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Summary

Transforming Wayang For Contemporary Audiences
Dramatic Expression in Purbo Asmoro’s Style, 1989–2015

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This dissertation examines a new style of wayang performance practice in Solo, Central Java, and its environs, known in academic circles as all-night *garapan* or all-night contemporary-interpretive style. This innovative system of story-telling, applied to otherwise traditional all-night wayang performances, was created and debuted in 1989 by the dhalang Purbo Asmoro (born in Pacitan, East Java in 1961), who then further developed the style over the subsequent decade, and continues the work to this day. By 2000, all-night *garapan* had become the single dominant style influencing dhalang of Purbo Asmoro’s age and younger, whether only selectively or as a complete systematic approach.

In this dissertation, all-night *garapan* style is defined and analyzed according to its individual elements. A close look into Purbo Asmoro’s creative processes offers insight about the challenges and benefits of this new style. The complex historical background and cultural context of its emergence is outlined in detail as well as how this new system of dramatic expression is being applied by other dhalang in the community of Solo-style performers.

As a performance translator, student, and avid follower of wayang in Java since 2004, as well as a practicing gamelan musician in Solo since 1991, the author noticed that a direct examination of all-night *garapan* style was conspicuously absent in both formal research and informal discourse in the artistic community. This curious lack of information on, and even simply identification and labeling of, the most significant development in wayang style in a quarter of a century, was what spurred the research. Only by exploring the history, development, creative
requirements, and philosophical basis of Purbo Asmoro’s all-night *garapan* style can current Solonese wayang performance practice be appreciated and fully understood.

**Chapter 1: Introduction** reviews the abundance of existing writings on wayang performance practice in the greater Solo area. Classical performance practice is well documented by Javanese writers, from manuals for dhalang from the 1870s to technical manuals out of ISI Solo in the 2000s; from example-scripts written by dhalang pedagogues in the 1930s to those proliferating in the dhalang community by influential script-writer, pedagogue, and dhalang Tristuti in the 1990s. Western scholars such as Brandon, Feinstein, Keeler, and Clara van Groenendael have also given us profound insight into classical wayang tradition. Sudarko, Suwarno, and Murtiyoso have written extensively on the condensed wayang movement at ASKI in the 1970s, while Western scholars Arps, Sears, and Brinner have also documented this movement. Kayam, Kuwato, Supanggah, Sumarsam, Suratno, and Mrázek have explored trends that drastically changed wayang in the 1980s and 1990s, an era known as *wayang hura-hura*, focusing on how the entertainment interludes evolved. Curtis, Sugeng Nugroho, Soemanto, and Poerwono have given us detailed artistic profiles of a number of high-profile dhalang, allowing insight into their creative processes. Sugeng Nugroho has explored the new form of biographical sketch known as *lakon banjaran*. Absent, however, until Purbo Asmoro and Emerson’s 2013 publication *The Wayang Educational Package*, was a broader stylistic discussion of post-classical, post-condensed, and post- *hura-hura* wayang: Purbo Asmoro’s all-night *garapan* style and its subsequent extensions and alterations by other dhalang. This dissertation continues that 2013 exploratory work. Chapter 1 also describes the researcher’s background, perspective, and methodology.

The next three chapters, Chapters 2–4, trace the historical perspective leading up to creation of the all-night *garapan* style. In **Chapter 2: Classical Style**, the parameters of the terms classical and traditional, as well as palace-classical style, village-classical style, and Nartosabdo style are examined. **Chapter 3: Condensed Style** explores *pakeliran padat* (condensed style) developed at ASKI (the university-level arts academy in Solo, Central Java) in the 1970s and 1980s. This includes a close look at the founders involved, such as Bambang Suwarno, Bambang Murtiyoso,
Sumanto, Sukardi, and later on Blacius Subono. One *lakon padat* script by Sukardi, *Kunthi Pilih (Kunthi’s Choice)*, is examined in detail. **Chapter 4: Birth of an Idea** introduces Purbo Asmoro, traces his upbringing, his education at SMKI (High School of Performing Arts in Solo), ASKI’s influence on his work, and finally the personal challenge that inspired him to come up with the idea of all-night *garapan* style in 1989. This chapter also explores his early career immersed in the *wayang hura-hura* and PANTAP movement, and his disillusionment with this artistic direction.

Chapters 5–7 offer a detailed examination and analysis of all-night *garapan* style, using primary-source examples from two recordings: Purbo Asmoro’s October 2007 live performance of *Makutharama (Rama’s Crown)* in the Regent Office courtyard of Pacitan, East Java, and his November 2007 live performance of *Sesaji Raja Suya (The Grand Offering of the Kings)* in the town square of Pacitan, East Java, both published in 2013 as part of the *Wayang Educational Package*. Each of these chapters focuses on a different aspect of all-night *garapan* style.

**Chapter 5: A New Vocabulary for Wayang Accompaniment** describes the new musical vocabulary used in all-night *garapan* performances. This new vocabulary encompasses a number of techniques: 1) using pieces from outside the traditional wayang repertory, such as from traditional processional, concert, or dance repertories; 2) using traditional pieces but played in new ways; 3) using the repertory of pieces composed at ASKI in the 1970s for *padat*, *sandosa* (multi-dhalang, extra-wide screen wayang performances in Indonesian), or dance dramas; or 4) creating new fragments, instrumental or vocal, on the spot in rehearsals. There are also new types of transitions, alternatives in instrumentation, and layerings (overlays) of pieces not normally played in tandem.

**Chapter 6: The Prologue** explores the prologue, one of the most characteristic elements of all-night *garapan* style, and one that many dhalang use even if they then proceed with an entirely classical performance. The structure and purpose of Purbo Asmoro’s elaborate prologues is examined, his creative process explored, and dramatic categories defined that can be used to define elements of his prologues.

**Chapter 7: Creating Dramatic Hierarchy—The Poignant and the Familiar** outlines how Purbo Asmoro crafts his all-night *garapan* performances after the
prologues. With a deeply considered theme, eternal question, or burning conflict or struggle as his overall focus, Purbo applies padat techniques to specific moments or sections of the story. He recrafts narration and dialogue, movement sequences, musical accompaniment, characterizations, and story details using padat techniques. This recrafting underscores structural points, highlights climactic moments, and enhances the poignancy of chosen interactions. In between these interspersed padat techniques, Purbo Asmoro provides familiar visual attractions such as traditional battle scenes, troop departure scenes, and court dispersals. This ebb and flow of padat intensity contrasted with the familiar and traditional creates a dramatic hierarchy across the all-night performance.

Chapter 8: Multi-Episode Constructions takes a look at how Purbo Asmoro applies his all-night garapan style to more complex structures involving multiple episodes combined in one performance. While he is famous for the birth-to-death biographical character sketch known as a lakon banjaran, his repertory of multi-episode constructions also includes partial biographical sketches, lakon in which a few chronologically adjacent episodes are combined, and lakon that trace the evolution of a weapon, heirloom, or philosophy.

Chapter 9: In the Hands of Other Practitioners offers short sketches of a number of other dhalang currently active in the Solonese wayang community. The focus is on how they view Purbo Asmoro’s all-night garapan style, which elements they have adopted, and to what extent. This chapter also briefly addresses a few dhalang who completely reject Purbo Asmoro’s style, and also elder dhalangs’ reactions to developments in wayang.

Chapter 10: Conclusion wraps up Purbo Asmoro’s creative process, summarizing how he constructs all-night garapan as well as what he consciously rejects. Ultimately, this dissertation argues the following points:

1. A distinct style, all-night garapan, has moved Solonese wayang performance-practice beyond both classicism and the hura-hura or PANTAP era of the 1990s. All-night performances by 2000 no longer fell into the two categories of classical (palace, village, or Nartosabdo style) and hura-hura as they did in the minds of wayang audiences in the 1990s, but rather five categories: classical,
hura-hura, all-night garapan, garapan-inspired (but not applied as an integrated system), or performances significantly outside a traditional framework.

2. The all-night garapan style was created by Purbo Asmoro, and debuted by him in March 1989. It is based on ASKI’s concepts of padat.

3. All-night garapan, as practiced by Purbo Asmoro, applies padat techniques only in well-chosen segments, in order to create dramatic hierarchy and emotional poignancy.

4. All-night garapan has been the single most important influence on Solo-style dhalang younger than Purbo Asmoro, even if they do not apply the system in the same way he does.

While wayang has been in a constant state of innovation as far back as scholars can determine, the past four decades (1975–2015), and particularly the past two decades, have seen substantial changes in performance practice. Western discourse about the recent developments in wayang has been mostly limited to the condensed (padat) movement at ASKI, the nature of the entertainment interludes, or special effects and innovative tricks in battle scenes since the 1990s. Some scholars have explored alternatives that fall far from a traditional Solo-style framework, such as forms that use modern characters in everyday neighborhoods, or completely alter the stage set-up and equipment. Discourse among Javanese researchers has tended to jump over the question of stylistics and go straight to discussing Purbo Asmoro’s performances without any consideration of his entirely new system. This dissertation attempts to fill that gap. It invites researchers to turn conversation away from the entertainment interludes and sensationalist elements for now, and direct their attention to radical and profound, yet, at the same time in some ways subtle, changes in the crafting of dramatic expression presented in Purbo Asmoro’s all-night garapan style.