

# Theater *I La Galigo* by Director Robert Wilson: A Linguistic Study

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**Abstract**—The literary work *I La Galigo* is an ancient book in the form of poetry that contains the myth of the creation of the Buginese civilization which was crowned by UNESCO as World Memory. Literary reading of *I La Galigo* is done while singing Laoang or Selleang songs. In fact, its existence is increasingly disappearing in the life of the Buginese Society today. *I La Galigo* then returned and attracted international attention after director Robert Wilson presented it in the form of a play written by Rhoda Grauer. By presenting a story about the process of the formation of the world as well as the long and spiritual journey of Sawerigading, the theater *I La Galigo* directed by Robert Wilson is considered capable of giving a stronger impression to the audience. This paper aims to 1) explore the theater of *I La Galigo* by Robert Wilson from the study of Linguistics, and 2) reveal the change of literary works of *I La Galigo* into theater performances and the process of transferring written literary works called *I La Galigo* into script theater performances. This study uses a qualitative method with data obtained from the literature study. It focuses on looking at the adaptation in the literary work of *I La Galigo* into a theatrical performance and the process of changing a written literary work, namely *I La Galigo* into a script for a theatrical performance by using dramaturgy theory and discourse transfer method.

**Index Terms**—*I La Galigo*, dramaturgy, linguistics, media transformation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Theatrical performance is a combination of the use of language power and literature content in the form of dialogue, movement, fashion and costumes, make-up, stage decoration, lighting, music and sound as well as dance (Pishkar et al., 2017, p. 70). All of these elements are part of the means of conveying the message or mandate of the story visualized in the theatrical performance. Thus, theater performances are part of linguistic studies (Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo, 2004, p. 376). The study of linguistics is simply a science that studies language both from its internal structure and the external structure of language. The internal structure of language consists of a sound system, word form, semantic system, discourse system and others, while the external structure is related to the use of language in the structure of society (Covington et al., 2015). In a theatrical performance, language is not only limited by its internal structure, but also its external structure.

One of the functions of theater is as a means of human communication by using several media to express it, so that theater can reveal more things to other humans (Pishkar et al., 2017). To be able to provide an expression that is in accordance with the value of the story, in theatrical performances, actors and also the properties in it must support the story. Not only playing a role, but also must animate the character of the role. This will help the audience to be able to take the value and content of the story raised. Because of this, many story scripts were later turned into theatrical performances in order to provide a better guide to the values contained in the story to the audience. One of them is the adoption of *I La Galigo's* written literature into the theater stage. *I La Galigo* is an ancient book containing the myth of the creation of the Buginese Civilization which was then visualized by Robert Wilson on a theater stage with a script written by Rhoda Grauer (Rahmaeni et al., 2020, p. 149). The theater performance of *I La Galigo* by Robert Wilson is seen as quite effective as a means of communication in showing the noble values of Indonesian culture such as courage, cultural richness, and the shame and empathy of Indonesians to the international world (Sugiyanto, 2009).

## II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research aims to 1) explore Robert Wilson's *I La Galigo* teater from Linguistics studies, and 2) reveal the

changes in I La Galigo's literary works into theater performances and also the process of transferring written literary works, namely *I La Galigo* into script theater performances.

#### A. Previous Study

Tanamas et al. (2020) conducted a research on theater performances entitled *Teater Sebagai Media Untuk Memperkenalkan Budaya Papua Kepada Generasi Milenial*. Papua is often seen as a primitive tribe and second-class society, but on the other hand Papua has a diverse, unique and beautiful culture that can be used as a national cultural heritage. The performing arts are an effective communication medium in conveying messages because they involve the audience and provide real experiences, and one of them is the performing arts of theater. In addition, theater itself is an effective communication to introduce Papuan culture to the current millennial generation because in this case, theater is very close to and in demand by the millennial generation. This research used literature approach and to support any required data, the researcher took several references to journal articles related to the above theme. Moreover, the researcher took references as additional secondary data, the authors conducted interviews and surveys to obtain facts and supporting data needed in this research process. It can be concluded that performances such as theater can be an effective medium to introduce Papuan culture to the public, especially the millennial generation.

The next article is written by Pramayoza about theatrical performances entitled *Pertunjukan Teater Sebagai Sebuah Sistem Penandaan*. The researcher stated that theatrical art utilizes almost all marking media which are also used in everyday life, which are all parts of the human body and also the objects that become their environment. When projected onto a theater stage, it is very possible for a semiotization process that can be absorbed by involving all the equipment of the human senses to occur (Pramayoza, 2013). The existence of communication built in the theater stage also allows the audience to receive the message outside the stage. In his writings intends to describe the nature of theatrical performances as a marking system by using a theater semiotic perspective. The results of the study indicate that in theater performances it is possible to use symbols (one of the sign systems) that strengthen communication between the audience and the performance. The communication system is considered important especially for the performance of works that have been transformed into other genres.

A research conducted by Novianto (2019) immediately explained that apart from being a product of expression, theater can also be seen as a cultural product in his research entitled *Peta Teoritik Pengkajian Teater: dari Teori Strukturalis sampai Teori Postrukturalis*. Theater as a product of expression becomes the presentation of artists in showing their expressions by the supporting of themes, storylines, characterizations in the script, directing methods, stage layouts, lighting locations and so on. Meanwhile, as a cultural product, theater art is also related to the background of the social and cultural aspects of the artists who present the conditions of the surrounding environment. In his research, it explained that there are several types of analysis of theater performances, one of which is dramaturgical analysis which focuses more on aspects that affect the form and style of the performance articulated in three stages; namely (1) the sources; (2) the process; (3) results and impacts. Thus, dramaturgical analysis sees the relationship between 'content', which is more than a theme or message but an articulated ideology and also a 'form' which is not only limited to what is shown on the stage, but has a wider reach to the segmentation of the audience and its socio-cultural space. Dramaturgical analysis in a performance is concerned with the above analysis; (1) the style and type of play in the performance; (2) the relationship between content and form of performance; (3) the contextual and actual value of the performance for the audience; and (4) the approach used by playwrights, directors, actors and also designers in all aspects of staging (Novianto, 2019).

#### B. Dramaturgy

Dramaturgy is known as the influence of drama or theatre, understanding that in human interaction there is an agreed behavioral "agreement" that can lead to the ultimate goal of the purpose of the social interaction (Boje et al., 2004, p. 753). Role playing is one of the tools that can refer to reaching an agreement that first introduces dramaturgy, as a basic theory of how individuals appear in the social world. In Goffman's (1971) view, the self does not belong to the actor but rather the result of a dramatic interaction between the actor and the audience. The self is a dramatic influence that emerges from the atmosphere it presents. Dramaturgy pays attention to processes that can prevent interference with one's appearance. Although much of his discussion is focused on this dramaturgical interaction, Goffman points out that its implementation is a success. The result is that in ordinary circumstances, the self that is in harmony with the perpetrator, his appearance comes from the perpetrator (Poloma, 2010, p. 14; Koubová 2014). In dramaturgy theory, humans are actors who try to combine personal characteristics and goals with others. The theory proposes humans as individuals and communities. In this theory, humans are different from animals because they have the ability to think, and they can learn and change meanings and symbols, perform actions and interact.

#### C. Linguistics

Linguistic Studies is the study of 'natural language' (Widdowson, 2000). This usually includes the study of the structure of language (grammar), the study of meaning (semantics) and the social functions of language (sociolinguistics). In recent years it has become a popular subject to study, included in the study of linguistics is an introduction to language theory and linguistic theory, children's language theory, language acquisition, phonetics, semantics, sociolinguistics, language, gender, pragmatics and psycholinguistics (Harris, 2014; Rahman & Weda, 2018).

Furthermore, Herman's opinion is that dialogue creates a situation that is built by the participants themselves. This includes spoken speech, that the linguistic code used in the dialogue is integrated with other codes in a performance, such as paralinguistic, kinesics, gestures, and so on. Linguistic unit analysis is suitable for dialogue as an interactional conversation, namely speech. Speech is relevant for the study of language in use, sentences in grammar (Herman, 2015).

#### D. Theatrical Performance

According to Kusumo et al. (2020, p. 2) theater is one of the performing arts that are often used to inform the public. With so many elements in theatrical performances such as musical, artistic, and also roles, this art is the choice for artists to convey their messages, ideas or ideologies to the audience (Wendy, 2014). The use of theater as a medium of communication has been used for a long time and still persists today. However, the exact time and place of theatrical performance is not known, but one theory says that theater originated from primitive religious ceremonies, which later added story elements and eventually developed into a performance drama. Although religious ceremonies have long been abandoned, theater is still developing today.

Through the media of theatrical performances, the ideology can be shown to the public, because the communication of theatrical performing arts has a pattern as a communication medium for cultural and environmental education (Wendy, 2014). The communication pattern of such theater performances basically has an interactive pattern with the local community who wants to get involved by watching, appreciating, observing, interpreting, and criticizing. Interaction in theater performances is seen as a symbolic interaction, namely as an activity that is characteristic of humans by means of communication or the process of exchanging symbols that are given meaning (Sugita et al., 2021, p. 7).

#### E. Media Transformation

According to Damono (2018, p. 12) Media transformation is a change from one type of art to another. Media transformation is one of the efforts to develop Indonesian literature as stated in government regulation number 57 of 2014 concerning the development, guidance, protection of language and literature, as well as improving the function of the Indonesian language (Ardiansyah et al., 2020; Elleström, 2014, p. 89). In this case, transformation is very important to do to improve the quality of literature so that it can be used as a medium of expression, reflection, and search for identity to build a new culture. In addition, media transformation is a legitimate and beneficial activity for a deeper understanding of the nature of literature (Wendy, 2014). The transformation of a literary work to other forms or media has long been carried out, for example changing the form of poetry into a song or painting, drama being converted into short stories and dance (Rahman et al., 2019).

The transformation process is that each product transfer is a new work because of the transfer from one work to another (Oktavia & Herwanfakhrizal, 2021). The transformation of the form of literary works into works of art is a change in the form (media) of literary works in the form of novels into works of art in the form of films (Yuliza, 2020). The appearance of films adapted from novels has recently become increasingly widespread, filmmakers are now using literary works in this case novels as ideas for making films, and this proves that novels are rich in interesting stories.

### III. METHODS

This research used qualitative method with data obtained from a literature review. In analyzing the data obtained regarding the change of *I La Galigo's* written literature into a drama script and in the show under the direction of director Robert Wilson, the media transformation method with a dramaturgical approach. Media transformation includes activities of translation, adaptation, and transfer from one art form to another (Darmono, 2012; Sparacino, 2000, p. 481). Media transformation can be interpreted as a transfer of the way of delivery, ideas, or feelings. Ideas that were initially conveyed through stories from novels or short stories were transferred to other media such as films or dramas. The feelings that were initially expressed through poetry were then transferred to a musical performance accompanied by dance or so on (Darmono, 2012). Media transformation method used to see the process of transferring the literary works of *I La Galigo* into a theater script by Rhoda Grauer and staged under director Robert Wilson.

### IV. RESULTS

*I La Galigo* or Sureq Galigo is an ancient book written in the form of poetry that contains the myth of the creation of the Buginese civilization. *I La Galigo* is also a book for adherents of the local Buginese religion, namely the Tolotang Faith. At first *I La Galigo* was a story that was passed down orally from generation to generation. In Makassar culture, it is customary to perform Sinrilik as a way of telling stories. Sinrilik since ancient times has been used as a medium to raise the spirit of patriotism among the people of Makassar. In addition, Sinrilik is used as a means to educate Makassar people to be brave, honest, and have noble character. The way to do this is to tell the history of struggle, heroism, courage, and journey, sometimes by adding a love story (Lewa, 2018). It is believed that this is how the stories in *I La Galigo* developed in Buginese society.

It is believed that since the 13th century, the stories in *I La Galigo* began to be written in Lontarak script, the original writing of the Bugis. This epic consists of 6000 pages with 360,000 lines consisting of 3 main chapters with many

stories in it. Referring to the writings of Rahman (2006) that uses the opinion of Kern and Sirtjo Koolhof said, *I La Galigo* is the longest work in the world, longer of the Indian epic Mahabharata and Ramayana, also longer than the Greek epic of Homer. However, as a written literature, along with the passage of time and the development of the times, *I La Galigo* is getting dimmer and is starting to be forgotten by the Buginese.

*I La Galigo*, the theatrical performance by Robert Wilson provides another perspective in showing the origins of the Buginese. It was through Robert Wilson's theater performance that *I La Galigo* became known to the international world and also revived an epic that had become extinct for most Indonesians, especially the Buginese of South Sulawesi (Hamilton, 2006). Robert Wilson himself made a long journey in 'finding' *I La Galigo* who actually 'disappeared' in his homeland.

The screenwriter of *I La Galigo* in director Robert Wilson's theater performance is Rhoda Grauer. Grauer first heard of *I La Galigo* in the late 1990s while doing research for a film about Bissu. Grauer's interest in writing a screenplay about *I La Galigo* then brought the idea to the Coordinator of the Center for the Arts in Bali and also proposed the idea of including Robert Wilson on their team in 2000. While in the process of making the script, Grauer received information and development from the advisory team who also communicate with the Bissu Saidi Community regarding their cultural protocol. Broadly speaking, Sureq Galigo tells about the origin of the creation of the first human in the Buginese belief with a core story that describes adventure, war, friendship, forbidden love stories, marriage ceremonies to betrayal. It is told that hundreds of characters then one by one fill the middle world which is still empty through various interesting events. Although initially it could only be read through ancient Buginese writings which were originally written, then they were told orally like readings when certain rituals were held by the local community (Adinda et al., 2021). The story in *I La Galigo* turned into a theatrical script by Grauer.

For Robert Wilson, *I La Galigo* is not the first work adapted from written literature. In 1988, Robert Wilson performed *The Forest* which was an adaptation of the ancient Babylonian epic, Gilgamesh. However, in working on *I La Galigo*, Robert Wilson involved negotiations with cultural groups as well as Bissu in South Sulawesi. Robert Wilson spent more than 20 years visualizing *I La Galigo* Literature in theatrical performances. With the help of Rhoda Grauer in writing the script, Robert Wilson made the literary stage of *I La Galigo* an experimental theater model. The result is a riveting three-hour epic tale that projects *I La Galigo* itself (Hamilton, 2006).

The development of the cultural heritage of *I La Galigo* is not only done by theatrical performances. *I La Galigo's* literature was also adapted into genres such as novels, comics and animation. This is a form of effort by the Indonesian people, especially South Sulawesi to protect *I La Galigo*. In the Law on the Advancement of Culture, Article 1 Paragraph 5 of 2017 concerning "Development is an effort to revive the Cultural ecosystem and enhance, enrich, and disseminate Culture". That art is not only limited to performances, but also the birth process of art and culture is also included in it (Indonesian Art Coalition, 2019). *I La Galigo* Literature adapted into the form of theatrical performance art with the aim of opening and also showing the values of life in it in the form of performing arts became part of the Law on the Advancement of Culture.

## V. DISCUSSION

Linguistics is the study of language, both from its internal and external structure. The internal structure of language consists of a sound system, word form, semantic system, discourse system and others, while the external structure is related to the use of language in the structure of society (Covington et al., 2015). In a theatrical performance, the internal structure of language consists of the whole system in its elements, ranging from acting, diction in speech to certain sounds and signs in their attributes and characteristics. The external structure in theatrical performance is to respond to the environment around the performance and also the audience. Dramaturgical analysis can explain the study of the performance of *I La Galigo* directed by Robert Wilson from linguistic studies.

Dramaturgy focuses on aspects that affect the form and style of performance, which are articulated in three stages; (1) source; (2) birth process; (3) results and impacts. Robert Wilson before staging *I La Galigo* had previously seen these three aspects.

### A. The Sources

The source is not only the literary works of *I La Galigo*, but also more broadly the memory of the Buginese community, especially Bissu and also the customary council to the local government. Talking about *I La Galigo*, it is not only a poetry text, but a system of life that is rooted in Buginese society. Robert Wilson needed more than 20 years to conduct research and collect data on *I La Galigo*. Likewise with Grauer, in writing a script, interviews and research are needed.

### B. The Process of Transitioning *I La Galigo* From Written Literature Into a Theatrical Performance

The script for the theatrical performance *I La Galigo* was written by Grauer. In the process of adapting *I La Galigo's* literature from writing to a theatrical performance, what needs to be developed is the dialogue, space, time and other contexts shown on the theater stage. The ideas and values written in *I La Galigo* must be able to be visualized with the movements of actors, music, dance and also properties in staging (Darmono, 2012).

The process of converting the text of *I La Galigo* into a script also requires a team. There are also considerations that

must be adjusted considering that the narrative in *I La Galigo* must be able to be transformed into a dialogue or movement that does not eliminate the ideas or values contained in it.

### C. Response to Robert Wilson's *I La Galigo* Theater Performance

The first show of *I La Galigo* was held in 2003 in Singapore. After that, it continued to major world cities, such as Amsterdam, Barcelona, Madrid, Lyon, Ravenna, New York, Melbourne, Milan, and Taipei, during 2003-2008 (Tempo, 2011). Robert Wilson is a well-known director and is accustomed to bringing written works to the theater stage. So *I La Galigo* became famous. After 'around the world', *I La Galigo* theater arrived in Indonesia in 2011. Various sponsors then wanted to be a part of the show. *I La Galigo* became famous among the people of Indonesia.

However, what needs to be seen is not in terms of financial benefits, but in terms of the values in it. The performance of *I La Galigo* is considered more capable of visualizing the process of the formation of the Buginese civilization. The fame of the *I La Galigo* theater stage is expected to be able to attract interest, especially the young people of South Sulawesi. Several years after *I La Galigo*'s performance in Indonesia, the local government has intensively conducted socialization about *I La Galigo*. Several youth groups have established the *I La Galigo* Foundation which aims to dig deeper into the values in *I La Galigo*.

The dramaturgical analysis of *I La Galigo* theater is also seen from several things: 1) style and Type of Play in the Show, 2) the relationship between content and form of performance the relationship between 'content', which is more than just a theme or message, but an articulated ideology and 'form' which is not only limited to what is displayed on stage, but has a wider reach on audience segmentation and socio-cultural space. The contents of *I La Galigo* are a set of cultural values, beliefs and life systems that were born and developed in Bugis society. Robert Wilson and Grauer tried to develop idealism and ideology in *I La Galigo*, 3) the contextual and actual value of the performance for the audience, and 4) the approach used by *I La Galigo*'s scriptwriters, plays, directors, actors and designers in all aspects of the show. In the *I La Galigo* stage, these actors not only act as humans, but also as characters as descendants of God, animals, and plants. Buginese have a philosophy of life to live a noble life, therefore every actor who plays a character in the *I La Galigo* story must be able to show the glory of Buginese society at that time (Adinda et al., 2021). The elements in the theatrical stage are all adapted to the same style and 'feel' as in the *I La Galigo* text. This requires months of specialized training.

## VI. CONCLUSION

*I La Galigo* Literature which was adapted into the form of theatrical performing arts became part of the Law on the Advancement of Culture. Robert Wilson director and Rhoda Grauer screenwriter took a long time to convert *I La Galigo*'s literary form into theatrical performance. Several aspects that Robert Wilson paid attention to include sources of information about *I La Galigo*, the process of transitioning written literature into theater performance scripts and also the international response to *I La Galigo*'s performances since 2004.

The transfer of the written work of *I La Galigo* into a theater performance script was very attentive to the details obtained from cultural groups and also Bissu in South Sulawesi. Not only limited to dialogue, but the entire system of elements in the theater stage does not eliminate the values and ideas of *I La Galigo* itself. The theatrical performance of *I La Galigo* by director Robert Wilson succeeded in bringing back *I La Galigo*, not only to South Sulawesi and Indonesia, but also internationally.

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