

# Social Criticism Intertextuality in Rendra's Poem and Book of Isaiah

Wadji\*

Indonesian Department  
Universitas PGRI Kanjuruhan Malang  
Malang, Indonesia  
\*wadji@unikama.ac.id

**Abstract**—Literary work comes from a certain civilization background. The creation of Rendra's poetry was greatly helped by the Old Testament. Social criticism in Rendra's poetry has a common thread with social criticism in the book of Isaiah. The purpose of this study is to describe the influence of the book of Isaiah in Rendra's poetry, especially those related to social criticism. This study uses an intertextuality approach to analyse the relationship between the two works, The Book of Isaiah and Rendra's poems. The results of this study found that Rendra's social criticism ideas came from the Book of Isaiah. This influence is not only manifested in terms of ideas, but also includes the choice of words for social criticism, which is taken explicitly from the book of Isaiah. This finding at the same time dismissed the notion that the social background of Rendra's criticism was purely from the events that occurred around Rendra's life, but beyond that the background for his social criticism was heavily influenced by the Old Testament.

**Keywords**—Rendra, Isaiah, intertextuality, social criticism, poem

## I. INTRODUCTION

Rendra is known as a poet who often delivers social criticism in his poetry works. Until now, Rendra acknowledged as Indonesia's greatest poet after Chairil Anwar. In general, literary critics think that Rendra's poetry originates from Javanese children's play. This opinion states that Rendra's poetry is highly mediated by the local Javanese culture where he was born and raised. Meanwhile, Subagio Sastrowardoyo [1] stated that the works of the Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca rely heavily on Rendra's poetry. This research refutes the critics' opinion that Rendra's works originate from Javanese culture and are also inspired by Lorca's work. Since childhood Rendra was educated Catholic, and the Bible is a familiar reading. In this research, the researcher tries to reveal that in his group of poetry, Rendra has a tendency to take ideas and linguistic expressions from the Bible, including Rendra's works of social criticism. The book of Isaiah is one of the sources of inspiration in expressing his ideas which contain social criticism in his poetry. This research will discuss (a) social criticism in the Book of Isaiah, (b) social criticism in Rendra's poetry, and (c) Isaiah's social criticism in Rendra's poetry.

Rendra is known as a poet who often delivers social criticism in his poetry works. Until now, Rendra acknowledged as Indonesia's greatest poet after Chairil Anwar. In general, literary critics think that Rendra's poetry originates from Javanese children's play. This opinion states that Rendra's poetry is highly mediated by the local Javanese culture where he was born and raised. Meanwhile, Subagio Sastrowardoyo stated that the works of the Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca rely heavily on Rendra's poetry. This research refutes the critics' opinion that Rendra's works originate from Javanese culture and are also inspired by Lorca's work. Since childhood Rendra was educated Catholic, and the Bible is a familiar reading. In this research, the researcher tries to reveal that in his group of poetry, Rendra has a tendency to take ideas and linguistic expressions from the Bible, including Rendra's works of social criticism. The book of Isaiah is one of the sources of inspiration in expressing his ideas which contain social criticism in his poetry. This research will discuss (a) social criticism in the Book of Isaiah, (b) social criticism in Rendra's poetry, and (c) Isaiah's social criticism in Rendra's poetry.

Research on the intertextuality between the books of the Old Testament and between the Old and New Testaments has been done by many researchers. Martin G. Klingbeil [2] conducted research on the influence of the creation story in the Book of Genesis and the Prophets. Matthew Thiessen [3] examines the interpretation of the Apostle Paul in Romans 2: 17-29 of the Jewish law in the Torah.

Research on the Bible's influence on poetry has also been carried out by many researchers. Barrett Reid-Maroney [4] conducted research on intertextuality of T.S. Elliot and the Book of Revelation. Meanwhile, the book of Isaiah is more studied for its intertextuality not in its influence on modern literary works but in its relation to the books of the Old and New Testaments. How the influence of the Book of Isaiah on literature has not received the attention of researchers.

The study of the social criticism of Rendra's poetry has also received much attention from researchers. At least I Ketut Sudewa, I Nyoman Darma Putra, and I Nyoman Kutha Ratna [5] have conducted research on social criticism in Rendra's poetry and drama work in the 1970-1990 era. Adi Nurhadi [6]

conducted research on social and political criticism in Rendra's *Potret Pembangunan dalam Puisi*.

The intertextuality approach was first introduced by Julia Kristeva. Literary text, according to Kristeva [7] is a trans linguistic set that divides the language structure again, as a space with several utterances taken from other texts, intersecting and neutralizing one another.

Until now, researchers have not paid attention to the link between Rendra's social criticism and the Bible. This research is expected to fill the void regarding the study of the intertextuality of Indonesian literature and the Bible, and contribute to world literature, because there has not been any attention from literary researchers linking the Book of Isaiah with modern literary works. This research is expected to give another colour to the study of Rendra's poems, which have been considered as a manifestation of Javanese culture.

## II. METHODS

The Bible has been a source of inspiration for many writers, both fiction and non-fiction. Rendra is one of the writers who based his inspiration on the Bible. To reveal the relationship between Rendra's poetry and the Book of Isaiah, this study uses an intertextuality approach with a qualitative descriptive method. The data sources in this study were the Book of Isaiah and Rendra's poetry. The book of Isaiah is part of the Old Testament Bible. The Bible in question is the Bible translation in the English King James Version (KJV) [8]. Rendra's poetry which is the source of the data in this research is Rendra's poetry in the collection of *Blues untuk Bonnie* [9].

Not all chapters and verses in the Book of Isaiah were analysed in this study. Only those verses containing social criticism were selected for analysis. Likewise, with Rendra's poems, only poems containing social criticism were selected for analysis. The next step is to align the verses of the Book of Isaiah and Rendra's poems which have an intertextual relationship.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Social Criticism in the Book of Isaiah

Isaiah (Hebrew: *yesya'yahu*) means "Yahweh is salvation." The book of Isaiah has a lot to do with social criticism. Isaiah speaks of what the nation of Israel could and should not do in terms of the social injustice before it.

Isaiah rebukes his people by contrasting God's laws and ongoing social realities. The laws in God as Isaiah meant tend to have a deductive rather than a legislative function. These laws are God's efforts through Isaiah to return the people to a holy condition again.

Social themes in the Book of Isaiah include: false piety, oppression of widows and orphans, bribery, seizure of other people's property, neglect of the hungry, envy and slander, deprivation of justice.

Isaiah first speaks of false piety, an offering that is not done with sincerity. God will not accept an offering that is not taken seriously.

*Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. (1:11)*

This false piety was shown by Isaiah's people who prioritized religious rituals rather than caring for fellow humans. They completely ignore the suffering around them. Isaiah not only criticized those who did not care about their social environment, but he also urged them to end all kinds of evil deeds and fight for justice.

*Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. (1:17)*

So bad is the state of his country, that even Isaiah compares his country to a prostitute.

*Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: everyone loveth gifts, and followed after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. (1:21)*

In Isaiah 32 Isaiah speaks of the injustice of the rulers. Isaiah provoked the women to rally against the tyrannical rulers.

*Tremble, ye women that are at ease; be troubled, ye careless ones: strip you, and make you bare, and gird sackcloth upon your loins. (32:11)*

### B. Social Criticism in Rendra's Poetry

Besides being good at processing language, Rendra was also known to be very concerned about the social conditions of Indonesian society at that time. These two strengths have led Rendra to become Indonesia's most popular poet, not only known in the country, but Rendra's poetry has been translated into many languages.

In Rendra's poetry collection entitled *Blues untuk Bonnie*, Rendra does not only talk about injustice in his country, but there are also several poems that have backgrounds outside Indonesia, including the poem "Blues untuk Bonnie". Rendra told about the pessimistic Negro people who live in Boston because of the social injustice that has hit them. They only hope to live happily in the hereafter.

*Dan di hari Minggu  
mereka pergi ke gereja yang khusus untuk negro  
Di sana bernyanyi  
terpesona pada harapan akherat  
kerna di dunia mereka tak berdaya*

(And on Sundays  
they go to a church that's exclusively for Niggers  
Over there singing  
fascinated by the hope of the afterlife)

because in the world they are helpless)

Poverty, oppression, injustice are important themes in Rendra's poetry in this collection. For Rendra [10], throwing out social criticism is in order to maintain life force. In social criticism in this collection of poetry *Blues untuk Bonnie*, Rendra uses more of the oppression of unlucky women, namely prostitutes, mistresses. In "Nyanyian Angsa", for example, Rendra tells the story of an unfortunate prostitute who is rejected by the surrounding community, including doctors and priests. For Rendra, prostitution is the result of poverty victims, as in the dialogue between the priest and Maria Zaitun follows.

*Lalu pastor kembali bersuara:  
"Kamu telah tergoda dosa."  
"Tidak tergoda. Tapi melulu berdosa."  
"Kamu telah terbujuk setan."  
"Tidak. Saya terdesak kemiskinan.  
Dan gagal mencari kerja".*

The suffering of women in Rendra's poetry is always contrasted with the domination of arbitrary power. This power is not only the power of the state but also refers to religious leaders. Ritual piety is emphasized more. Religious symbols are emphasized more than social behaviour, in which every human being must sympathize with the suffering of others.

### C. *Isaiah's Social Criticism in Rendra's Poems*

According to Riffaterre [11] intertextuality can explain what a text cannot say. The reader must hypothesize and look for the missing link in the text. Gerald Genette [12] states that intertextuality is the relationship between two or more texts, which is the effective presence of one text in another in the form of plagiarism, quotation or allusion. Intertextuality has been introduced in Bible studies since 1989. At first, intertextuality was only to study the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament [13].

Part of Rendra's social criticism in his poetry is found in his hypogram in the Book of Isaiah. In several passages of the Book of Isaiah, Isaiah analogizes his country as a prostitute.

*How is the faithful city become a harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. (1:21)*

In general Isaiah 1:21-26, according to Groenewald [14], describes the cleansing of Zion from all kinds of evil, and the hope of holiness for those who repent.

In his poetry which contains social criticism, Rendra often uses the word "prostitute" which has both a literal and a symbolic meaning. There is the title of Rendra's poem which explicitly contains the word "prostitute", namely "Bersatulah Pelacur-pelacur Kota Jakarta". Some of his poems also talk about prostitutes, such as "Nyanyian Angsa," and "Pesan Pencopet kepada Pacarnya."

In his poem entitled "Bersatulah Pelacur-pelacur Kota Jakarta" Rendra juxtaposes the word "prostitute" with the word

"city". This poem does not only describe how Rendra provokes prostitutes to dare to protest against the authorities, but at the same time Rendra describes the behaviour of the rulers as prostitutes as well. Like Isaiah, who analogizes his city as a prostitute, Rendra describes the ruler without paying attention to justice.

*Revolusi para pemimpin  
dalam revolusi dewa-dewa.  
Mereka berjuang untuk surga  
dan tidak untuk bumi.  
Revolusi dewa-dewa  
tak pernah menghasilkan  
lebih banyak lapangan kerja  
bagi rakyatnya.*

(Revolution of leaders  
is a revolution of the gods.  
They are fighting for heaven  
and not for the earth.  
Revolution of the gods  
never produce  
more jobs  
for its people.)

Rendra's way of provoking prostitutes to protest against the injustice that afflicts them is also similar to that of Isaiah. In Isaiah 32:9-20 Isaiah reminds the women of Jerusalem to keep the truth so that the city where they live will remain peaceful and prosperous.

*Tremble, ye women that are at ease; be troubled, ye careless ones: strip you, and make you bare, and gird sackcloth upon your loins.*

Compare the verse above with the way Rendra speaks to the following prostitutes:

*Ambillah galah.  
Kibarkan kutang-kutangmu di ujungnya.  
Araklah keliling kota  
sebagai panji-panji yang telah mereka nodai*

(Take the pole.  
Hoist your bra at the end.  
Drive around town  
as the banner they had tainted)

The method of protest suggested by Rendra and Isaiah was almost the same, namely using clothing. If the Sion woman's protest is to take off her clothes and put on a sackcloth around her waist, Jakarta prostitutes will wave a bra. The image of the two events is the same, namely both taking off their clothes. Isaiah's social protest was in order for his people to return to God's law in the Torah. Isaiah is a prophet who continues the authority of Moses. Isaiah is a representation of Moses in his day. Isaiah's teaching echoes the voice of Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy. Rendra explicitly in his social criticism in the poem "Khotbah" also quotes Musa's statement:

*Melewati Nabi Musa yang keramat  
Tuhan telah berkata:  
Jangan engkau mencuri.  
Pegawai kecil jangan mencuri tulang-tulang ayam goreng.  
Para pembesar jangan mencuri bensin.  
Dan gadis jangan mencuri perawannya sendiri  
Tentu, bahwa mencuri dan mencuri ada bedanya.*

(Passing through the sacred Prophet Moses  
God has said:  
Don't steal.  
Little servants don't steal fried chicken bones.  
The lords don't steal gasoline.  
And girls don't steal their own virgins  
Of course, that stealing and stealing makes a difference.)

Like Isaiah, Rendra wants to restore the law of justice as taught by Musa in the Torah. Religious rituals have no value when social problems are never completely resolved. The ten commandments of Allah are the keys to living a clean and socially just life.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The social criticism built by Rendra in his poetry is Rendra's interpretation of the Old Testament, especially the Book of Isaiah. Rendra has taken subtly Isaiah's ideal to restore his society by upholding social justice as stipulated by Musa in the Torah. The book of Isaiah is a very valuable asset for Rendra's ideas in creating his poetry, it is evident that the hypogram of Rendra's poetry in the collection of poems *Blues untuk Bonnie* is the Book of Isaiah.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] S. Sastrowardjo, *Kerancuan Pribadi Rendra-Lorca, Sosok Pribadi dalam Sajak*. Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, pp. 159-201, 1997.
- [2] M.G. Klingbeil, "Creation in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament: An Intertextual Approach," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, vol. 20/1-2, pp. 19-54, 2009.
- [3] M. Thiessen, "Paul's Argument against Gentile Circumcision in Romans 2:17-29," *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 56, pp. 373-391, 2014.
- [4] B. Reid-Maroney, "What Thou Seest, Write in a Book' –Intertextuality in Journey of the Magi and the Book of Revelation," *Liberated Arts: A Journal for Undergraduate Research*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2019.
- [5] I.K. Sudewa, I.N.D. Putra, and I.N.K. Ratna, "Social Criticism in the Poem and Drama Created by W.S. Rendra from Nineteen Seventies to Nineteen Nineties," *e-Journal of Linguistics*, pp. 1-8, 2013.
- [6] A. Nurhadi, "Kritik Sosial dan Politik dalam Kumpulan Pusi Potret Pembangunan dalam Sajak karya W.S. Rendra," *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics Review*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 47-66, 2017.
- [7] Becker-Leckrone, *Teori sastra dan Julia Kristeva*, Denpasar: CV. Bali Media Adhikarsa, 2013.
- [8] *Holly Bible King James Version*, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002.
- [9] Rendra, *Blues untuk Bonnie*, Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1993.
- [10] Rendra, *Penyair dan Kritik Sosial*, Yogyakarta: Kepel Press, 2001.
- [11] M. Riffaterre, "Intertextuality vs. Hypertextuality," *New Literary History*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1994.
- [12] A. Jefferson, "Autobiography as Intertext: Barthes, Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet." Michael Worton and Judith Still. *Intertextuality, Theories and Practices*, Manchester University Press, 1990.
- [13] M. Steve, "Intertextuality and Bible Studies: A Review," *Verbum et Ecclesia JRG*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 418-431, 2002.
- [14] A. Groenewald, "Isaiah 1:2-3 and Isaiah 6: Isaiah, A Prophet Like Moses," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, vol. 68, no. 1, pp. 1-7, 2012.