



SYMBOLS IN THE PLAYS OF
NOORDIN HASSAN

BY

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ABSTRACT

The works of National Laureate Noordin Hassan must be looked at in the light of his life as a historic route of occasions, coloured by his past, his richness of experiential content. His emotions draws on the past to form the present, most often presented through symbols. The responses and reference to the meaning of the symbols should give the additional effect and room for analysis. The constructs of knowledge, awareness and meaning is realized by integrating the multiple perspectives derived from the use of ‘self’ as part of the context of analysis. Noordin’s process of knowing and its end product, his plays, are based on, and subject to a time and space dimension that affects the way he knows and the way he produces his works. Time and space influence the nature of his thinking methods and the nature of the knowledge. This study hopes to explore the use of symbols in five of his plays supported by inter-textual references to his other works. The dissertation shall begin with his background: his origin, education and the influences on his life that have contributed to ideas for the plays. Analysis of the texts and interviews with the playwright shall reveal the sources of his ideas and inspiration to reveal the soul of a most prolific Islamic playwright. This dissertation also hopes to give insights into the philosophy behind the symbols found in the works of the first playwright to receive the *Sasterawan Negara* (National Literary) award in 1995. The frame of reference is within a specific environment of religion and tradition. As Noordin’s plays should not be limited to Malay theatre practitioners but to be read and understood as works of an Islamic and traditional thinker, all five of his plays under study have been translated.

ملخص البحث

يجب أن ينظر إلى أعمال نور الدين حسن الحائز على الجائزة الوطنية من منظار حياته التي هي لون من ماضيه. وغالبا ما كانت مشاعره المستمدة من تجربته الشخصية مقدمة من خلال الرموز الموجودة في مسرحياته. وينبغي ان تعطي الردود والإشارة الى معنى الرموز تأثيرا إضافية ومجالا للتحليل لأنه لا يمكن اعتماد المعرفة والوعي والمعنى إلا من خلال الجمع بين أضعاف زوايا حياته وتجربته المتعددة . تستند طريقة نور الدين للمعرفة ومنتجاتها، ومسرحياته وتخضع لوقت وبعد معين، ويؤثر هذا على فهمه للحياة وأسلوبه حينما يكتب مسرحياته: ان للزّمان والمكان تأثير واضح علي فكره ومعرفته. تأمل هذه الدّراسة المدعومة بمراجعة نصوص من أعماله الأخرى، استكشاف كيفية استخدام الرموز في خمس من مسرحياته. تبدأ بلمحة عن خلفيته: أصله، وحياته التعليمية و التأثيرات علي حياته المتشخصة في. ومن المأمول ان القراءة الدقيقة للنصوص ومقابلات مع الكاتب المسرحي تساعد علي إظهار مصادر أفكاره وتكشف عن كاتب إسلامي منتج. تأمل هذه الدّراسة أيضا إلقاء الأضواء علي الفلسفة وراء الرموز الموجودة في أعمال أول كاتب حائز علي جائزة نوبل الوطنية (*Sasterawan Negara*) -في العام 1995 والإطار المرجعي لا يتجاوز بيئة دينية عرفية محددة. قد ترجمت مسرحيات نور الدين الخمسة التي تناولتها هذه الدّراسة الي اللّغة الإنكليزية لأجل إفادة القراء من غير الملايوا وإطلاعهم علي أعمال مفكر إسلامي ومتمسك بالتقاليد .

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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For my daughter, Sofia
and my beloved family

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“On the earth
Are signs for those
Of assured faith,
As also in your own
Selves: will you not
Then see?”

(Al-Qur’an, Adh-Dhâriyât: 20-21)

Words are not enough to express my deepest gratitude to my professors Ustaz Dr. Muhammad ‘Uthman el-Muhammady, Professor Dr. Amir H. Zegrgoo, Professor Dr. Sayyid Ajmal M. Razak Al-Aidrus, Professor Dr. Hassan el-Nagar. To the Dean, Professor Dr. Ibrahim M. Zein, without whose persuasion, I would not have been a part of ISTAC. Last but not least, my special thanks to Associate Professor Dato’ Baharudin Ahmad, my supervisor. I would like to express my gratitude to all my friends at ISTAC. Naming all would be an impossible task, but special mention and thanks to Abdul Ganiy Muhammad Raji for explanation of some of the Islamic texts and Riduan Masri for helping me to source rare material.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The seventh National Literary Laureate (*Sasterawan Negara*) Noordin Hassan shook and changed the world of Malay theatre with *Bukan Lalang Ditiup Angin*¹ which was first staged at Sultan Idris Training College in 1970, a year after the race riots of 13 May 1969 that left a dark spot in the history of Malaysia. This play was brought to Kuala Lumpur in the same year and staged at Dewan Syed Nasir in Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. From then on, there was no stopping him as he wrote plays that won him accolades and recognition, winning Literary Awards until, again, he changed tradition and became the first playwright to receive the *Sasterawan Negara* (National Literary) award in 1995. As an innovator who changed the structure and presentation of Malay drama, Noordin's plays should not be limited to Malay theatre practitioners only but to be read and understood as works of an Islamic and traditional thinker.

Noordin's exposure to a world of culture has contributed to acquisition of motives and values, a distinctive world view. He lived in an environment where the hub of Malay theatre was evolving from *Bangsawan*² performances in Hindi to include Malay text which brought this theatre genre to its height in the 1950s; where *boria* was the mainstay of his father's existence; where his understanding of the Qur'an played a major role to his inner psyche; where a diverse cultural heritage has greatly influenced his thinking on religion and his tolerance of other religious beliefs;

¹ Translated as "Tis Not Tall Grass Blown by the Wind".

² *Bangsawan*: Malay stock theatre developed from "Wayang Parsee" which was brought into Malaya in the 1870s. See pp. 24 & 101.

where the influence of the women around him has earned his respect of women of *ḥasanah* (goodly). The lyrical style of Noordin's writings is done consciously, to create ambiances suitable for situations in different settings and for different themes but is yet to be understood in its proper context. His education includes both the formal education in schools and colleges, whilst his informal education includes his family, his acquaintances, his travels, the tragic events in his life, the films and paintings that have created strong impressions and the books he read which have become his major reference materials that have led him to better understanding of his purpose as a playwright. This is elaborated in Chapter Two.

This study hopes to give insights into the philosophy behind the symbols found in the works of playwright Noordin Hassan. It is hoped that this study will put Noordin's works on a wider perspective.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

One of the functions of literature is to foster wisdom, if nothing else, through instinct, bound by common emotions. Through his dramas Noordin deals with the complexity of the situation and it is up to the reader to discern his intention, to respond and to act accordingly. Critics who deem it necessary to use Western theories fail to understand his plays and thus miss an opportunity to learn, to direct attention to issues surrounding society and the social system in response to the lack of spiritual ethics. These criticisms are incongruous to Noordin's purpose to 'educate' and have thus confused readers of Noordin's plays. The difficulty is in analyzing what lies beyond the symbols and the wisdom behind the symbols that reaches out to the metaphysical and perennial philosophy of Noordin Hassan.

The responses to the symbols should be automatic; the reference to the meaning of the symbols should give the additional emotional effect and room for analysis. Unfortunately, readers of Noordin's works are often widely sundered, through disparity in knowledge and wisdom at Noordin's level. Depending on the level of knowledge of the audience, these works have been seen from the physical aspects for the spectacle and not for the philosophy.

The constructs of knowledge, awareness and meaning is realized by integrating the multiple perspectives derived from the use of the playwright, as the 'self', as part of the context of analysis. Noordin's process of knowing and its end product, which are his plays, are based on, and subject to a time and space dimension that affects the way he 'knows' and the way he interprets the 'knowing' through his works. As Coomaraswamy says:

Such is the "understanding" of a traditional episode, which a knowing author has retold, not primarily to amuse but originally to instruct...³

Time and space influence the nature of his thinking methods and the nature of the knowledge he produces in his plays. The process of 'knowing' is relative to the underlying thinking process which is relative to his awareness of his surroundings. This relativity not only exists in relation between different individuals, it is also relative to the continuing states of his 'self' which evolves and changes through time, experience and observation and this has not been understood.

Noordin's exposure to a world of culture has contributed to acquisition of motives and values, a distinctive world view. He lived in an environment where the hub of Malay theatre was evolving from *Bangsawan* performances in Hindi to Malay; where *boria* was the mainstay of his father's existence which has been translated as

³ Coomaraswamy, Ananda, *The Door in the Sky: Coomaraswamy on myth and meaning* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 188.

drama laced with “vivid childhood memories of *bangsawan* and *boria*”.⁴ His understanding of the Qur’ān played a major role to his inner psyche where a diverse cultural heritage and philosophical mysticism (*taṣawwuf*) has greatly influenced his thinking on religion and his tolerance of other religious traditions. Noordin has been accused as being ‘woman-struck’⁵ but the women around him, starting with his mother, has earned his respect of women of *ḥasanah*.

Damage to the environment, social and political issues which disturb him personally have become themes in his plays. Often, these issues are not evident as they are under the guise of comedy, set in a different time, or so well blended in the plays through symbols that they are not obvious to the casual reader or the audience who see the semiotic symbols as part of the setting. The semantic symbols are not understood as representational of Noordin’s philosophy.

The concerns of the Malay community include religion, social problems and issues related to the country’s aspiration towards a national identity which has displaced the Malays, physically, mentally and spiritually. The racial riots of May 13, 1969 inspired playwrights like Syed Alwi, Johan Jaafar, Dinsman and Hatta Azad Khan with explosions of new plays, including Noordin. Whilst other playwrights of his time wrote on the issues within their confines of reactions of the situation, Noordin expanded and refined his works towards more universal issues.

The refusal to acknowledge the importance of Noordin’s works has been due to the lack of understanding of what has motivated and inspired Noordin to write the way he does. Even less is the understanding of the confrontation of tradition and Western education within the ‘self’ that has led to the ‘return’ of Noordin whereby the

⁴Krishen Jit, *Krishen Jit: An Uncommon Position*. (Singapore: Contemporary Asian Art Centre, LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts, 2003), 52.

⁵Noordin Hassan. *Saya Dari ... Hujung Kota*, xii.

solution is Islam. As stated in the Qur'an, "Then unto your Lord is your return, so He will tell you that wherein you have been differing."⁶ Noordin is well aware that his deeds will determine the 'differing' or his 'fallen' state. This research hopes that readers, theatre practitioners and his audience will see Noordin's works in a new light through the profusion of images and symbols used in the sets, props, characters, the stage directions and the language in his plays.

Meaning resides within people thus enabling representations of meaning. His writing is a process through which he constructs and interprets his dreams to give meaning for his audience. In *Sirih Bertepuk Pinang Menari* ("The Betel Leaves Clap and the Areca Nut Dances"⁷) Noordin says, "If what is said is impossible, then look for what is hidden."⁸ This is his advice for audiences not only to suspend disbelief, but to look deeper into what is hidden. What is "hidden" means the knowledge within the 'self' which is required to fully understand his plays which must be acquired through knowledge of the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith. So far, the understanding has been limited as the plays have been seen in the Malay context as contemporary drama with Islamic elements, not Islamic literature seen on a universal level.

Unfortunately, few can go beyond the entertainment aspects of the plays in interpreting the texts, sub-texts, structure and symbolism used in his plays. Often critics fail to see the presence of Islamic elements in his plays; that his sensibility is rooted in the values and teachings of Islam. Sadly, the need to label his plays has confused readers on his primary and larger purpose. This has arisen from the way Noordin has structured his plays, putting layer upon layer of "a play within a play within a play". The connection becomes apparent when the plays are staged for one to

⁶ *Surah Al-An'am*: 164.

⁷ My translation.

⁸ Noordin Hassan. *Saya Dari ... Hujung Kota*, 164.

construct a coherent connection of the layers. His plays are not linear in nature, for life itself is not linear. As an innovator who changed the structure and presentation of Malay drama, Noordin's plays should not be limited to Malay theatre practitioners only but to be read and understood as works of perennial philosophy of an Islamic and traditional thinker.

1.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although Noordin started writing and directing plays since 1953, his earlier plays were not published and copies of the scripts are lost. For the purpose of this dissertation only five plays will be looked at closely with inter-textual references made from Noordin's other plays to support the study. The texts referred to are in Malay with transliteration by the researcher. The five plays selected are: *Jangan Bunuh Rama-rama*⁹ (1979), *Cindai*¹⁰ (1989), *Sirih Bertepuk Pinang Menari*¹¹ (1992), *Mana Setanggihnya?*¹² (2000), and *Intan Yang Tercanai* (2008)¹³. These plays have also been selected due to the varied themes and issues and also cover a span of over twenty years, taking into consideration that *Jangan Bunuh Rama-rama* was first staged in 1978 in English. These plays also contain the archetypal, universal and particular symbols sought for which conveys Noordin's philosophy. Although Noordin considers *1400* as the paradigm shift,¹⁴ the turning point in his life, it shall

⁹ First staged in 1982.

¹⁰ First staged in 1988.

¹¹ First staged in 1992

¹² After almost ten years of being published, the play was finally staged in June 2009. It has been translated as *The Frankincense*, not quite appropriate nor true to the meaning intended by Noordin.

¹³ I used part of the script which was staged in January 2009 to commemorate Noordin's 80th birthday in a collage taken from ten plays entitled "Saya ...dari Hujung Kota," taking the title of his autobiography as well as the fact that Noordin hails for 'the edge of the city' (*hujung kota*). It was staged at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in July 2009.

¹⁴ Interview: 7th January 2004.

only be used in reference to recurring symbols, and in interpreting his principles of *Teater Fitrah*.

Ideally, all his plays should be used for discussion. Unfortunately, not all his works have been published and the sources would depend on interviews with Noordin. Some of his closest friends who should be interviewed have passed away or are else indisposed due to health reasons. Furthermore, using all his texts would lead to a monolithic scope of discussion which is not possible due to limited time and space.

Unfortunately, this study is looking at five of his plays in the original Malay texts and needs to be translated for the purpose of this study. The main substantial sources of Islamic contexts, the Holy Qur'ān and the Hadīth are also translations. This means that the dissertation will deal with materials in Malay and support materials which are also translated texts. This dissertation proposes to refer to the original text in Malay and shall explain the meaning through the researcher's translation in the referential process. Obviously, a perfect translation is an unattainable ideal, but to elucidate the meanings an attempt has been made to transliterate the plays¹⁵ used for this dissertation and where there is a possible ambiguity, footnotes are used to further clarify not just the meaning but the intention of the use of words, as understood through cloze reading and constant reference to the playwright himself.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this research is to examine a new intellectual approach to analyze Noordin's works by explaining the myths, symbols and signs used in his plays to explore and understand, not only his plays but his worldview and thought. This study is "...a crucial analysis that opens up perspectives on symbols in a richly reflective

¹⁵ See Appendix I.

and provocative way.”¹⁶ It is not a discovery but a recognition through association as a symbol is “regarded as an autonomous mode of cognition.”¹⁷

Noordin’s works must be seen in a new light, to give their full intended meanings, to give him the profile he deserves. He must be looked at in the occasion of his experiences, the historical and social environment that has led to Noordin’s need to express his thoughts, philosophy and his tolerance of other religious traditions. These occasions are complex and therefore must be analysed into phases and other components that constitute the environment that has led him to produce his works. His life is a historic route of occasions, coloured by his past, the richness of experiential content.

Noordin’s works play a significant role as a platform for pertinent matters concerning the Malay society in general, and the Muslim community in particular; a community that has inherited cultures from the migration of different creeds with varying practices which have been assimilated into the culture of Malay Muslims. This assimilation not only includes the practices of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, but intermarriages between various races from China, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Persia and Arab states like Yemen have contributed in the enrichment of the culture of the Penang Malays.¹⁸ In the then tolerant society, the Jewish community existed and lived side by side with the other communities until the Second World War when they migrated to Australia for fear of their own safety.¹⁹

¹⁶ Beane, Wendall C. and Coty, William G., *Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 343.

¹⁷ Beane, Wendall C. and Coty, William G., *Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader*, 344.

¹⁸ Abdullah Ishak, *Islam di Nusantara: Khususnya di Tanah Melayu*, (Kuala Lumpur: Badan Dakwah dan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia, 1990), 47-70.

¹⁹ Noordin has hinted this in his play *Sarah*, staged in 2006. See Rohani’s article in *Dewan Sastera* December 2006 issue in discussing the play.

It is hoped that this study will establish the link between the understanding of spirituality and its expression in the cosmological reality within Noordin's thoughts and plays. It shall examine the use of particular, religious and traditional symbols and art forms found in his plays. This study hopes to show how Noordin has integrated Western education, his understanding of other religions with traditional Malay and Islamic values in 'educating' his audience. This study also hopes to prove that the themes in his plays reflect the ritual, socio-cultural and political significances of modern Malay communities. Most importantly, this study hopes to disclose the links of Noordin's paradigm shift that signals his 'return' through the development of his works through understanding of his psyche to arrive at perennial philosophy. The study of the meanings of the symbols used in the plays lends support to the messages in the plays. These include the names of characters, the set designs, the stage directions and other theatrical devices he uses. This study will also explain the reasons for the use of these symbols as they tie to the particular or the universal to arrive at his perennial philosophy.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

In Malaysia, the only Government-supported journal, *Malay Literature Journal* published in English by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) twice a year, hardly supports the rich dramatic literary culture of local dramas, especially those of the Malay language. DBP however, supports both literary and cultural understanding through the monthly publication *Dewan Sastera* and *Dewan Budaya*, published in Malay. Often, comments and reviews are found in these two magazines.

Reviews of Malay dramas in English newspapers are limited to the performance aspects of the plays. With a few exceptions, Malay dramas are reviewed

for the productions and not the texts, which make them seasonal. Mostly, comments and reviews on Malay dramas are found only in Malay newspapers.

Translations of Malay dramas have also been minimal and hence have not become subjects for study other than in Malaysia, among Malay scholars. So far only Solehah Ishak and Rahmah Bujang, both from the academia, have each translated one of Noordin's plays, but only one has been published. Faizal Yamimi Mustaffa and Ashfaq Ali translated *1400* published in *Malay Literature Journal* in 1995, in recognition and honour of Noordin Hassan's winning the Seventh National Laureate Award in 1993. This was later published in book form in selected works of seven laureates.²⁰ As non-practitioners of the theatre, the translated works have been direct, most often losing the essence of the dramas especially in the language as signifier of the culture of Penang Malays. While this dissertation was being written, a selection of four other plays were translated Malim Ghazali PK and Mohd Bahadun in an anthology entitled *The Frankincense* published by Institut Terjemahan Negara in 2009.²¹

In the past, there were three main categories of critical discussion on Noordin's works. The first category is the analysis of the performances, how it is presented on the stage (which is a review on the work of the director) and the performers. The second category is the reviewer who has some understanding of theatre practice but without adequate understanding of Islam and Noordin's use of events in Malay historical development and culture. The third is the analysis of the plays as theatre text and is generally for academic purposes. The fourth category does understand the

²⁰ Solehah Ishak et. al., *Malaysian Literary Laureates*, (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1998), 248-294.

²¹ Plays translated include: *Mana Setangginya?* to *The Frankincense*, *Disentuh Bulan Pun* to *Touched by the Moon*, *Selendang Umi* to *Umi's Shawl*, *Malam Ini*, *Penyu Menangis* to *Tonight*, *the Turtle Cry*.

religious (especially Islamic) concept of Theatre of Faith, linking it to the Qur'an and Hadith.

Under the first category is Saleha Ali, in her review of *Anak Tanjung*, is based on an interview with Noordin with comments that, "Noordin's brave attempt to bring to the fore his keen observations of the changing world of Malaysians is admirable."²²

Ku Seman Ku Hussain's review²³ is more introspective in his interpretation of the same play:

The pre-independence backdrop is most attractive in linking the thinking that is still not independent of colonial ideology today. The question of Malay rights in this country has been discussed even before independence. Nevertheless, *Anak Tanjung* insists, "this country is also Ah Heng's country."²⁴

He goes on to say that some of the roles (in the play) "show the importance of the newspaper as an institution that sparks critical thinking through the ages" stressing the importance of the written word.²⁵ While praising its theatrical elements, Hatta Azad Khan²⁶ labelled *1400* as didactic, "boring," similar to listening to a religious talk or the Friday sermons (*khutbah*).

Under the second category is a well-known critic of his time, Krishen Jit, who saw *Bukan Lalang Ditiup Angin* as "happenings that are prophesied are drawn in visual fantasy which is sometimes abstract."²⁷ In another article Krishen dismisses Noordin as a Malay Teacher's Training lecturer not included in the modern drama movement:

He possessed vivid childhood memories of *bangsawan* and *boria*, a call-and-response form of sung procession, preceded by a comic sketch.

²² *New Sunday Times*, 1 February 1987

²³ *Utusan Malaysia*, 5 September 1990.

²⁴ My translation. The line is taken from Scene 44 of *Anak Tanjung*.

²⁵ *Utusan Malaysia*, 5 September 1990.

²⁶ Hatta Azad Khan, "Nak berteater atau berdakwah?," *Dewan Budaya*, October 1981, 45.

²⁷ Krishen Jit, "Contemporary Malaysian theatre," *Tenggara: Journal of Southeast Asian Literature*. (1989): 12.

(Noordin's father was a well-known *boria* practitioner in Penang, its original home). They were reinforced by his adult encounters with Western *avant-garde* art and theatre, (especially surrealism and the absurd)...²⁸

The playwright's statement through a line in the play *Anak Tanjung*, "This country is also Ah Heng's country," has sparked a comment from Khalid Salleh who thinks that the Malays have sold themselves out to the Chinese.²⁹ In this rare occasion, Noordin responds to Khalid's article, "Anak Tanjung Jual Bangsa" (Anak Tanjung Sells His Race)³⁰ he sought to correct Khalid's interpretation of the play in which the author says that Khalid's comments are based on probabilities, which are then wrong as they are misplaced.³¹ As the title of Noordin's article suggests, it is a 'prejudiced interpretation'.³² Noordin views Khalid's comments as a personal affront which is very sad and humiliating. Criticism of this nature is opinionated and misleading as it is based on assumptions, not supported by facts or understanding.

Solehah Ishak's article on *1400* is a textual analysis based on a book derived from a doctoral thesis published in 1987 comes under the third category. The textual analysis on *1400* is seven pages, including three pages of the synopsis. As the title suggests, the work is basically comparing "histrionics" or dramatics of three Malay playwrights. It compares works of the three playwrights through the form, structure and theatrical devices, language and names of characters as signifiers. Solehah misinterprets it by saying:

Reform is the subtext of "1400." The Message of the play is that deliverance from bondage to material wealth and its consequent evil must come from Islam.³³

²⁸ Krishen Jit, *Krishen Jit: An Uncommon Position*, 52.

²⁹ Khalid Salleh. "Anak tanjung jual bangsa," *Berita Harian*. 28th February, 1987, 11.

³⁰ My translation.

³¹ *Berita Harian*, 5 March 1987

³² My translation.

³³ Solehah Ishak, *Histrionics of Development: A Study of Three Contemporary Malay Playwrights*. (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987), 106.

Eight years later, Solehah used the material from the book as a basis for a new article.³⁴ She combined the philosophy of Noordin's *Teater Fitrah*, an interview with Noordin, as well as what others have written about the play to express her thoughts and ideas rather than create original ideas and form her own opinions with no new insight or understanding of the play. Solehah, however, has tirelessly written on Noordin Hassan. In an article she discusses signs, symbols and meanings in the works of Noordin within the theoretical framework of structuralism and post-structuralism³⁵.

In the same book, Jamaludin Osman looks at the problems of the Malay community in *Bukan Lalang Ditiup Angin*. Talib raises the political issue in the same play.³⁶ Rahmah Bujang questions the existence of Bangsawan elements in Noordin's works.³⁷ Mana Sikana is convinced that Noordin Hassan is a post-modern playwright, in line with other Malay playwrights of the seventies, Dinsman, Johan Jaafar, Hatta Azad Khan, Syed Alwi and Hashim Hassan. In his articles he insists that despite the Islamic values, Noordin's plays can be criticized using Western theories like theatre of the absurd and surrealism.³⁸ He says this because Noordin's texts are intellectual and for this reason they are open to can be "deconstructed using theories of Bakhtin, Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva and Barthes."³⁹ In the last category, Fatimah Ali and

³⁴ Solehah Ishak. "Interview: Noordin Hassan," *Malay Literature Journal*, Volume 8, No.2. (1995), 234.

³⁵ Solehah Ishak, "Semiotik Teater: Penanda, Simbol dan Makna dalam Karya Noordin Hassan" in *Sasterawan Negara Noordin Hassan: Anak Tanjung Pejuang Seni*, (Pulau Pinang: Penerbitan Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2003), 57-81.

³⁶ Jamaludin Osman, "Noordin Hassan: Permasalahan Masyarakat Melayu dalam *Bukan Lalang Ditiup Angin*" in *Sasterawan Negara Noordin Hassan: Anak Tanjung Pejuang Seni*, 83-96.

³⁷ Rahmah Bujang, "Unsur Bangsawan dalam Karya-Karya Noordin Hassan – Apakah Ada?" in *Sasterawan Negara Noordin Hassan: Anak Tanjung Pejuang Seni*, 25- 37. Rohani explains the use of Bangsawan elements in her article "Elements of Bangsawan in Sirih Bertepuk Pinang Menari" whereby using only elements does not qualify the genre nor the form of the play (*Malay Literature Journal* Vol.17, No. 1, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2004), 171-186.

³⁸ Mana Sikana, "Keperangan Dramatis Noordin Hassan, in *Sasterawan Negara Noordin Hassan: Anak Tanjung Pejuang Seni*, 10-24.

³⁹ Ibid.

Rahmah Bujang, and more recently A. Rahim Abdullah and Zakaria Ariffin have come close to understanding and interpreting Noordin Hassan.

In her essay which is based on another play, “*Jangan Bunuh Rama-Rama*” Fatimah Ali understands Noordin’s purpose through his reminder not to kill the butterflies, Allah’s (SWT) creation. Close reading through “the hermeneutics of the soul” is recommended.⁴⁰ To her, this method is not foreign in a religious life, in particular for Muslims, which she refers to as *ta’wīl*. Later she uses Ismail al-Faruqi’s and Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s thoughts as reference to the same play.⁴¹ She adds that the issue, idea and message found in the texts are in concordance with *tawhid*, with Islamic perspectives and behaviour practiced according the *syariah*. She says the links between his texts is like one cycle and continuum as if without a beginning or an end. She uses Gadamer’s theory of Hermeneutics (*ta’wīl*) in reading Noordin’s texts and also includes the Action-theory of Roger Lunden in her paper. She then elaborates on the Prologues (*mukadimah*) and closing of Noordin’s plays that had been staged. She says that the mind and soul of Noordin are manifested here, and can assist the audience, including critics and researchers in their effort in understanding his works. Unfortunately, Fatimah still needs to make reference to Western theories whereas the Islamic perspective would have been sufficient and text analysis could be dealt more profoundly.

In her essay “The Semantic Content of Play[s] in Malaysia with Reference to Islam,”⁴² Rahmah Bujang comes close in understanding the meanings of the

⁴⁰ Fatimah Ali, “Drama “*Jangan Bunuh Rama-rama* karya Dato’ Noordin Hassan: Satu Bacaan Hermeneutika Kerohanian” in *Teater Fitrah dan Esei Pilihan Noordin Hassan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2002), 89.

⁴¹ Fatimah Ali, “Pemikiran asl-Faruqi dan Nasr dalam Drama *Jangan Bunuh Rama-rama* karya Noordin Hassan,” in *Noordin Hassan dalam Esei dan Kritikan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2007), 134-190.

⁴² Rahmah Bujang, “Kandungan Semantic Keislaman dalam Drama Malaysia,” in *Teater Fitrah dan Esei Pilihan Noordin Hassa*, 3-19. Author’s translation.