *wayang purwa*, which is a classic and fine art. Efforts to understand the sense of the quality of work are inseparable from its basic mindset and existential system (Gadamer, 1989: xxvii). Likewise, the value of the 'symbol and meaning' of the *kayon* or *gunungan* of Surakartanese *wayang wahyu* cannot be understood without the cultural space and time contexts that surround it.

Javanese people perceive that the universe is not merely filled with living and animating forces, but is also arranged in a complex hierarchy and order (Anderson, 2008: 15). Javanese society has long recognized that the concept of the Triloka-Tribuana, which includes the three layers of the world: the Upper World, the Middle World, and the Human World (Sumardjo, 2013: 9), is true. Various ancient works of art, both those are truly based on Hinduism and those with nuances resembling them, are not far from this concept, remain perpetuated today, which is the concept of "three levels" in the meaning contained in the *kayon* or *gunungan* of *wayang kulit purwa*.

Triloka-Tribuana, in Mahayana Buddhist belief, conceptualizes the three realms of existence, including Niskala, Sakala-Niskala, and Sakala (Sumardjo, 2013: 43). Niskala is the empty realm where God exists, while Sakala-Niskala is the intermediary realm, where holy spirits act as intermediaries between the human world and their God, and Sakala is the real world or human nature. In the Javanese version of the Mahabharata mythology, these three realms are massively implied, although the dimension of God is never represented clearly, the world of Sanghyang, Bathara, and Gods is described with a clear structure, penetrating into the human world through Pandawa and Kaurava figures.

There are fundamental differences between the stories in *wayang purwa* which originate from the Mahabharata and Ramayana and those of *wayang wahyu* which are from the Old and New Testaments.

However, by looking closely at the *gunungan* of *wayang wahyu*, it appears that the systematic representation has similarities with the plot of the depiction of the 'three world levels' as in the *gunungan* of *wayang purwa*.

IV. SHAPE, SYMBOL, AND MEANING OF GUNUNGAN OF WAYANG WAHYU

Some argue that the word *kayon*, which is another name for *gunungan* in *wayang purwa*, comes from the Arabic *khayyu*, which means "life", symbolizing the form of life that exists in the universe and which is believed to have three levels. *Tuwuh* (trees) garden found in *gunungan* or *kayon* is defined as a "*Kalpataru*" (Buddhist) tree which means "tree of life" or source of life. In the world of *pakeliran* (*wayang purwa*), there are two types of *gunungan*, which are *gunungan lanang* (male) and *gunungan wadon* (female), with nearly similar motifs and ornaments but different shapes and sizes; the male *gunungan* looks slimmer and sharper, while the female *gunungan* looks a bit dense and full (Haryanto, 1988: 126 & 1995: 33). Based on the contents of the picture, it is divided into two, namely: *kayon Blumbangan* and *kayon Gapuran*.

Gunungan or *kayon* of *wayang wahyu* also consists of two types, namely *gunungan Surya Sengkala* and *gunungan Misteri Iman Katolik* (mystery of Catholic faith). Literature review has reported that the *gunungan Surya Sengkala* was created by M.M. Atmowiyono, the first mastermind of *wayang wahyu*, while other literature has noted that R. Roesradi was the designer and creator of other *wayang wahyu* characters. *Gunungan Misteri Iman Katolik* was designed by Bruder Timotheus and visualized by R. Roesradi (Yayasan, 1975). *Gunungan* or *kayon* of *wayang wahyu* has a relatively similar shape to that of *wayang purwa*, but it is bigger in size. *Gunungan Misteri Iman Katolik* is bigger than the *gunungan* of *Surya Sengkala*. However, the information about the male *kayon* and female *kayon* is not provided.

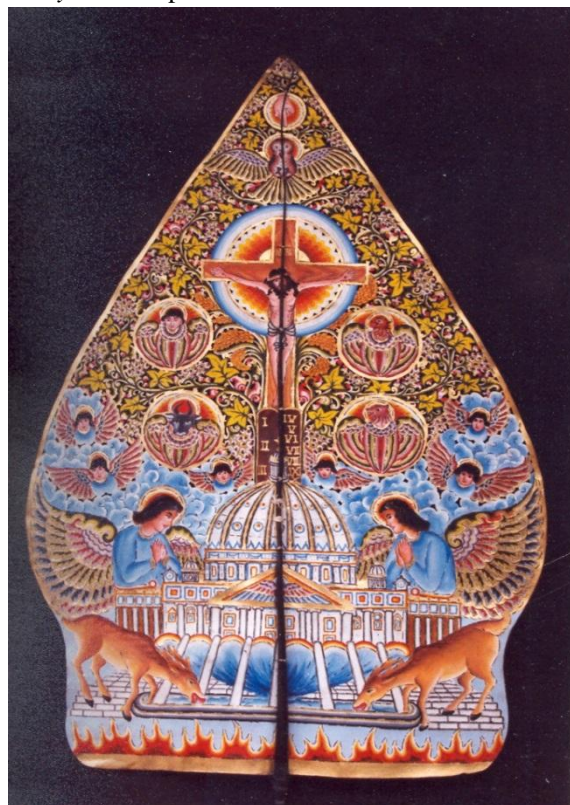


Figure: *Kayon/Gunungan* of *Misteri Iman Katolik*

Source: The Collection of Yayasan *Wayang wahyu* – Purbayan Surakarta

Tracing the shapes and symbols, the meaning that the *gunungan Misteri Imam Katolik* represents can be understood from the bottom to the top parts as follows:

- a) The lowest part is a picture of flames (hell), which means that eternal misery and torment determination come for those who do not get the glory because they deny God's teachings.
- b) The picture of two deers drinking from under the pond conveys the meaning of thirsty deers; that is how human nature should live, always in thirst for happiness in eternal glory, by always willing to receive God's love and grace through the sacraments as spiritual strength in carrying out the goodness in life.
- c) On the top is a pool with seven fountains, which means that Christ purifies His people or bestows His grace through the seven sacraments.
- d) On the right and left parts are pictures of churches, with two prostrating angels bearing the meaning of eternal submission, obedience, devotion, and love for God above all.
- e) The picture of St. Peter Church in Rome signifies that Christ has founded His church to continue His teachings under one Leader, namely the Lord Jesus Himself, and His role in the world is represented by the Holy Pope/Father who reigns in the Kingdom of the Vatican in Rome.
- f) The pictures of clouds and small angels represent saints and angels in glory in Heaven.
- g) The pictures of wheat and vines that cover the surface of the *gunungan* as a background between the main pictures symbolize the material used in the Holy Mass. The Holy Mass sacrifice or Eucharistic celebration is a New and Eternal Covenant sacrifice, in which Christ sacrificed himself with bread and wine to become the body and blood of Christ - to God the Father - for the forgiveness of sins instead of sacrificing himself on the cross at the top of Golgotha hill. Christ then spoke: "Whoever eats my body and drinks my blood, he has eternal life".
- h) On the right and left of the cross, there are four pictures in a circle, representing four authors of the Gospel, including:
 - Picture of a person : symbol of Saint Mathius
 - Picture of a bull : symbol of Saint Mark
 - Picture of a lion : the symbol of Saint Luke
 - Picture of a garuda (eagle) : symbol of Saint John
- i) The picture of a board with Roman numerals I to X means "The Ten Commandments of God which were sent down in the world through the Prophet Moses; then the Lord Jesus Himself taught again, revealed, emphasized, all of which were summed up as one, namely "The Law of Love".
- j) The Lord Jesus/God the Son hanging on the Cross suggests that the Love of God has incarnated into a human child to redeem/save the world by way of suffering and death on the cross, then rising from the dead in Glory.
- k) The dove with a circle represents God the Holy Spirit who purifies the world with His mercy and grace.
- l) At the very top or peak of the *gunungan*, there is a picture of a hand in a circle, which embodies God, the Creator, the heavens, the earth, and everything in it.

From the twelve groups of pictures or objects contained in the *gunungan* of *wayang wahyu*, it is clear that these objects are completely unfamiliar with the ethics of *isen-isen* (fillers) or stuffed images in the *kayon* or *gunungan* of *wayang purwa* or other creations of puppets in Java. Based on the characteristics of the shapes, the fillers can be divided into three groups of meaning, including:

- a) Fire, two deers, a pool with seven fountains, and a church, representing the state of the 'underworld' with all the evil images and good hopes;
- b) Two angels, clouds, small angels, wheat and grape trees, four gospel authors, and a sign bearing Roman numerals I to X, which suggest the 'middle world' with all the teachings of faith and belief to reach the 'upper world'; and
- c) Lord Jesus/God the Son on the Cross, as well as the picture of a dove with a circle, and hands in a circle, confirming that God is One, with three characters called *Tri Tunggal Yang Maha Kudus* (the Most Holy Trinity); that is the culmination of the meaning of *Misteri Iman Katolik* (Foundation, 1975: 32).

V. CULTURAL MEANING AND VALUES OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH

Craft art as a cultural fact in the Indonesian Archipelago, particularly in Java, has three main characteristics, as Joseph Fischer stated that craft art is always associated with mythology, serves as a part of a ritual procession, and is rich in meaning and symbols (Fischer, 1994: 2). This is in line with Victor W. Turner's statement that every ethnic work has three main concepts, including work, play, and leisure. *Work* is defined as a factual object that contains aesthetic characteristics and artistic signs, *play* is seen from its functional side which is generally related to ritual, and *leisure* means enjoyment of taste, it is even emphasized that leisure can have spiritual nuances (Turner, 1982: 30-37). Contextually, the *pakeliran* of *wayang wahyu* does not depart from mythology; the basic idea is to find a method to spread the message of the Catholic faith through the medium closest to Javanese society, namely puppet.

The introduction of *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change (Tracking the Traces of the Development of Art in Indonesia)* written by Claire Holt emphasizes that in the cultural context, works of art are produced, which embodies an awareness to assist in understanding the *weltgefühl* (feeling of the world) that want to be conveyed, so that forms of intellectual knowledge in its flow are not freely conveyed, even irrational expressions also become commonplace, as a form of expression of feelings. Works of art are perceptions and feelings that are tangible from their cosmology (Holt, 2000: xxviii). Like the shape of the *gunungan* of *wayang wahyu*, there is an effort to understand and interpret the concept of the Catholic faith in the form of ethnic symbols, which is the puppet world presentation.

Efforts to interpret a text or cultural phenomenon are not just making an understanding of what happened or should have happened, but how it happened. Efforts to construe all indications of meaningful findings (meaning over meaning), synchronization, structuralization, and sharpening their meaning always require interpretative dialectics (hermeneutics). The position of *gunungan* of *wayang wahyu* is the potential for the content of truth, which is acceptable to reason, dealing with the issue of aesthetic sense and religious truth, as Karsten Harries has emphasized in the book of *Art Matters*:

1. *Art is tied to truth.*
2. *The adequate expression of truth can only be thought, which communicates itself in ideally clear and distinct propositions.*
3. *Art is essentially sensuous* (Harries, 2009: 8).

Thus, the existence of *gunungan* of *wayang wahyu* is an aesthetic potential that conveys the truth, in the context of the Catholic faith, so that the representation of symbolic objects is merely the language of local communication in the form of puppets. This is how the monks and church artists communicate signs of Christian (Catholic) truth through the local visual language (Javanese puppet art), as well as with the conception of the symbolic structure that was most familiar at the time the puppet was created, namely the *Triloka-Tribuana*. It is noted that the adaptation of the ecclesiastical conception in the presentation of *gunungan* of *wayang wahyu* through the *Triloka-Tribuana* is a way for church artists to choose natural characteristics of the mind close to the understanding of the old Javanese people, instead of merging Catholic dogma with the locality conception.

VI. CONCLUSION

Wayang wahyu is the implementation of the church's intention to bring local content (traditional art) closer to Christian (Catholic) teachings, although it was never expected to give birth to an understanding of new beliefs as a form of cultural acculturation. This puppet is an attempt to cultivate the teachings of Christ that are not contrary to Javanese culture, educating how to "read" the teachings of Christ with the pattern of understanding of the Javanese people. The way of depicting *gunungan* or *kayon* of *wayang wahyu* is an example of implementing Catholic teachings and beliefs in the way of expressing ancient cultural arts. The *Triloka-Tribuana* is a Hindu-Buddhist conception, but when synergizing with the Catholic faith, it creates a truly unique but comprehensive form of expression, where almost all the main conceptions and teachings of the Catholic faith can be embodied in a symbolic aesthetic arrangement in puppet artworks called the *gunungan* of *Misteri Iman Katolik*.

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