

Strategy for Creating Characters Based on the *Tolak Bala* Ritual in the Theater Performance of *Hideung Geulis* Play

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Abstract

Kawung trees in *Banceuy* Village are often tapped to obtain their sap. Before tapping, the tappers perform the *Tolak Bala* ritual to ward off potential misfortunes. This ritual activity serves as an idea for creating characters in theater performances. This study addresses the problem of the strategies of character creation based on the *Tolak Bala* ritual in the theater performance of the *Hideung Geulis* play. This study aimed to describe the creation of characters based on the *Tolak Bala* ritual. The approach employed in this study was the concept of reading literary reception as proposed by Wolfgang Iser. Methods of data collection included observation, interviews, and literature studies. The study results demonstrate the creation of characters through text (the *Tolak Bala* ritual). For example, the *Kawung* tree is depicted as a woman named *Hideung Geulis*. Monkeys and lizards, symbolic of nuisance, are portrayed as the characters of Momon and Karman, who act as thugs. The supernatural creature as nuisance is represented by the character of Santi with a bad character. The perpetrator of the ritual is depicted as a helpful character, while the tapper is characterized as a morally flawed individual. These characters collectively from the cast of the *Hideung Geulis* play.

Keywords: *Strategy, Character Creation, Tolak Bala Ritual, Kawung Tree, Hideung Geulis.*

1. Introduction

The creation of characters is inspired by the real life of the *Banceuy* community in Subang, West Java. This community firmly upholds a custom of performing the *Tolak Bala* ritual (a traditional tradition carried out to ward off disaster or ask for protection from danger) before tapping the *Kawung* tree to ensure the sap flows abundantly.

Ki Darso (73) said that performing the *Tolak Bala* ritual, *nyadap* (tapping) the *Kawung* tree in *Banceuy* village yields optimal good results (interview, November 7, 2024). The *Banceuy* community still believes in the *Tolak Bala* ritual. *Tolak Bala* ritual is a ritual held in groups or individually that depicts spiritual beliefs about the environment and aims to prevent disasters and

calamities. The ritual is seen by the *Banceuy* village community as a form of respect and communication towards ancestors and supernatural beings. As Ratna Umayana (2019) described, the ritual is essentially seen as a symbol of communication in the form of dialogue between the real world and the spirit world that connects humans, nature, spirits, and their creator. The term *Tolak Bala* consists of 2 words: *tolak* and *bala*. *Tolak* in the sense of warding off disasters and dangers, diseases, floods, tornadoes, and landslides. *Bala* refers to negative things that come and disrupt human survival. The *Tolak Bala* ritual in *Kampung Adat Banceuy*, Subang Regency, West Java, is a hereditary tradition that is still preserved today. This ritual is carried out before tapping the *Kawung* tree to collect sap. The people of *Banceuy* village still believe in the *Tolak Bala* ritual to avoid negative things and disasters. This ritual is also believed to purify *Kawung* trees that are

unproductive or do not produce sap so that the tree returns to normal, allowing them to yield sap once more. Spirituality can overcome all forms of things and crises that bring blessings to society. In general, the purpose of the *Tolak Bala* ritual is to create a state of prosperity, safety, and freedom from disturbances from real creatures and spirits (Muhtadi Abd. Mun'im, 2022).

Zeni Wahyudin (32) stated that the *Banceuy* community likens the *Kawung* tree to *Hideung Geulis*. She is a beautiful woman. The *Kawung* tree tapper is a man. Therefore, the tapper tapping the *Hideung Geulis* figure must perform a ritual: *tolak bala*. This ritual aims to ask permission from the creator, nature, and supernatural beings. The ritual requires preparing free-range chicken eggs, white cigarettes, cigars, and incense. (interview, October 31, 2024).

The same *Kawung* tree is often tapped by different people so that the tree

becomes unproductive, and therefore, the people of *Banceuy* Village perform the *Tolak Bala* ritual. Therefore, it is necessary to purify the tree again with the *Tolak Bala* ritual. If the tapper neglects the ritual, disturbances from animals, nature, and supernatural beings may occur.

The problem of the *Tolak Bala* ritual in *Banceuy* village can be used as an idea for creating characters in the *Hideung Geulis* theater performance. The *Tolak Bala* ritual of tapping the *Kawung* tree is read as a text. What is seen by the reader, in the sense of the creator, is used as an idea for creating characters in a theater work. Characterization is a real depiction of a person who is shown in a story (Jones through Nurgiyantoro, 1995:84). Characters can also be interpreted as people who are shown in a narrative story or drama, whom the readers show to have certain moral qualities and tendencies as expressed in speech and what is done in actions (Abrams through

Nurgiyantoro, 1995: 85). The problem arising from this study is how the reader or creator's strategy is in creating characters based on the *Tolak Bala* ritual. This study aimed to explain the creation of characters in theater performances through reading the text of the *Tolak Bala* ritual. Noor (in Daulay, 2020:2) also said that literary works as works of art are creative, meaning that they are the result of human creation in the form of language works that are aesthetic (in the sense of art) the results of which are literary works such as novels, poetry, short stories, dramas, and others.

The approach used in solving the problem, namely literary reception, was proposed by Wolfgang Iser. In literary reception, readers have individual experiences according to what they see and have different personal experiences and backgrounds. Readers explore the *Tolak Bala* ritual activities and create new perspectives to create an

artwork. In this discussion, critics and the general public have an important role in analyzing a new work (Armia Faiqah, 2023).

Wolfgang Iser stated that there are three types of readers in the literary reception theory. The first reader is the real reader, where the reader can find out his reactions with documentation. Furthermore, the second reader is the ideal reader, formed by a critic (theorist). This reader is formed by an author who plans the plot. The third implicit reader is a reader who is not much different from the ideal reader. In Wolfgang Iser's opinion, the reader is positioned as a real reader. The *Tolak Bala* ritual is positioned as a text (the *Tolak Bala* ritual) by readers who give individual assessments, readers are inspired by the text (the *Tolak Bala* ritual) that occurs directly so as to create an artwork in the form of characterization. According to Segers (1978:52), the reader is satisfied by the individual meaning presented by

the author. Magdalena M. Manao (2021) also said that the author processes literature by manipulating reality so that there is an integration between reality and the author's imagination. Literary works are imaginative works expressed by the author in writing with aesthetic value.

2. Research Method

This qualitative research used data collection methods such as observation, interviews, and literature review, conducted in the *Kampung Adat Banceuy*, Subang Regency, West Java, from September to December. The study aimed to collect data to obtain facts and increase knowledge sources.

2.1. Observation

This study used direct observation of the implementation of the *Tolak Bala* ritual on the *Kawung* tree in *Banceuy* Village. The observation was carried out before tapping the *Kawung* tree until the tapping process was

completed. The ritual process was observed from start to finish. After the *Tolak Bala* ritual, tapping was carried out to obtain palm sap, and the cooking process was carried out to become palm sugar. The observation was documented with photos and videos.

2.2. Interview

Data were collected through interviews with the *Banceuy* village community, from the general public to the traditional elders. This interview was obtained through direct questions and answers from the resource person. The first interview was conducted with Ki Darso (73) to obtain information about the *Tolak Bala* ritual, the ritual stages, and what needs to be prepared. Ki Darso said that before carrying out the ritual, one must prepare incense, cigars, white cigarettes, and a slice of palm sugar for offerings, then ask for permission and read prayers and mantras; after reading the mantra, the white

cigarettes that are burned are placed under the *Kawung* tree. The second interview was conducted with Ki Wahri (60) about the *Tolak Bala* ritual from start to finish until the tapping process. This ritual is carried out using offerings and Islamic prayers. Ki Wahri said that the prayers for the *Tolak Bala* ritual are varied according to the ancestors who passed it down. The third interview was conducted with Zeni Wahyudin (32), stating that the *Tolak Bala* ritual occurred because the *Kawung* tree was no longer productive in holding a ritual, so it would be productive again and could be tapped again.

2.3. Literature Review

The study involved reading books, literature, notes, and reports on the problem from the Internet to strengthen data and obtain references related to the issues raised. In addition, printed media was also used for data collection.

3. Discussion

The *Tolak Bala* ritual in *Banceuy* village begins with *mipit kudu amit* (seeking permission), first to God, then to ancestors and guardians (supernatural beings). The first thing to do in the *Tolak Bala* ritual is prepare offerings, burn incense and white cigarettes, and recite prayers and mantras. These stages must be carried out properly and correctly. Zeni Wahyudin (32) stated that failing to perform the ritual correctly could result in disturbances (interview, 2024). Based on these problems, readers, in this case the work's creator, can find inspiration for creating characters. As a reader, possessing the personality to provide reactions that produce or transcribe the text (the *Tolak Bala* ritual) of the *Kawung* tree into a theater characterization named *Hideung Geulis*. The aspects of the character are derived from sociological, psychological, and physiological factors. In *Hideung Geulis's*

performance, the character creation strategy is carried out as follows:



Picture 1: Kawung Tree



Picture 2: Hideung Geulis Character

Picture 1 shows a *Kawung* tree; readers are inspired by the *Kawung* tree with the character of the tree, which is good in that it has many benefits for the people of *Banceuy* village. Palm sap is processed into palm sugar, sugar palm fruit is used for health, palm fiber is used for brooms and hut roofs, tapioca flour is used in cooking, *sawen* leaves are crafted into weavings and other materials, and *Kawung* tree roots

serve as herbal medicine. In the *Tolak Bala* ritual, the *Kawung* tree becomes the main goal of the reader, who is inspired to create the main character named *Hideung Geulis*. Picture 2 of the *Hideung Geulis* character is a transcript of the *Kawung* tree; and therefore, not much different from the character of the *Kawung* tree, *Hideung Geulis* has a good character, is beautiful, friendly, polite, helps each other, and becomes the village prima donna.

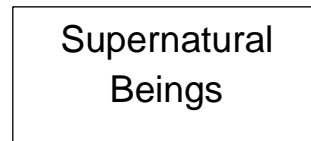
Picture 3 shows a monkey and a lizard as nuisances, symbolic of disruptions caused by improperly performed rituals. These creatures negatively affect the *Kawung* tree and the tapper, reducing productivity and quality. In Picture 4, the authors describe the two animals depicted as the characters: Momon and Karman. The reader makes the characters Momon and Karman a thug and a nuisance, just like the monkey and lizard, selfish and greedy, who often disturb, so that it makes the character, as the nuisance of *Hideung Geulis*, depressed.



Picture 3: Lizard and Monkey



Picture 4: Momon and Karman Characters



Picture 5: Supernatural Beings



Picture 6: Santi Character

Another nuisance is a supernatural being whose presence disturbs humans due to the tapper not performing the ritual properly by disturbing the tapper. The way to disturb the supernatural being is by inciting, teasing, and giving negative energy. Picture 6 represents the character of this supernatural creature. The reader creates the character of *Santi* as a third person in the relationship between *Hideung Geulis* and the tapper. The character of this cheating character is a seducer, seducing, inciting, and seizing.



Picture 7: A Kawung Tapper



Picture 8: A Bad Tapper Character

Picture 9 shows a bad tapper whose tapping process is rough, as he pleases, not following the general process. A tapper who does not perform rituals or obtain permission results in disturbances. Picture 8 shows the reader creating this tapper character with bad characteristics, such as being rough, selfish, greedy, easily provoked, unfaithful, and not thinking about the fate of *Hideung Geulis* (depicted as his wife).



Picture 9: Performing the ritual



Picture 10: Ritual Elder Character

Picture 9 shows the Tolak Bala ritual that elders carry out using the correct sequence according to the processes. Picture 10 indicates the figure of an elder who is a transcript from elder to elder characterization. This figure is good and performs the *Tolak Bala* ritual to cleanse from nuisance and purify again. The author created this figure of an elder with a good character, helping each other and caring for the elders.

According to Minderop (2005: 3), the characterization of characters can be studied using five methods: direct method (telling), indirect method (showing), point of view method, stream of consciousness method, and figurative language method. The telling method relies on the presentation of character traits in exposition and direct comments from the author. Subandi said (1978: 12) that characterization is a pattern of depicting a person's image that can be viewed from a physical, psychological, and sociological

perspective. The following table summarizes the overall character depiction in the *Hideung Geulis* theater performance.

Table 1: Character Depiction

Character	STRUCTURE			TEXTURE
	SOCIOLOGY	PSYCHOLOGY	PHYSIOLOGY	
Hideung Geulis	Simple, selling palm sugar, Kang Ujang's wife.	Good, friendly, polite, gentle, easygoing.	Slim, beautiful, ideal, tan skin.	Calm, peaceful, living in a rural village.
Momon	A village thug, rough, taking others' belongings.	Selfish, greedy, rough.	Tall, dark, with messy hair, an untidy appearance.	Tense, on the streets, loud and rough.
Karman	A village thug, careles about others, with untidy and messy clothes and hair.	Flirtatious, greedy, rough, lewd, materialistic.	Dirty, dark-skinned, and tall.	Tense, rough, on the streets.

Santi	A herbal medicine seller, simple.	Flirtatious, attention-seeking, opportunistic.	Beautiful, sexy, ideal, fragrant, fair-skinned, and tall.	Soft, living in Santi's simple home.
	A palm sapper, simple, and Geulis's husband.	Rough, unfaithful, a smooth-talker, easily tempted.	Handsome, ideal, neat, fragrant, and tan-skinned.	Soft, rough, selfish, and indifferent.
The elder	Simple, helpful, and a traditional authority.	Kind, friendly, empathetic, and helpful.	Old, hunched, slim, and tan-skinned.	Tense, sad, and moved, on the streets.

4. Conclusions

The *Banceuy* community has its way of preserving nature, one of which is by holding the *Tolak Bala* ritual. Based on the *Tolak Bala* ritual of tapping the *Kawung* tree, a story can be created. The elements of the *Tolak Bala* ritual are modified into a performance story, which contains aesthetic beauty. From these results, readers of the text (the *Tolak Bala*

ritual) can create characters from the text (the *Tolak Bala* ritual), which are then transcribed into the characterization of the drama script. By applying the literary reception theory of Wolfgang Iser, the *Tolak Bala* ritual (text) inspires readers to create characters based on animals, plants, and supernatural beings. Animal characters, such as monkeys and lizards, are transcribed into the characters of Momon and Karman, who are portrayed as thugs. Plant-based characters are transcribed into the character of *Hideung Geulis*, who embodies goodness and politeness. The supernatural creature's character is transcribed into the character of *Santi*, who has a bad character: as a seducer and an adulteress. Based on the *Tolak Bala* ritual in *Banceuy* village, readers can produce works of art, such as the creation of drama characters realized in theater performances in the *Banceuy* Traditional Village, Subang Regency, West Java Province. The *Hideung*

Geulis play was performed in the Banceuy Village Hall on December 1, 2024.

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