

‘Arrogant and Seductive’: Disclaiming the Opinion of G. L. Koster with Regard to the Authors of Traditional Malay Literature

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ABSTRACT— *This working paper re-evaluates the opinion of G.L. Koster with regard to the authors of traditional Malay literature, specifically of Panji Literature. The spread of Islam in the Malay world awakened writers to the purpose, facts and methods of literary creativity with regard to matters concerning ‘penmanship’. The responsibilities of Malay writers became more complex with the emergence of the Javanese influence, which brought a breath of fresh air into the world of Malay literature. Writers of the Panji Literature genre very daringly included elements of sexuality in their works, something that was considered a taboo subject that was not to be openly discussed in Malay society. Furthermore, the authors of Panji Literature failed to apply ‘the idea of the book’ in their compositions. Consequently, G.L. Koster labelled the authors of Panji Literature as ‘dalang’. The question is, if the authors were ‘dalangs’, then why did they also incorporate elements of trust, advice and guidance in the genre to balance the entertainment function? Being a Western scholar, did G.L. Koster understand the conventions of Malay authorship? By carrying out a textual analysis of three selected texts, namely Hikayat Panji Semirang, Hikayat Chekel Waneng Pati and Syair Ken Tambuhan, this study will challenge the role of the authors of the Panji Literature, who have been classified as ‘dalangs’ by G.L. Koster. The study found that the authors of the Panji Literature were intellectuals of their time who abided by the conventions of Malay writing. Therefore, based on their wisdom, they managed to adapt the elements of sexuality that enabled the Panji Literature to be accepted by the Malay-Muslim community. This was highly consistent with the conventions of Malay writing that focus on benefitting the audience and not simply composing blindly.*

Keywords—Sexuality, Panji Literature, *dalangs*, Malay, Traditional

1. INTRODUCTION

Malay authors were introduced to ‘the deeds of the reed pen’ when Islamic tradition made its entry into Malaya (Braginsky, 1989; 1993:1). Malay authors began to be aware of the importance of literature in their lives or, as stated by Braginsky (1993; 1998; 2001), they developed a ‘literary self-awareness’. This literary awareness, which emerged together with the spread of Islam, led the community to an understanding of the purpose, facts, and methods of literary creativity in line with matters related to these ‘deeds of the reed pen.’ Accordingly, the most valuable treasure that has been passed down to the present generation is the ‘written arts’, most of which were composed after the arrival of Islam (Braginsky, 1993:1). The main factor in the development of Malay authorship other than the introduction of the Jawi script is the tolerance of Islam with regard to the beliefs and cultures that have been inherited by its adherents from the days of animism, especially the myths and legends that cannot be uprooted altogether. This is reflected in Malay literary works such as their historical literature, sagas, Panji, epics and several others that contain many such elements that were aimed at enhancing the legitimacy of the reigning king or to glorify a certain figure. It is obvious that the literary awareness that was developed among the Malay authors after the arrival of Islam made this group of intellectuals conscious of the fact that they were not composing blindly.

The introduction of the Jawi script encouraged the advancement of knowledge within the Malay community. The palace was turned into a centre of knowledge, bringing together many intellectuals who were loaded with the responsibility of rewriting works from Arab-Persia, India or Java to suit the taste and literary conventions of the Malays. This gave rise to several genres that enriched the corpus of traditional Malay Literature as evident from the works of scholars involved in the classification and distribution of that genre since the colonial era. For example, R.J. Wilkinson

(1909), R.O. Winstedt (1940), C. Hooykaas (1952), M.G. Emeis (1952), Mohd. Taib Osman (1961), Ismail Hussein (1966), Liaw Yock Fang (1975), Ismail Hamid (1983), Teuku Iskandar (1995), Harun Mat Piah et al. (2000) and V.I. Braginsky (2004) carried out efforts to organise various texts according to the period or the dominant influence. Detailed studies were also conducted based on the literary functions, such as the studies by Skinner (1978) and Braginsky (1989; 1993; 2004). Nevertheless, unlike the above scholars, G.L. Koster (1997) gave a misleading perspective of the authors of traditional Malay literature, particularly of Panji Literature. He classified the writers of this genre as arrogant and self-centred ‘*dalangs*’ or ‘sorcerers’. Furthermore, Koster (1997:86) also described the authors of this genre as producers of bad writings because they included many fictional elements and forgot the fact that they were servants of their Creator. Moreover, the inclusion of sexual elements in their writings complemented Koster’s accusations. Using Koster’s (1997) perspective as its point of departure, this study will identify the self-portrayal of the authors in the Panji Literature and analyse the functions of the sexual elements that were included by the authors in this genre. Indirectly, this study is aimed at redeeming the reputation of Malay writers so that they will not be wrongly given negative labels by Western scholars.

2. ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE CLAIM THAT MALAY WRITERS WERE ARROGANT ‘DALANGS’

G.L. Koster (1997) was of the opinion that the authors of Panji Literature deserve to be known ‘*dalangs*’ because of their obvious promotion of themselves in their works. According to Koster (1997:54), besides the capacity of the writers to entertain and to soothe the weary heart, they also included elements of their arrogance in their works. For example, in *Hikayat Chekel Waneng Pati* (1965) it was quoted as below:

“This is the story of the ancients in Malay and Javanese (?) that was narrated by knowledgeable masterminds and poets in the land of Java. It was translated into the Malay language so that it can entertain as the revengeful feelings are played out”.

According to Koster (1997), other words that were used by the authors of Panji Literature were, “[...] discerning and wise masterminds who are very famous in the land of Java,” and “Therefore, were composed by those who were wise in the land of Java [...]”. From these statements, Koster (1997) concluded that the authors of Panji Literature claimed that as writers they possessed wisdom and greatness so much so that their arrogance and pride could be clearly seen in their works. Koster (1997:59-64) also labelled the authors of this genre (paper-*dalang*) as sorcerers, when he stated, “Obviously, the paper-*dalang*, too, is something like a magician, a prologue showing something of the connection between wisdom and magical power, *dalang*-ship, kingship and authorship”.

Based on this ‘wisdom’, according to Koster (1997:63), the authors, like ‘*dalangs*’, build ‘their space of power’ through the pen in the works produced by them. Furthermore, their high level of self-confidence caused them to swell with pride in their capabilities and greatness in composing their works. The writers confidently promised that their stories could relieve the desire for revenge, especially when a person is in love or is in a courtship. On reviewing the opinions of Koster (1997) above with regard to the authors of Panji Literature, it was found that he could not escape from the Western bias stemming from the Darwinism Theory that dominated the thinking of most Western scholars. This theory regards European society as a ‘select’ society, thus giving rise to the concept of the ‘white man’s superiority’ and the ‘white man’s burden’, which directly reinforces the racist perspective of Western society that classifies the citizens of the world as inferior and superior. Without trying to understand the meaning of the sentences in those works, Koster went ahead to draw a conclusion that was clearly so obnoxious as to insult the dignity of the Malay writers. For example, in *Hikayat Chekel Waneng Pati* and several other works, it was stated that “This is the story of the ancients in Malay and Javanese (?) that was narrated by knowledgeable masterminds and poets in the land of Java” or “discerning and wise masterminds who were very famous in the land of Java,” and “Therefore, were composed by those who were wise in the land of Java [...]”. This clearly shows that Koster (1997) tried to accuse the Malay writers of being ‘arrogant’ because the above statement obviously indicates that this genre was composed by other individuals from another country (Java). The Malay writers only used their creativity to ‘rewrite’ the works to suit the thinking and taste of the Malays. Thus, the sentence, “discerning and wise masterminds who are very famous in the land of Java” in the preamble to the Panji Literature did not refer to them, especially since it is not the nature of the Malays to show off or to display self-pride through their works.

Koster (1997) should have tried to understand the writing conventions that underlie traditional Malay literature before attempting to study such works. This is because for the Malay community, it is very important to abide by certain conventions in order to be accepted by the people, not to mention the ruler, who was the patron of such artistic activities (Sweeney, 1987: Siti Hawa Salleh, 1997 and 2009; Koster, 1997; Braginsky, 2004). Furthermore, the Panji Literature was regarded as ‘palace art’, ‘higher art’, ‘written works of art’ and ‘the product of the court’ (Sweeney 1980: viii). Accordingly, the ruling royals and aristocrats viewed written works as something to be preserved, declared or disseminated to the people (Siti Hawa Hj. Salleh, 2009:132). Thus, these works were composed and read first in the palace, it being the main centre for the development of knowledge. Every piece of written work had to be approved by

the king as the patron of the written arts and the work also had to be functional for the audience (Braginsky 2004). Commenting on the conventions of writing in traditional society, Sweeney and Phillips (1975: xxii) stated:

“In this society, where individualism was not encouraged, originality of composition was not a criterion of good literature, although it cannot be denied that there was some scope for creativity within the bounds of convention. Every copyist of secular literature was a potential re-writer. Writers concerned themselves with kings, princes and the palace life, ignoring entirely the common man. Moreover, the writer as an individual remained well in the background. The reading public, in this age of manuscript literature and widespread illiteracy, was obviously limited, but works were sometimes read aloud to audiences or adapted for performance in dramatic genres such as the shadow-play, so that the society was often well-acquainted with the content of such works”.

For that reason, Western scholars in particular are often confused and, failing to understand the literary conventions, express their dissatisfaction by hurling unfounded criticisms. For them, Malay writers cannot distinguish between writing as an art or craft (Sweeney and Phillips (1975: xxii). Consequently, the confusion over the interpretation of the term drove G.L. Koster to reach the wrong conclusion about Malay writers, particularly in the genre of Panji Literature. The greatness of the authors of this genre cannot be denied, as they were able to interpret and rewrite the Javanese works to suit the psyche and thinking of the Malay audience. Thus, the issue of ‘high self-confidence’ giving rise to ‘arrogance or pride’ in the writers is untrue and should be corrected because the fact is that the compositions of the Malay writers were based on certain constraints and limitations that governed their freedom of expression, what more to state that their ‘power of knowledge’ was above that of the king as the patron of the arts.

3. ARGUMENTS AGAINST PANJI LITERATURE AS ‘BAD WRITING’

Human beings are creatures of Allah Almighty, endowed with an intellect (mind) that can teach and maintain a balance in their ‘passions’ in the realms of lust, desire and illusion in living out their lives in this world. An examination of the Panji Literature revealed that many seductive elements were manipulated by writers in their efforts to appropriately entertain their audience. In reality, the explicit sharing of the issue of sexuality is strictly forbidden in a traditional Malay audience. The community cannot accept works where this issue dominates the actual functions of literary compositions, i.e. as entertainment and didactics. Furthermore, the existence of this issue is contrary to the worldview and the horizon of expectations of the Malay-Muslim community with regard to the writings of their intellectuals, who should emphasize the element of ‘decency’ in their works, as expressed by Tope (2010:100) that:

“[...] there is relative silence on the invisible aspects such as sexuality. To begin with, sexuality has a confidential, secret nature that keeps it invisible. This invisibility is usually personal in nature. In traditional Malay societies, it is a topic generally avoided, elided or often dismissed as a non-issue. Regarded as a taboo subject, or a necessary evil at best, sexuality seems to be regarded as a discomfiting, discomfiting, do-we-have-to-talk-about-it topic meant for hushed whispers or instant dismissals”.

Based on this phenomenon, G.L. Koster (1997:54) argued that writers of the Panji Literature can be likened to ‘*dalangs*’ because they use the element of human ‘lust’ to ensure that their works are remembered. This exciting display of passion, which does not benefit the audience in any way, was described by Koster as ‘bad writing’. Moreover, being Muslims, the writers must compose works where the leading theme is the love of mankind for their Creator, but the writers of this genre focused more on the theme of ‘love between humans’, as mentioned by Koster (1997:56) below:

“As the prime effect of his story on its audience of readers the narrator as *dalang* promises that it will soothe all feeling of yearning and desire, especially of those who are in love. He suggests that he is indeed capable of writing a story that has such a power because he himself has also suffered the pangs of love and therefore knows what it means to be young”.

Thus, in their effort to be individuals who understand this matter of ‘love’, several sexual elements were included by the writers until these became significant in the Panji Literature. For example, metaphors were used to describe the sight of a woman’s body, and this affected the behaviour of Sang Ratu, who initially wanted to kill Paduka Liku, but after being fascinated with the physical beauty of the character, she forgot her intention. This is mentioned in the excerpt from *Hikayat Panji Semirang* (1992:23-24) below:

“At that time, Paduka Liku entered the castle and going to the bedroom, tucked the betel residue under the pillow. He then hugged the pillow while baring his chest, which was adorned with a pair of milk wells that flowed directly to a stream of honey. Her Majesty the Queen then followed Paduka Liku. When the Queen saw that, the sword that was in her hand dropped to the earth and her rage began to weaken. As her affection grew [...] her hardened desire began to soften, her rough voice became melodious like the voice of an insect drawing nectar from a flower, and her wrathful task was forgotten. Being unable to contain her desire for Paduka Liku, she embraced him and kissed him on his left and right cheeks”.

The pleasure described by the writers in the Panji literary works was meant to highlight the loveliness of certain features through the use of beautiful words, which reflected the emotions experienced by the characters, especially the feelings of the characters while making love or even when yearning for a person, for example, in *Syair Ken Tambuhan* (2000:26-27) below :

The princess was lifted to his lap,
He kissed her nose while his hands fondled her,
He coaxed his darling Angel Surgaba,
This elder brother has become a slave.

So, these elements of fun and teasing were accentuated by the author, who had the courage to insert this episode of the intimate relationship between a husband and wife. The author incorporated the use of beautiful and persuasive words by the male character or the husband to praise his partner by using maxims to express his feelings, as in *Syair Ken Tambuhan* (2002: 27-28) below:

The night is turning into day,
Flattery and persuasions are left unspoken,
The noble minister is very passionate,
Ken Tambuhan is given the residue.

Ken Tambuhan was inattentive for a moment,
The cloth was lifted exposing her waist,
It looked like a sprouting plant,
The nobleman, overcome with ecstasy, kissed her.

The excerpts above prove that the Panji Literature writers were courageous enough to include matters that were considered to be private, personal or ‘taboo’, such as the question of sexuality, to be discussed openly in the Malay community. The Malay community considered the issue of sexuality as something that is implicit and very personal in nature. Works that included extreme elements of sexuality were slammed as being weak and inferior in terms of morality and character. Accordingly, Koster (1997) described the Panji Literature writers as individuals who produced ‘bad writing’ because being Malay-Muslim writers they could not escape from the concept of ‘the idea of the book’, especially in the application of the Koran, the interpretation from Islamic intellectuals, the Book of Malay Courtesy and so on, as the basis of their compositions.

In this regard, the authors of the Panji Literature were labelled as those who produced ‘false and bad’ works. On reviewing Koster’s (1997) opinion, it was found that he failed to explore the facts concerning the authors in a transparent manner. He continued to use religion as a tool to hammer at those works that did not originally belong to the Malays. He overlooked the intellectualism of the writers who adapted the Hindu or sexual elements to suit the taste of their patrons and the Malay-Muslim audience. Moreover, he was not familiar with the perspective of the discerning mind of the Malays themselves, who included elements of sexuality in their earliest works, for example, in the poetry and idioms genre. Several Malay poems, for instance, expressed the inner passions (libido) of the human being, such as, ‘*Where the pheasant sleeps, on the rock in a level space, that is where I long to sleep, on the milk within your breasts*’, or the Malay idiom that goes, ‘*two catfishes in one hole*’, ‘*a meal licked by a lizard*’, ‘*like the sugarcane, whose juice is drunk and the dregs disposed of*’, which clearly show that the Malay community defined ‘sexuality’ in the form of metaphors of nature that were very closely related to their lives. In addition, Koster (1997) should not judge this genre as ‘bad writing’ because the phenomenon of sexuality in the Panji Literature was not regarded as something ‘deviant’ as this genre had Hindu-Javanese influences which permitted open comments on the issue (Ras, 1973; Rassers, 1959). Several episodes that encompassed the sexual experiences of the community were also included, such as tips on facing the first night, the episode of kissing or exchanging of residue (betel leaf residue) to symbolise the expression of love between two members of the opposite sex as well as between homosexuals, which reflected the importance of the sexuality element as an expression of the inner self (internal self). Farish A. Noor (2009: 159-166) was of the opinion that the issue of ‘same-sex love’ had its roots in our culture since the 15th century A.D. The evidence can be seen in works such as *Serat Centhini*, a Javanese manuscript that recorded the importance of sexual relations in human life including homosexuality, which was viewed as a normal culture at that time. This also coincided with the influence of Shivaism (Hindu-Buddhist), which was practised since the 8th century A.D. by the inhabitants of Central and East Java, who believed in the pre-Vedantic Tantric concept so much that it affected their sexual nature, as in the following excerpt:

“The Shivaistic-Tantric sexual practices that were enacted on a ritualised basis by our ancestors in Southeast and South Asia were directed at precisely the containment and regulation of excess, in order to channel this sexual energy inwards towards both the individual as well as society as a means of attaining that sought-after union and cognition with the divine which was seen as that mysterious and joyful wellspring of life, creation and creativity [...] Sex was not against religion then, for sex was religion”.

4. ELEMENTS OF SEXUALITY THAT EDUCATE

I) *Guide To Foster Love and To Remain In Love*

The Panji Literature is a work of fiction with love as its theme. The love portrayed by the writers cover the love between a man and a woman, the love for parents, family as well as the government. Nevertheless, the love between members of the opposite sex remained the dominant theme in this genre in line with the objective of the writers to entertain. An interesting point to note about this genre was that besides serving up entertainment of a sexual nature, the writers frequently had a ‘two-pronged’ objective, namely to combine the entertainment with teachings (Rahimah Hamdan, 2015: 291). Indirectly, the Panji Literature served to educate and benefit its audience. For example, the writers invite their audience to understand the meaning of sacrifice, loyalty and honesty in ensuring a love that is eternal between two different sexes. The difficulties of life encountered by the main characters (Raden Galuh and Raden Inu) were deliberately composed by the author to lead the readers to assess the importance of an individual being mature enough to take on the responsibilities of a family. Moreover, the authors of this genre invite the audience to honour women by being gentle and tolerant with them, as expressed through the many speeches by the main character (Raden Inu). For example, an excerpt from *Syair Ken Tambuhan* (2002:43) mentions as below:

The darling prince in glorious colours
A perfect appearance without flaws
I have caught sight of him
I can never return home

Indirectly, the Panji Literature invites its Malay readers, who are dominated by patriarchs, to respect women as special beings created by God. The authors also educate their audience, especially the men, to always behave like gentlemen and to try and project credible personalities and not to be carried away by their passions, especially towards women. This is because women dream of having a charismatic husband who is responsible and who can guide her to the end of her life. Thus, the character of a man is very important and can be recognized at first glance. This was highlighted by the author through the character of Chekel, who was able to control his stormy passion with a sound mind in an effort to win the heart of the woman of his dreams, as mentioned in the excerpt (*Hikayat Chekel Waneng Pati*, 1965: 41) below:

“After the conversation, Chekel then accompanied Raden Galuh back to the palace. During the journey, Chekel observed Raden Galuh constantly. Her waist was gentle like a flowering plant swaying in the breeze. Deliciously sweet, need more be said? Chekel Waneng Pati’s heart was so moved at the sight of Raden Galuh that he longed to embrace her. When it was evening, they stopped beneath a gardenia tree that was in bloom [...], the birds were flying about as though calling out to Raden Galuh. The insects drew nectar from the flowers as though inviting the romance. Raden Galuh had captivated his heart. Chekel was carried away by the romance and behaved like one who was madly in love, longing to grab hold of Raden Galuh. But he managed to control his feelings”.

The authors offer many tips for approaching women, the most important being to respect them. For example, the authors include ways to coax and praise women through the main characters. This does not mean that the writers intended to create a Don Juan or Casanova in the Malay community but they wanted to convey the importance of having the skills to communicate, especially to coax and put words together to create a lasting atmosphere of harmony and love in the family. An excerpt from *Hikayat Panji Semirang* (1992:121-122) below may be proof of this:

“So it was that Raden Panji held the hand of the male dancer, Warga Asmara, and kissed it. When the male dancer, Warga Asmara saw Raden Panji holding his hand, he flung the gold statuette, which was picked up by Raden Panji. He then coaxed her with various persuasive words. After that, he lifted her head and immediately allowed her to rest on his arm while coaxing her with various persuasive words”.

II) *Guide to Newly-Married Couples*

The uniqueness of the Panji Literature genre lies in the open attitude of its writers in discussing the element of sexuality, especially when it comes to behaviour in the bedroom. Furthermore, the courtesy in the bedroom is portrayed in such a transparent manner through the use of beautiful verses. The proof of this is in *Hikayat Panji Semirang* (1992:76) below, which shows how the procedure for facing the first night can be the most valuable experience in the life of an individual. This is because for the Malay community, the ‘first night’ or the ‘wedding night’ will determine the reputation of the bride, in particular, as to whether she is pure or not on her marriage night. That is why in this piece Paduka Liku (mother) is portrayed as giving advice in a contest, especially on how to excite passion in the husband (Inu). This was coupled with the act of sharing the residue (betel residue), which is considered to be a symbol of the height of the love between a couple. Thus, the behaviour in ‘facing the first night’ is very important for every virgin so that their every move will not be misinterpreted by their husbands, as in the following extract:

“My child, if you are together in a contest, it would be better if you could pretend to be afraid and sad at first, if Brother Inu holds your hand, you must withdraw and pull back your hand, so that Brother Inu will take you and carry you. Then, my child, you should pretend to cry so that he will wipe your tears and coax you with gentle words and in his melodious voice. If Brother Inu refuses to hold and coax you, you must lie on his lap while embracing him by his waist. If you do this, you will definitely be praised and coaxed, and will be embraced and kissed by him. If you eat betel, then you should feed the residue into your brother’s mouth with your own mouth. If he bites your lips, that’s a sign that he is passionate and loves you”.

III) Guide in Addressing Husband-wife Relationship

The authors of the Panji Literature included sexual elements as a means to realise a situation particularly in the relationship between husband and wife. For example, *Hikayat Panji Semirang* (1992:78-79) portrayed the inner misery of Galuh Ajeng, who was madly in love with her husband. However, her husband never loved her or even touched her to fulfil his responsibilities as a husband. Although the character of Galuh Ajeng felt unappreciated and worthless in the eyes of her husband, she did not give up but instead continued to coax and seduce her husband. Indirectly, the author was showing the audience that in a marriage situation, the wife must be aggressive and not simply allow her husband to make any decision about herself, as is often encountered in a traditional Malay society. Women are also capable of enforcing their rights as housewives and not allow themselves to be simply exploited by their husbands, as mentioned in *Hikayat Panji Semirang* (1992:78-79) below:

“My brother, as long as you have been married to this slave, you have not had sexual relations with me. If you, my brother, are not skilled at this, I myself will make love to you [...]”

In that connection, Koster’s (1997) view that the authors of Panji Literature only produced badly written works is inaccurate and unfounded. The Malay writers tried to adapt the ‘panji’ works that originated from the Hindu-Buddhist civilization in Java to suit the *weltanschauung* and milieu of the Malay-Muslim community. Balancing the element of sexuality that was the trademark of the Javanese Panji Literature requires great wisdom. However, the authors of the Panji Literature handled this by using the concept of intelligence and discretion in accordance with the connotation of ‘literature’ as ‘a valuable and useful work of art’ other than ‘a beautiful descriptive composition’. The term ‘*budi*’ (courtesy) is derived from the Sanskrit word, ‘*Buddhi*’, which means wise and intelligent. Therefore, the best work is the one that ‘provides wisdom’ to its audience. Accordingly, G.L. Koster’s (1997) perspective should rightly be rejected because it reveals his biased attitude as a Western scholar who made no attempt to understand in greater detail the thinking and values of the society that was being studied.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study can counter G.L. Koster’s (1997) view of writers as ‘*dalang*’, which has long been accepted in the teaching of literature in this country. It is clear that as a Western researcher, he was still overshadowed by the Western bias that was dominant within him. It is inappropriate to label the writers of the Panji Literature as ‘*dalangs*’ or to liken them to ‘sorcerers’ because evidently he did not try to understand the mind of the Malays themselves. Furthermore, he failed to clearly understand the clause, “[...] related by the masterminds and poets residing in Java” as is often found in the preamble to this genre. Malay writers refer to the works that were rewritten as the works of Javanese intellectuals and do not present themselves as being the bright authors, as stated in the works. The compliments extended to the original authors of this genre, namely the Javanese authors, were used as an argument by Koster (1997) to chide the Malay writers for being arrogant and proud individuals. He overlooked the fact that the Malay authors did not compose for themselves but did so as a service to their patron, the reigning monarch. It was not fair of him to ignore the individuals who were given such a trust. This placed the authors in violation of the conventions of Malay writings, which adhere to the concept of sovereignty, curses and treachery to the ruler.

G.L. Koster’s (1997) second argument, which described the Panji Literature as ‘bad writing’, was very harsh compared to other Western scholars such as V.I. Braginsky. According to Braginsky (1998; 2001; 2004), the Panji Literature is a ‘high literature’ or ‘court literature’ genre that uses the art of writing as a medium of communication. Thus, its writers will definitely not produce works blindly without a meaningful purpose for their audience. According to Koster, the ‘bad writing’ is due to non-compliance with the writing conventions of Malay-Muslim authors. Obviously, Koster (1997) made no attempt to understand the background of the production of such works. It was not unusual for works inspired by Hindu-Buddhist influences to openly discuss many elements that were regarded as taboo by the Malay community, such as sexuality. The wisdom of the Malay writers in prudently reporting these elements until each sexual element is inscribed with guidance and teachings that are useful for the audience should be commended. Thus, it should come as no surprise if *Syair Ken Tambuhan* emerged as the earliest poem (in the 17th and 18th century A.D.) to be produced after the

golden age of poets during the time of Hamzah Fansuri in Aceh, and won a place in the hearts of the Malay community (Teeuw, 1966; Braginsky, 1991). This poem, which was composed for the first time in Palembang and was then copied into various versions in the Malay world until the 19th century A.D., proved that the Malay-Muslim community accepted and held in high regard the intellectualism of the authors of the Panji Literature.

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