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The Rhetoric of Paintings: Towards a History of Balinese Ideas, Imaginings and Emotions in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries¹

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Abstract

Western historical scholarship has taught us much about Southeast Asia in the period between 1800 and 1940. This was a time when the insistent, intensifying and transforming influence of Dutch colonial society and its culture became widespread in Bali and more broadly in the archipelago. Much too has been written about the analytical framework of European histories of these times. In this essay I discuss Balinese paintings from this same period which shed light on how painters and their works spoke to their viewers both about how the Balinese knew, imagined, thought and felt about the world in which they lived and about the visual representation and communication of these ideas, imaginings and feelings through the medium of narrative paintings. In this paper I hope to draw attention to a number of historiographical issues concerning the reception of the ideas, imaginings and feelings conveyed in paintings. In particular I shall have some remarks to make about the role of philology in this regard.

Keywords: Bali, history of ideas, rhetoric of painting, visual representations, emotions

Abstrak

Retorika Lukisan: Menuju Sejarah Ide, Khayalan dan Emosi Orang Bali pada Akhir Abad Kesembilan Belas dan Awal Abad Kedua Puluh

Ilmu pengetahuan sejarah Barat telah mengajarkan kita banyak tentang Asia Tenggara pada periode antara 1800 dan 1940. Ini merupakan waktu ketika pengaruh masyarakat dan budaya

1 I am grateful to Mark Hobart, Helen Creese, Merle Ricklefs, Stuart Robson, Adrian Vickers, all of whom read and commented on a draft of this paper. My thanks also to the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and to Nyoman Gunarsa and the Museum of Classical Balinese Art in Klungkung for permission to publish photographs of paintings from their collections.

kolonial Belanda yang kuat, intens dan transformatif menjadi tersebar di Bali dan secara lebih luas di Nusantara. Banyak juga yang telah ditulis tentang kerangka analitis sejarah Eropa saat ini. Dalam karangan ini, saya membahas lukisan Bali dari periode yang sama yang menjelaskan bagaimana pelukis dan karya-karyanya berbicara kepada audiens mereka baik tentang cara-cara orang Bali pada waktu itu mengetahui, membayangkan, berpikir, dan merasakan tentang dunia tempat mereka tinggal maupun tentang representasi visual dan komunikasi ide, khayalan, dan emosi itu melalui media lukisan naratif. Dalam karangan ini saya berharap untuk menarik perhatian pembaca terhadap sejumlah isu historiografikal mengenai penerimaan gagasan, khayalan, dan emosi yang disampaikan dalam lukisan. Dalam hal ini, secara khusus saya akan membicarakan peran filologi.

Kata kunci: Bali, sejarah ide, retorika lukisan, representasi visual, emosi

1. Introduction

Western historical scholarship has taught us much about the period between 1800 and 1940, a time when the insistent, intensifying and transforming influence of Dutch colonial society and its culture became widespread in Bali and more broadly in the archipelago. Much too has been written about the analytical framework of European histories of these times. In this essay I discuss Balinese paintings from this same period which shed light on how painters and their works speak to us both about how the Balinese knew, imagined, thought and felt about the world in which they lived and about the visual representation and communication of these ideas, imaginings and feelings through the medium of narrative paintings. In this paper I hope to draw attention to a number of historiographical issues concerning the reception of the ideas, imaginings and feelings conveyed in paintings and in particular I shall have some remarks to make about the role of philology in this regard.

2. The Rhetorical Configuration of Paintings

The painters, I suggest, designed their works not just to recount a story but configured them visually in order to persuade viewers of the probable logical, ethical and emotional validity of generally shared beliefs and values (Smith 2007). Two examples might serve to illustrate the point. The painter of one nineteenth century work illustrating the Brayut story from the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (Illustration 1; Tropenmuseum Amsterdam, 2058-2; Worsley 2016a & b) narrates a tale of family life—of discord and angry disagreement around the rituals at the time of *Galungan* (Illustration 2), and later, of reconciliation and restored harmony, at the time of the father's ritual meditation on a graveyard under the tutelage of a *pedanda Boda*, his consecration as a commoner *dukuh* priest and the youngest son's marriage, the moment when he, the son, assumed responsibility for the family's civic and ritual obligations (Illustration 3). The painting illustrates the efficacy of ritual, the different roles of men and women in family life, the moral virtue of the male head of family and the emotional appeal of a convivial harmony in family life. There is a second Brayut painting in the Nyoman Gunarsa Museum of Classical Balinese Art in Klungkung in Bali (Illustration 4), which shares an interest in these same rhetorical themes but the painter in this case appears to have been intent on downplaying the place of women in family life and highlighting the family as a closely-knit community of men—of father, sons and brothers (Worsley 2017:9–11; Vickers 2012:59; 62; Gunarsa 2006:6, 104–105). Like these two paintings, there are many other paintings which illustrate the story of the Brayut family and display an interest in these same issues, but sometimes do so with subtle differences in their point of view.

3. Kamasan Painting in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Kamasan paintings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and those of related schools are narrative works in a style which the painters themselves and the viewers of their works

regarded as realist, and able to represent the events, places and beings of the world in which they imagined they lived.² At this point I should note the way in which these painters achieved their rhetorical intentions: how they selected stories to tell and scenes to illustrate and designed their paintings to draw the attention of viewers to the points they wished to make about the world. This process is embedded in a variety of ritual and other narrative practices—in dance, theatre and texts inscribed in manuscripts and their recitation and glossing. Painters painted their paintings from particular points of view, as members of some status, class or kin group and gender and viewers too viewed the paintings from these same sorts of points of view.³ Each telling of a story was, as Inden put it when writing about another cultural context, a moment in ‘the relationship between social agents, simple or complex, who are engaged in the rhetorical processes of ‘criticism, appropriation, repetition, refutation, simplification, [and] abbreviation [...]’.⁴ If we are to discover the rhetorical intent of a painting it must be in the context of these rhetorical processes and practices in which painters and their viewers are engaged at particular historical moments.

4. Obstacles in the Way of Historical Interpretation

There are obstacles in the way of this task, however. The first is circumstantial. Very often we know little about the dating of paintings or the identification of painters and the communities in which they lived and worked, and the individuals and institutions

2 For Balinese accounts of realism in painting see Pan Mertasih, Nagasepuh. Gedong Kirtya Manuscript Collection, MS 2091: ‘Satua I Sangging Lobangkara’ transcribed by I Gusti Nyoman Agung, 30 October 1940; Kat Angelino (1921–1922:387–89) and the *pangipuk wimba* (Making of Portraits) episode from Canto 4 of the *Malat* (Vickers 2005:23,209,326). See also Covarrubias (1937:165) for his report of a conversation he had with I Gusti Bagus Jelantik, the regent of Karangasem, in the early 1930s on the subject of realism. See Worsley (2014:7–9) and Vickers (2012:21) for further commentary on realism in Balinese painting. For descriptions of the iconographic conventions which conveyed the realist representation of the world in Balinese painting, see Kanta (1977/78) and Forge (1978) and (1980).

3 Vickers (1985) discusses the *sudral/jaba* identities of painters and its implications for their paintings.

4 Inden 2000:11–12) following Vološinov (Bhaktin). Mark Hobart [personal communication 10th August 2017] drew my attention to Inden’s discussion.

who patronized them and for whom their works were painted, because the paintings have very often been long removed from the social context in which they were originally produced, displayed and viewed.⁵ The second obstacle concerns the very nature of visual systems of communication. The abstraction, which inhabits all art systems, Forge has argued, lends a multivalency to the elements of visual design of such a system. In one context they may be perceived to have one meaning but at the same time suggest other cognate meanings, which only 'those who have been socialized into the society within which they were created' understood and could contest.⁶

The ensuing ambiguity, he says, creates opportunity for the expression of 'a very real and intense emotion in their [viewers]' concerning 'key associations and relationships that are essential to ritual and cognitive systems' (Forge 1977:31). Furthermore, we know precious little about the transmission of Balinese painterly traditions in nineteenth and early twentieth century and the display of paintings (Kat Angelino 1921–1922; Kanta 1977–1978; Forge 1978). It is clear of course that they were painted and embroidered on cloth and on wooden screens or *parba* and decorated the ceilings of pavilions of justice and the living spaces of palaces and house

5 They are removed from the original social and cultural context in which they were once created and then viewed on ritual and other occasions and become part of museum and private collections cherished as part of national and ethnic heritages or as commodities to be bought and sold. Information about their origins is frequently scarce, even non-existent, as are dates on paintings, and signatures in the period before the 1930s rare indeed. Judgments about the date of a painting can often only be approximate and rely heavily on the identification of the materials used, the cloth and pigments, and identification of the painter by stylistic signatures. Two useful publications on the subject of the deracination of Indonesian artefacts are Hardiati & Keurs (2005–2006) and Keurs (2007) which include chapters by Brinkgreven and Hout (2005–2006), Brinkgreven and Stuart-Fox (2007) on Balinese collections in museums in The Netherlands and by Lunsingh-Scheurleer (2011) on ancient Javanese artefacts housed in Dutch museum collections. See also Brinkgreven (2008). See Campbell (2013:1–43; 200–233) for discussion of patronage in recent years and Vickers (1985) for earlier forms of patronage. See also Vickers (1979), (1982) and Worsley (1970), (2011b) for discussion of the dating of Balinese paintings from this period.

6 This is a view consistent with a more general observation Hobart has made concerning communication: '[w]hile lack of ambiguity is carefully engineered to be a feature of computing, it is notably absent in human communication, where inexactitude, equivocation and opacity — let alone muddle and confusion — are common conditions in social life' [Hobart 2017:4].

compounds. They were displayed during rituals in temples and private household shrines, just one aspect of the elaborate reception and entertainment of the gods and ancestral spirits who visit for the time of a ritual. However, we have to wonder what a member of a Balinese temple congregation could make of the glimpses caught of paintings amidst the elaborate decoration and busy and varied activities on ritual occasions—the circumstances in which very many Balinese had the opportunity to view paintings.

5. The Two Brayut Paintings

At the beginning of my remarks I made reference by way of example to two paintings of the Brayut family and concluded that their painters—intending to draw attention to the efficacy of ritual among other things—chose to illustrate scenes from the story of this commoner family’s celebration of the festival of *Galungan*. Why did these painters feel called upon to draw this ritual event to the attention of viewers? Why was it important to celebrate the rites of *Galungan*? Were they simply paying lip service to age-old customs or were they perhaps responding critically to what they considered lapsed moral values in times of real or threatened social, even what they understood to be cosmic change in the world they inhabited and the need to ward off dangers by reminding fellow Balinese of the efficacy of ritual and ancient family values? Was the interest which the painters of our Brayut paintings shared more broadly by others in Balinese society in this period?

To answer these questions, we have available contemporary accounts of Bali and the Balinese. These include the descriptions of the festival of *Galungan* by European visitors to the island in this period.⁷ We also have evidence that a contemporary Balinese shadow play of the narrative existed, as well as ritual and temple

⁷ Contemporary European accounts of the festival of *Galungan* include those of van den Broek (1817–18), Dubois (1828–31), Bloemen Waanders (1855–56), van Eck (1866–77), and Goris (1927–1965). See van den Broek (1834), Creese (2016), Bloemen Waanders (1859), van Eck (1878–1880), Goris (1933/1960).

architectural practices which are focussed on the Brayut family.⁸ However, it is to the corpus of nineteenth and early twentieth century Balinese manuscripts and three works which contain accounts of the rites of *Galungan* that I want to turn in order to discuss the role of philology in the historical interpretation of these three works. There are manuscripts which record the *Geguritan Brayut*, a Balinese ballad which narrates the tale of the Brayut family and was widely known in Bali in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁹ There is also the *Usana Bali*, a work, which was known to Balinese readers in a variety of versions in this same period and contains an account of the origins of the ritual observance of *Galungan* and its association with the goddess Durga (Hinzler 1986). And there are also records of the liturgies of the rituals conducted during the festival of *Galungan* (Arwati 1992; Sirikanden 1982; Sugriwa 1957; Surpha 1972; Wiratmadja 1969).

6. The Historical Interpretation of Works in Manuscript Traditions

As in the case of paintings, there are difficulties which stand in the way of the historical interpretation of works recorded in the form of manuscripts. Manuscripts too have often been removed from the cultural and social context of their use and all too frequently the names of authors and copyists, the dates and places of their authoring or copying are not recorded. Furthermore, the presence

8 There are puppets of the Balinese shadow play representing characters from the Brayut story in museums. See Terwen-de Loos (1967 and 1969). Outside the Pura Dalem in Jagaraga Bali are statues of Pan and Men Brayut and their many children and a pedestal for a water container in the Pura Sakti in Sawan represents Men Brayut with her children. See Grader (1939:photos).

9 The story of Pan and Men Brayut appears to have been known widely in Bali in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The ten manuscripts which I have read to date come from Padangsabian in Badung; Tembuku in Bangli; Negara in Jembrana; Penaban, Sideman, Subagan, and Taman in Karangasem; and from the Puri Gobraja in Singaraja, Buleleng (See Kidung Pan Brayut, Pusat Dokumentasi Provinsi, Internet Archive, Bali, Lontar and Video on (<http://www.archive.org/details/kidung-pan-brayut>), LOr 3613. 3773, 3823, 3883 (2), 3911 (2), 3948 (4), 3968 (2), 3982 (2), 4380, 4381 (1/4 3823), 4382, 13.608, 15.229, 16.327, 16.432, 19.459, 19.851, 20.000, 21.771, 21.877, 24.244, 24.625, 24.845. For a Dutch translation of the story see Grader (1939) and for a text and translation into Indonesian see Ardika (1980). According to van der Tuuk (1897–1912 IV:894–95) paintings of the Brayut story were traded by people coming from Klungkung in Bali towards the end of the 19th century—apparently as far as Singaraja where van der Tuuk was living.

of variable readings between manuscripts of the same work gives rise to important consequences for a work's comprehensibility. Resolution of these kinds of difficulties of interpretation, historically the business of philologists, can also give rise to problems—in particular the introduction of anachronisms as I have argued was the case in Belo's and Hooykaas's description and text edition of the litany of a ritual which a *pemangku* conducted in the temple Pura Nagasari in the village of Sayan between 21st and 25th April 1937 (Belo 1966; Hooykaas 1977:1; Worsley 2017).

Faced with variable renditions of rituals and the presence of 'errors' in manuscripts, what is the task of philology if it is not to produce a work's originary moment or autograph or at least a text that was fully comprehensible? In a series of articles, Sheldon Pollock has commented on the place of philology as a discipline central to the humanities. In one of his essays he was particularly concerned to promote philology's legitimate interest in the text's tradition of reception, and in this enterprise, he emphasized the 'historical malleability' of texts as audiences respond to them over time and in different cultural contexts. Interpretations of texts, he argues, cannot be judged to be 'correct or incorrect *in their historical existence*' [my emphasis]. They simply exist, and the philologist's task is to explain what about the text itself summoned particular interpretations into existence and how the world, as readers of the text imagined it to be, shaped such views of the text. When doing this he emphasised the need to be aware of differences between inconsequential variations and enhancements of greater historical significance. Having noted this last point, it must be said that the identification and explanation of any textual error, contamination or variant—call them what you will—will contribute to our better understanding of Balinese linguistic, orthographic, lexical, grammatical, narrative and conceptual understandings and practices.¹⁰

10 Pollock (2014:406). See Robson (1988:26–31) and his discussion of Proudfoot's (1984) and Behrend's (1987) comments on variation in Malay and Javanese manuscripts.

The task of the philologist is not to expunge variations, errors and contaminations in the text of a work but to explain them in the historical moment of their occurrence. If we are to apply this principle to the historical interpretation of Balinese works, it is particularly important that we identify the textual practices of Balinese authors and scribes during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—their copying, reworking, excerpting, glossing and recitation of texts—and in particular we need to consider whether the hermeneutic search for the true form of an autograph which Pollock has identified as so fundamental a Western philological preoccupation was shared by Balinese authors and copyists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹¹

In recent times, a number of commentators have deepened our understanding of the textual practices of Javanese and Balinese authors and copyists.¹² In the course of my rereading and reconsideration of this literature—still far from complete—my attention was drawn to what we might refer to as an ‘openness’ in the Balinese tradition of textual transmission. By which I mean, depending on genre, copyists were not narrowly focussed on the reproduction of a work’s autograph. In 1972 Robson, for example, in his study of the courtly *Kidung Wangbang Wideya*, tentatively recognised an element of this openness in textual transmission when he noted the existence of what he referred to as ‘horizontal

11 Pollock (2014:402–403) notes that the first real defence of the correctness of a historicist reading of texts in the European philological tradition came with the publication of Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologica-politicus* in 1670 and it is worthwhile here to recall Pollock’s summary of the coherent program of the *Tractatus*. Good reading, according to Spinoza—one that would produce the singular true understanding of a text—was founded upon:

as deep a familiarity as possible of the text’s original language, based on usage in the corpus; the history of the text’s transmission and its current text-critical state; the salient features of the text’s genre; the history of its canonization; a form of discourse analysis that depends, not *a priori* on doctrine, but on the text’s coherence with itself; the assemblage of all parallel passages within the text and the author’s other works that can illuminate the obscure; a reconstruction of the historical context; the relevant biography of the author and the historical constraints of the authorial intention; the nature of the original audience and their thought-world; and all relevant intertexts.

12 These include Acri (2011, 2013, 2017), Arps (2016), Becker (1989), Creese (1998, 2001), Hinzler (1986), Robson (1972, 1988), Rubinstein (2000), van der Meij (2017), van der Molen (1979; 1983), Vickers (1984b, 2005) and Zurbuchen (1987)

contamination’ in the manuscripts he consulted but what it seems his Balinese copyists regarded as perfectly acceptable alternative readings. In 1988, in his *Principles of Indonesian Philology*, he was clearer, arguing that there was even evidence that copyists considered that they enjoyed a freedom to enhance a work’s appeal to contemporary audiences. Acri too, has drawn attention to the kind of radical paraphrasing, synthesising and restyling of central works at important moments of religious history—in this case, of Balinese premodern Śaiwa *tattwa* and *tutur*, which became the object of debate among the various factions of the Balinese intelligentsia who sought to reform their religion in the early twentieth century. According to Acri, these practices were based firmly on a traditional understanding of Sanskrit and Old Javanese, “folk etymological derivations” and analogies of sound and meaning’, when anomalies in the text of these premodern works were identified (Acri 2013:68–71, 74–78, 82–85).

Finally, Vickers’ research on the Balinese *Malat* marks an important advance in our understanding of this openness in the textual practices of nineteenth and early twentieth century authors and copyists, and in many ways anticipates Pollock’s proposed investigation of a text’s tradition of reception (Worsley 1972, 1984; Robson 1988:23). Vickers noted that cataloguers described all but one of some ninety eighteenth and nineteenth century manuscripts of the *Malat* he had located as ‘incomplete, ‘fragments’, or ‘variants’. Only one manuscript, discovered in Brandes’ collection, was said to contain a complete version of the *Malat*. However, in this case there are doubts about whether the manuscript was a copy of a ‘single Balinese manuscript into a folio book, or whether Brandes had a number of different manuscripts copied as one’.¹³ Vickers argued there is in fact little evidence that there was ever a single original, ‘that this original was ‘complete’, or that it preceded all

13 This is not the only composite version of the *Malat*. Soegiarto working with C. C. Berg produced a critical edition of the *Malat* on the basis of van der Tuuk’s manuscripts and Brandes’ notes (Vickers 2005:90).

visual representations and performances of the *Malat* in paintings and in the *Gambuh* dance-drama (Vickers 2005:7–9). '[T]he process of the formation of the written text', he argued, 'was a lengthy and complicated one involving interactions between oral storytelling, musical forms, theatre and other visual traditions, and that these interactions did not cease once a body of manuscripts had been produced.' This process addressed the ongoing need to recount performed or painted stories, for texts to be sung on ritual occasions, and to speak to 'the specific times and places in which they were produced.' This process 'was then a positive experience that kept the *Malat* alive and rendered it a broad cultural phenomenon, allowing it to serve as political model, romantic entertainment, an element of ritual and a form of history, not tied to any single function' (Vickers 2005:10).

7. Conclusions

To identify the rhetorical intentions of painters, we must situate their works in the processes of the rhetorical exchanges in which painters and the viewers of their works were engaged at particular historical moments—in the case of paintings of the *Brayut* story and their representation of rituals, in the context of the competing ideas, imaginings and emotions evoked in contemporary performances of the shadow play, in oral story-tellings of the tale and in ritual and temple architectural practice, and of course in particular in the processes of copying, recitation and glossing of works such as the *Geguritan Brayut*, the *Usana Bali* and the litanies of the rites of *Galungan*. We need to be mindful of the potential interplay of ritual, narrative and rhetorical practices and processes at the historical moment of the generation of each version of these works. Historical interpretation of them requires explanation in the context of a dynamic process of historically shifting understandings of a work—of what Fox has referred to as the 'performative reframings' which any work undergoes in the changing social conditions in which its reception takes place over time (Fox 2005:90–91).

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Illustrations



Illustration 1: The Brayut family celebrates Galungan and Pan Brayut consecration as a *dukuh* priest; Kamasan, late 19th-early 20th century, Tropenmuseum Amsterdam, 2058-2.



Illustration 2: Pan and men Brayut argue in the kitchen; (detail) Tropenmuseum Amsterdam, 2058-2.



Illustration 3: [Right to left] Pan Brayut is consecrated as a *dukuh* priest; Pan Brayut is welcomed back home after his graveyard meditation and consecration; Subaya, the youngest son, approaching his bride's house yard; (detail) Tropenmuseum Amsterdam, 2058-2.



Illustration 4: The Brayut family celebrates Galungan and Pan Brayut's consecration as a *dukuh* priest; Kamasan, late 19th and early 20th century, Nyoman Gunarsa Museum of Classical Balinese Art in Klungkung in Bali (Photo Gustra).