

# FROM BERTOLT BRECHT TO NANO RIANTIARNO

## Corruption in *The Threepenny Opera* and *Opera Ikan Asin*

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### Abstract

This article examines corruption in two plays: Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* (*Die Dreigroschenoper*) and Nano Riantiarno's *Opera Ikan Asin* (*The Salted-Fish Opera*). Discussed herein are collusion and bribery and how depictions of these problems in *The Threepenny Opera* were received by Riantiarno in *Opera Ikan Asin*. Using this perspective, Riantiarno's horizon of expectation as he read about corruption in *The Threepenny Opera* and actualized it in *Opera Ikan Asin* can be revealed. This study shows the transformations implemented in *Opera Ikan Asin*, finding that collusion is more explicit and transparent in *Opera Ikan Asin* than in *The Threepenny Opera*. Meanwhile, the practice of bribery is expanded from one perpetrator in *The Threepenny Opera* to four perpetrators in *Opera Ikan Asin*. The means used for bribery are also developed; Riantiarno's horizon of expectation played a major role in the development of his own play. Brecht wrote his play as a critique of the capitalism of Germany's Weimar Republic while Riantiarno provided it with new context as a criticism of the New Order in Indonesia. The rampant and blatant practice of corruption during the New Order became the reason for corruption being made more explicit and transparent in *Opera Ikan Asin*. Even though the types of corruption are the same, there is a novelty that is more highlighted by Riantiarno's drama. In presenting this drama as a whole, Riantiarno used Brecht's Epic Theater style, which has been combined with traditional theater style. This novelty shows that Riantiarno's *Opera Ikan Asin* stands on its own despite its affinities to Brecht's play.

### Keywords

Bribery, collusion, horizon of expectation, reception

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## INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a phenomenon destructive to national life. The detriment caused by corruption and its various perpetrators (both state and non-state) can result in significant financial losses and other problems for the nation. Another destructive phenomenon in social life is collusion. In law, the term collusion refers to the creation of alliances or groups meant to promote negative purposes. When perpetrators give money (i.e., bribes) to state officials, collusion can result in corruption and the abuse of power. Collusion can ultimately be more dangerous than corruption, as it involves state officials in their policymaking capacity.

The deviant social phenomenon known as corruption is a social reality, one that endangers society and the State (Danil 1). Corruption occurs in countries with diverse political systems, as well as in countries with varying levels of economic development. For example, in Indonesia, cases of corruption have become more rampant as awareness of democracy has increased (Tomsa 196–219). The deleterious effects of corruption are significant, and thus efforts have been undertaken to eradicate it. Corruption eradication efforts include cultural ones that have utilized literature.

In literature, corruption is and has been widely discussed and criticized. One writer who discussed corruption in his work is Bertolt Brecht, who dealt with the theme in *The Threepenny Opera (Die Dreigroschenoper)*. This German play was written in 1928. It centers on the conflict between two of its main characters, namely Macheath and Jonathan Peachum. Macheath is a bandit king, known widely for his crimes, while Jonathan Peachum is a businessman who earns money by exploiting beggars. The drama exposes the collusion between the police chief Tiger Brown and Macheath—the bandit chief of Soho, London, England. The end of the play is steeped in irony; despite having been shown to have perpetrated various crimes, Macheath receives amnesty from and is freed by Queen Victoria, and even given a noble title and pension. By forefronting the perpetrators of collusion and bribery, as well as the exploitation of humanity, this play critiques the government of Germany's Weimar Republic, particularly the capitalism that began to spread through Germany following World War I. This drama is Brecht's most monumental work, as through it runs his concept of "Epic Theater," for which he became famous throughout Germany and Europe.

Brecht was a German dramatist who rose to fame in the early 20th century. His strength is readily apparent in his discussion of his dramatic theory, which became known as the "Theory of Epic Theater" (*Theorie des epischen Theater*). This concept, which he popularized in 1926, is anti-Aristotelian. According to Aristotle, a drama needs to involve the audiences to drift away in the stream of its

story, and consequently become uncritical. This Artistotelian view is rejected by Brecht. His theory of Epic Theater offers not only a modern dramaturgy but also a comprehensive theory of performance (*Aufführungstheorie*) (Kesting 64). Eric Bentley, a historian of German drama, identifies Brecht as using a narrative realism (*erzählender Realismus*) aesthetic, one that combines naturalism and symbolism and positions the stage as nothing more than a stage (Hinck 11).

In his *Short Organum for the Theater* (*Kleinen Organon für das Theater*), which is summarized in *Writing on the Theater* (*Schriften zum Theater*), Brecht wrote that inconsistency in depictions of human interactions can erode the joy of theater, as these depictions differ from the realities in front of us (135). For Brecht, it is insufficient for theatergoers to seek theatrical discourses and expose theatrical realities. Brecht's Epic Theater seeks to arouse viewers' curiosity and desire for transformation (Brecht 135). As such, Brecht's Epic Theater is opposed to Stanislavskian theater, which seeks to present reality as accurately as possible and requires actors to totally embrace their roles.

As a Marxist, Brecht sought to transform the theater into a tool of enlightenment (*Instrument der Aufklärung*). As such, he desired to shatter viewers' illusions and enable them to critically examine reality through what he termed alienation (*Verfremdungseffekt*). Brecht presented his concept of alienation through his book *The Epic Theater* (*Das epische Theater*). He depicted Epic Theater as being when the stage begins to speak, when the fourth wall and narrator vanish. Actors distance themselves from the characters they play, and as such, critique is possible. It is not possible for audiences to simply remain passive and uncritical. All performances lead to alienation processes (*Entfremdungsprozess*) through which messages become understood; that which is easily understood is usually ignored (Brecht 65). Brecht discusses the use of *Verfremdungseffekt* in his *A New Technique for the Performance Arts* (*Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst*) to ensure that audiences become critical. According to Brecht, the stage and performance space must be clean and clear, without any hypnotic elements. Meanwhile, to produce alienation, actors must show what they intend to show through gesture of pointing (*Gestus des Zeigens*), ensuring that things flow smoothly to audiences (Brecht 106).

Brecht's theory of Epic Theater and his works became known not only in Germany, but throughout Europe and around the globe—including Indonesia. Nano Riantiarno, the leader and main writer for Teater Koma—the most popular modern theatre group in Indonesia—was one of Brecht's readers. Riantiarno became interested in Brecht's themes as he saw himself as sharing a similar vision, including on social issues such as corruption. Riantiarno was also interested in Brecht's theatrical style, which in turn influenced the dramas he wrote and directed.

Riantiarno's concern for corruption is expressed in *Opera Ikan Asin*, which emerged during the New Order era. Although *Opera Ikan Asin* has many similarities with *The Threepenny Opera*, Riantiarno tries to actualize the problems of corruption in Indonesia in a different way. In Riantiarno's drama, for instance, there are more characters engaging in corruption and bribes are not limited to money but may also include women. The innovations made by Riantiarno owe to his distinctive horizon of expectation regarding corruption.

The Epic Theater style developed by Riantiarno in his *Opera Ikan Asin* also follows Brecht's theatrical style. However, he has a distinctive style that makes it different from Brecht's. Despite the similarities, Riantiarno still tries to maintain the traditional characteristics of his dramas. The traditional elements contained in *Opera Ikan Asin* show that Riantiarno's drama has more variety compared to *The Threepenny Opera*. Riantiarno finds the identity and the typicality of his drama. As an Indonesian, he gives it opportunity to receive tradition, so that it does not only have the Epic Theater style, but also a traditional one. We can see it, for example, in the replacement of the long *Nebentext* (adjacent text; as opposed to *Haupttext* or main text) by the narrator which is analogous to *Dalang* (the puppeteer) in *Wayang* (a traditional puppet show). Thus, Riantiarno enriched *The Threepenny Opera* and made it more colorful.

This article will borrow Hans Robert Jauss's concept of horizon of expectation (*Horizonerwartung*). Jauss, a German-born scholar, is a major figure in aesthetic reception theory. In his book *Literary History as a Provocation of Literary Studies (Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft)*, Jauss explored how literary paradigm shifts can occur. He referred to Hans-Georg Gadamer's understanding of aesthetic reception as seeking to escape from immanent interpretation. Jauss emphasized that the historical life of a literary work is meaningless without active reader participation (*Das geschichtliche Leben des literarischen Werks ist ohne den aktiven Anteil seines Adressaten nicht denkbar*) (169). Jauss's theory of aesthetic reception has been used here because its basic concepts are capable of explaining how developments in reader-text dialectics enable the aesthetic development and recontextualization of literary works. Owing to readers' varying horizons of expectation, different receptions offer different aesthetic potentials. Readers are informed by their horizons of expectation based on their actual experiences and on the *Vorwissen* in their literary experiences (Jauss 174). In other words, Jauss's theory can be used to see how Riantiarno actualizes *The Threepenny Opera* in his *Opera Ikan Asin*, especially in the case of corruptions.

It is necessary to discuss corruption using a reception perspective to understand how corruption in other times and places can influence writers' horizons of expectation and expose contemporary corruption. Temporal and spatial

distance are no obstacles to writers in actualizing their works. In this case, the corruption of Germany's Weimar Republic in Germany developed into criticism of corruption under Indonesia's New Order. A cultural approach that uses a reception perspective to understand corruption and criticism is expected to benefit readers and audiences, helping them understand how corruption changes over time and shapes their mentalities.

A previous discussion about Indonesian corruption and the New Order Era can be seen in Rajeswary Ampalavanar Brown's article "Indonesian Corporations, Cronyism, and Corruption." Brown describes the relationship between corruption and cronyism in Indonesia during the New Order era, and the relationships between various political, bureaucratic, and economic institutions in the country at that time.

Another article that discusses Teater Koma, Riantiarno, and the New Order is Michael Bodden's "Teater Koma's Suksesi and Indonesia's New Order." Bodden describes the condition of the country after the announcement of the era of openness by President Soeharto in August 1990. In this era of openness, the journey of *Sukses* (Succession), a drama staged by Teater Koma, which was planned to perform for 14 days, was eventually stopped by the police on the 7th day. This phenomenon occurred in the New Order era in 1990, when freedom of expression and freedom of the press were silenced.

Another discussion on *Opera Ikan Asin* can be found in Dhanita Putri Sarahtika's article entitled "Tracing Brecht's Artistic Visions in Teater Koma's *Opera Ikan Asin*" that talks about the performance of *Opera Ikan Asin* by Teater Koma and Brecht's epic theory traits in the drama. By examining the playwright's horizon of expectation and Riantiarno's recontextualization of the work, it contributes toward an understanding of how Riantiarno developed *The Threepenny Opera's* theme of corruption.

## **CORRUPTION IN THE TWO DRAMAS**

In both *The Threepenny Opera* and *Opera Ikan Asin*, corruption is presented as involving collusion and bribery.

### **1. Collusion: From *The Threepenny Opera* to *Opera Ikan Asin***

According to the *Greater Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI)*, collusion may be defined as the creation of an illegitimate alliance for improper

or devious purposes (Tim 2002). Etymologically speaking, collusion comes from the Latin word *collusio*, which means to ‘create a union or alliance for nefarious purposes.’ It involves at least two parties, an agreement, and often the exchange of money or facilities to further a shared purpose. Collusion can be considered a form of corruption because it generally involves individuals in positions of authority and power who are working together for illegal or deceptive purposes (Rahardjo 26–27).

In *The Threepenny Opera*, collusion occurs between the characters Macheath and Tiger Brown. Macheath is renowned for his various criminal activities while Tiger Brown is the Chief of Police for London and the pillar of the Old Bailey, the city’s central police station. Collusion emerges between them because of a childhood friendship which had been further cultivated while they were soldiers in India. These two men remain friendly even after entering different—and even diametrically opposed—professions (Brecht 30).

The crimes perpetrated by Macheath are presented early in the drama, where the bandit king—better known as Mackie—is likened to a shark. His multitude of crimes include murder, theft, and even rape and arson (Brecht 7–8). Subsequent scenes further depict the crimes of Macheath, including his murder of two shopkeepers, his more than thirty thefts, his twenty-three robberies, his arsons, attempted murders, forgeries, and even his seduction of two underage sisters (Brecht 46). However, even with all of these known crimes, Macheath remains above the law, receiving no punishment.

In *Opera Ikan Asin*, collusion occurs between the bandit king Mekhit and the colonial police commissioner Kartamarma. These characters reflect characters in *The Threepenny Opera*; Mekhit, the Bandit King, serves the same role as the famously cruel bandit Macheath while Kartamarma serves the same role as Tiger Brown, being a police chief (or commissioner) who should offer protection from criminals but ultimately works with them instead. Several scenes in *Opera Ikan Asin* show the close relationship between Mekhit and Kartamarma: when Mekhit marries Poli, when Picum learns of Poli and Mekhit’s marriage, and when Mekhit is facing the gallows. Meanwhile, the close relationship between Macheath and Brown is shown when Brown personally came to Macheath’s marriage with Polly, when Brown was arrested and went to jail, and when Macheath was about to be hanged. Macheath and Brown’s close relationship in *The Threepenny Opera* is mirrored in *Opera Ikan Asin* with similar scenes involving Mekhit and Kartamarma. Only the characters’ names are changed, having been adapted by Riantiarno to the colonial Dutch East Indies setting.

The collusion in these two dramas is perpetrated, respectively, by Macheath and Brown in *The Threepenny Opera* and by Mekhit and Kartamarma in *Opera Ikan*

*Asin*. The collusion between the Bandit King and Chief of Police is emphasized in both plays. Such collaboration is improper, intended to further nefarious purposes. The mutual dependency between these characters, which Macheath terms “real friendship,” is truly nothing but collusion (Brecht 32). Macheath always gives Brown a share of his criminal profits while Brown always warns Macheath when a police raid is planned. As such, the crimes of Macheath are never proven, enabling the Bandit King to act freely without any fear of reprisal. A similar situation is found in *Opera Ikan Asin*. After every crime he commits, Mekhit divides the proceeds in two, with one half being reserved for him and the other half being allotted for Kartamarma. In return, Kartamarma warns Mekhit whenever the police are planning a raid (Riantiarno 32).

MEKHIT. “.....Setiap hasil operasi selalu kami bagi berdua. Setengah untuk kita dan setengahnya untuk dia. Begitu juga jika ada penggerebekan, dia selalu memberi tahu sebelumnya.

MEKHIT. ....Every operation result we got, we shared two. A half for us and a half for him. And if there would be a raid, he would tell us before. (Riantiarno 32; translation by Hari T. Santoso)<sup>4</sup>

Due to this collusion, Mekhit’s crimes cannot be proven as Kartamarma ensures that his involvement remains hidden.

As a result of the actions of police officers such as Brown and Kartamarma, crime is rampant in the plays. Both Macheath and Mekhit become increasingly daring in their crimes as they have no fear of reprisal. The police, who are tasked with protecting society from criminals, in reality offer their protection only to these same criminals. As such, the local residents cannot live in peace, and instead, they become fearful of the Bandit King and his syndicate. It is ironic that the persons tasked with providing security and protection to civilians are in fact only interested in protecting the criminals who threaten society. This irony is what enrages Peachum (or, in *Opera Ikan Asin*, Picum), driving him to enact his own schemes to ensure the arrest of the Bandit King.

The depictions of collusion in *Opera Ikan Asin* indicate that Riantiarno sought to expand upon the aesthetic potential present within *The Threepenny Opera* and to actualize it through characters that were adapted to Batavia and the colonial Dutch East Indies. However, several elements of collusion are emphasized more strongly in *Opera Ikan Asin*. Riantiarno puts greater emphasis on the close relationship between Mekhit and Kartamarma than Brecht gives to the relationship between Macheath and Brown. In several *Nebentexts*, Riantiarno highlights the closeness and intimacy of Mekhit and Kartamarma by depicting the two as hugging just like



at the former's wedding to Poli. The close friendship between the two is thus made explicit by Riantiarno. This familiarity is also apparent in Kartamarma's support for Mekhit's crimes. Kartamarma is even saddened by Mekhit's arrest and detainment, crying as he cannot bear to see Mekhit suffer. However, when another police officer enters, Kartamarma quickly changes his attitude (Riantiarno 70).

In *The Threepenny Opera*, Brown acts formally, even stiffly. He still appears to maintain the image of a London police officer, and does not respond directly to Macheath's stories about their close friendship. Brown only responds when Macheath speaks of his in-law and his fear that Peachum will expose his crimes. When Macheath asks about his criminal record with Scotland Yard, Brown answers that he has ensured that none of Macheath's crimes are recorded. It is clear that Brown has worked hard to protect Macheath while still ensuring that their relationship remains unknown (Brecht 33). Brown does behave somewhat differently after Macheath is arrested. He expresses sadness as he has done his best to ensure Macheath is not arrested. Nonetheless, he attempts to maintain his dignity as a police officer and to present himself to his men as an ideal member of law enforcement.

From the depictions of the collusion between the bandit kings and the police in *The Threepenny Opera* and *Opera Ikan Asin*, it is apparent that the practice of corruption (in the form of collusion) is more prominent in *Opera Ikan Asin*. Although collusion is present in both plays, in *Opera Ikan Asin* it is shown explicitly and transparently through specific words as well as activities such as hugging. Unlike in *The Threepenny Opera*, where the police attempt to maintain a simulacrum of professionalism, the close friendships between police officers and criminals are not hidden in *Opera Ikan Asin*.

## 2. Bribery: From *The Threepenny Opera* to *Opera Ikan Asin*

Bribery is defined as the giving of money or gifts to officials with the intent of influencing them for criminal or improper purposes (Hamzah 32). Various forms of bribery are found in society, including the gifting of money, goods, or services. Such bribery is intended to influence the decisions made by the recipient. Bribery may be considered a basic form of corruption as it can lead to other crimes (i.e., being criminogenic) and potentially prove detrimental to others' interests (i.e., being victimogenic). As such, bribery may be considered a crime *extraordinaire* (Eleanora 20).

Bribery is one of the crimes criticized by Brecht throughout *The Threepenny Opera*. Through the character Macheath, Brecht attempts to present his criticism using sarcasm and insinuation. Macheath is known as the Bandit King of Soho, and in that capacity, he frequently bribes others to ensure his own freedom or to receive lighter shackles (thereby easing his escape). Whether or not bribery is possible is determined by the recipient—in this case, the police or prison guards. Bribery could not occur if Officer Brown and Officer Smith were unwilling to accept Macheath's bribes.

In *Opera Ikan Asin*, bribery is also practiced; indeed, it is committed by several characters. Bribery is perpetrated by the main character, the Bandit King, Mekhit. Mekhit pays bribes three times over the course of the play: to his friend Commissioner Kartamarma, to the prison guard when he is first arrested, and to the prison guard after he is arrested the second time. Bribes are also paid by the characters Poli, Panjul, and Leni. In general, the bribes paid by Macheath in *The Threepenny Opera* and by Mekhit in *Opera Ikan Asin* have the same purpose: to ensure the ability to freely commit crime.

In *Opera Ikan Asin*, Riantiarno develops *The Threepenny Opera* by depicting characters other than the Bandit King as paying bribes; these characters are Poli, Panjul, and Leni. That Poli has bribed a police officer is indicated in the *Nebentext* as follows:

POLI. Lima menit? Ini kan perpisahan terakhir? Masa Cuma lima menit? (MENYUAP.  
POLISI-2 JADI RAMAH)

POLI. Five minutes? This is our last goodbye and only five minutes!?  
(OFFERS BRIBE; POLICE-2 BECOMES FRIENDLY). (Riantiarno 113; translation by  
Hari T. Santoso)

Panjul likewise bribes the police so that he could be allowed to enter the prison and visit Mekhit (Riantiarno 109). However, the form of bribe—cash or otherwise—is not clear in this case. A different form of bribe is offered by the prostitute, Leni, who travels to the prison with her fellow prostitutes to visit Mekhit. Leni does not bribe the guards with money but rather with her body; she exposes her breasts to them as follows:

BETI. Untung ada Leni.  
EMI. Kalau tidak dia perlihatkan teteknya kepada para penjaga itu, mana bisa kami  
masuk?

BETI. Lucky for us, Leni is here.

EMI. If she did not show her boobs to the guards, how could we get in?

(Riantiarno 117; translation by Hari T. Santoso)

Leni's bribery shows that the guards are easily influenced by others and their interests.

Bribery, thus, is clearly perpetrated in the *Opera Ikan Asin*. This play reveals how easily and readily people may offer or accept bribes. Mekhit in *Opera Ikan Asin* successfully bribes the Chief of Police/Police Commissioner and the prison guards. Riantiarno even expands the aesthetic potential of bribery present in *The Threepenny Opera* in several ways. The first expansion is the amount paid. In the third scene, it is mentioned that Mekhit gives Kartamarma half of his ill-gotten proceeds. Meanwhile, in *The Threepenny Opera*, it is only said that Macheath gives some of his money to Officer Brown, without any amount being specified (Brecht 28). As such, the size of the bribe is more explicit in *Opera Ikan Asin* (half of the total amount) than in *The Threepenny Opera* ("some" money is paid).

In *Opera Ikan Asin*, bribery is also developed through the prison guards' responses upon receiving their bribes. The guard Smith in *The Threepenny Opera* appears embarrassed to accept Macheath's bribe, while in *Opera Ikan Asin*, the guard—identified only as Polisi-2 (Police-2)—appears more aggressive when Mekhit signals that he will pay to ensure his freedom and to avoid execution. In *The Threepenny Opera*, Smith only inquires about the money once. In *Opera Ikan Asin*, Polisi-2 continuously asks Mekhit about the money that Mekhit has implicitly offered. Without wasting time, Polisi-2 says that he will arrange Mekhit's escape so long as the money is ready. The character also gives Mekhit's friends and colleagues (Poli and Leni) the opportunity to offer bribes, accepting said money without any sense of shame, as if bribery is normal and acceptable (Riantiarno 116).

From the above discussion, it is clear that bribery is a simple matter in *Opera Ikan Asin*—particularly in prison. Opportunities to give (or take) bribes are common. In *Opera Ikan Asin*, the Bandit King (Mekhit) gives bribes to ensure that he can commit crimes freely without being sent to prison, so that he can be comfortable when imprisoned, and so that he can avoid the death penalty. The character Poli gives the prison guards a bribe to seek more time with her husband. Another form of bribery is practiced by Leni, who is otherwise unable to enter the prison and meet Mekhit. However, in both plays, bribery is dangerous; as a result of rampant bribery, characters are convinced toward making decisions that are actually detrimental to their interests. The Chief of Police/Police Commissioner and the prison guards, for example, find themselves in such situations. Mekhit

gives Kartamarma half of his ill gotten proceeds whereas Leni shows her breasts to the guards so that she and her friends could gain entry and visit Mekhit in prison.

A different form of bribery is introduced by Riantiarno in his *Opera Ikan Asin*. Whereas only cash and checks are considered bribes in *The Threepenny Opera*, *Opera Ikan Asin* demonstrates that women's bodies can be used as a bribe. Although she and her fellows are initially refused entry, after Leni's bribe, the women are welcomed into the institution. This opportunity is presented to them only after Leni shows her breasts to the guards. As such, bribery need not necessarily involve money. It can take other forms; in this case, the exposure of a normally concealed body part, Leni's breasts (Riantiarno 117).

From this discussion of corruption—i.e., collusion and bribery—in the two dramas, it is clear that the collusion perpetrated by Macheath in *The Threepenny Opera* and by Mekhit in *Opera Ikan Asin* ultimately leads to Brown and Kartamarma's willingness to accept bribes. This collusion, which results in bribery, is intended to ensure that the Bandit King can freely commit crimes, without fear of reprisal. As such, both dramas contain clear and strong themes of corruption. Furthermore, in *Opera Ikan Asin*, Riantiarno clearly expands upon the theme of corruption. The collusion presented in *Opera Ikan Asin* is more explicit and transparent than that contained in *The Threepenny Opera*. Meanwhile, in its depiction of bribery, *Opera Ikan Asin* depicts larger bribes. It also portrays more characters as giving bribes, increasing the number from one in *The Threepenny Opera* to four in *Opera Ikan Asin*. The forms of bribery used are also expanded.

This expansion of the corruption (bribery and collusion) in *Opera Ikan Asin* represents a recontextualization of the subject by Riantiarno. In his work, Riantiarno gives corruption a new face. The development of corruption in *Opera Ikan Asin* shows Riantiarno's concern for the issue. Riantiarno, meanwhile, emphasized corruption as he sought to criticize the corruption that was occurring in New Order Indonesia. To ascertain how *Opera Ikan Asin* recontextualized corruption, the following section will focus on the theme within Riantiarno's horizon of expectation. By doing so, it will show how *Opera Ikan Asin* became a more explicit critique of corruption than Brecht's work.

#### **CORRUPTION WITHIN RIANTIARNO'S HORIZON OF EXPECTATION**

According to Jauss, the horizon of expectation is the horizon possessed by the reader when first reading a new text. It is shaped by the reader's actual experiences, as well as their *vorwissen* or literary experience (Jauss 174). Corruption may be

understood as a pre-experience or *vorwissen* that existed within Riantiarno's mind when he first read or watched *The Threepenny Opera*. In this play, corruption is found in two forms: bribery and collusion. These forms of corruption are dominant in Brecht's work. The acts of bribery perpetrated by a criminal to enable him to continue his criminal deeds without any legal repercussions, as well as to attain his freedom once he has been imprisoned, are closely linked to his collusion with the police (in this case, the police chief). As such, the two forms of corruption in Brecht's play are connected; as collusion exists between the criminal and the police, bribery is possible. Conversely, to ensure he maintains strong ties with the police, the criminal (in this case Macheath) commits bribery, giving part of the proceeds of his crimes to Tiger Brown. Because of this money, Macheath can freely commit crime without fear of arrest. Thus, the corruption—bribery and collusion—committed in Victorian London becomes an important part of Brecht's drama.

In discussing corruption, it is important to first define corruption and understand what acts it may involve. According to M. Dawam Rahardjo, the word corruption refers to a fraud or deviation, an illegal act that disrupts the existing order (19). Similarly, Elwi Danil writes that the social phenomenon known as corruption refers to deviant social behavior that endangers the State and society (1).

Syed Hussein Alatas writes that corruption entails various acts, including bribery, extortion, and nepotism. Corruption may include offering gifts and other incentives to influence government officials, or (conversely) demanding gifts or other incentives before public services are provided. Office holders who embezzle funds are also perpetrators of corruption. Finally, nepotism may be understood as the granting of offices to one's family, friends, or political allies without considering their experience, expertise, abilities, or potential to improve the public welfare (10).

According to *KBBI*, collusion may be defined as the creation of an illegitimate alliance for improper or devious purposes (Tim 582). The word collusion is derived from the Latin word *collusio*, which refers to an agreement or alliance for nefarious deeds. In law, the word collusion refers to the creation of agreements, alliances, or unions for illegal purposes. Collusion, thus, involves at least two parties and an agreement between them; it is also frequently influenced by the provision of money and other facilities to ease the process. Collusion may be considered a form of corruption as it usually involves officeholders and other persons in power working together for nefarious purposes (Rahardjo 26–27). Ultimately, collusion can lead to corruption as it may result in the giving of funds to State officials (bribery) and the abuse of authority by said individuals. Collusion can be dangerous, as it can involve state officials in a policymaking capacity.

From these definitions of corruption, we can recognize that the act consists of several elements: deviancy, illegality, disruption of the established order, and finally the endangerment of society and the State. Furthermore, corruption may involve the giving of money and other facilities to influence decisions and services, or the demanding of money/other facilities before decisions are made or services are rendered. Also dangerous is collusion as it can influence the decisions made by State officials.

Through *Opera Ikan Asin*, Riantiarno sought to contribute to the eradication of corruption—particularly collusion and bribery—in Indonesia. According to the playwright, he decided that the cultural approach (i.e., a play) would be more effective in conveying his message than any other approach (Riantiarno, Personal interview). For his purposes, and based on his observation, Riantiarno chose *The Threepenny Opera*, which he considered to contain universal values. Brecht's message was similar to his own. The theme of corruption—which remained actual in contemporary society—reinforced Riantiarno's decision to actualize it in his *Opera Ikan Asin*. He chose the title *Opera Ikan Asin* as a symbol of the poor and of poverty; the phrase "ikan asin" is literally "salted fish" and in Indonesia, it is a food identified with the poor as it is easy to acquire and readily affordable. In this play, poverty is caused by rampant crime, including collusion between the police and the criminals that the former are supposed to arrest.

However, the corruption emphasized by Riantiarno in *Opera Ikan Asin* differed from the corruption of *The Threepenny Opera*. Brecht had taken corruption as one of his themes while he was criticizing the capitalism of Germany's Weimar Republic. In *The Threepenny Opera*, he had thus highlighted how characters such as Macheath, Peachum, and Mrs. Peachum prioritized capital and material interests in their lives. Brecht sought to show how these characters were controlled by materialism. In *Opera Ikan Asin*, corruption is the main theme. Through the play, he criticizes the corruption of the New Order government even though the play is set in Batavia during the Dutch colonial period. The corruption that occurs during the New Order era, which was highlighted by Riantiarno, is what differentiates *Opera Ikan Asin* from *The Threepenny Opera*. Riantiarno tries to describe how corruption in the New Order era occurs because the system permitted collusion and bribery. If such conditions are allowed to continue, it would destroy the nation's economy.

In Indonesian history, the New Order refers to the Soeharto government. According to *KBBI*, the New Order represented a new system of governance in Indonesia, and lasted from March 11, 1966, to May 20, 1998 (Tim 802). This regime replaced the Old Order government, under President Soekarno. During the New Order, state finances were widely abused and exploited by corrupt officials. It has been said that not a single government agency was free of corruption, and that

corruption was most severe at the highest levels of power. Corruption was rampant at all levels of Indonesia's bureaucracies, from the village level through the national level. Corruption in Indonesia—particularly in New Order Indonesia—has been described as structural as it occurred as a direct result of policies that drove people to commit it. Incentive systems in the public sector, for example, resulted in project budgets becoming inflated so that greater incentives could be granted (Pradiptyo xlviii).

In New Order Indonesia, corruption was massive and systematic, affecting all walks of life. It occurred in society, politics, finance, and even in the legal system. Corruption was particularly dangerous when it involved law enforcement officials as there was no way to impartially uphold the law. It was particularly common, meanwhile, among state officials, and as such eradication efforts were difficult; it was further exacerbated by the involvement of President Soeharto's family. Corruption was practiced openly and even considered normal and acceptable by the common people. Collusion and bribery (both elements of corruption) were practiced by all elements of society, upper and lower class alike. Corruption, collusion, and nepotism—widely known through the initials KKN—plagued Indonesia's development and had serious effects on its society. Corruption resulted in moral degradation and, often, economic difficulties (Rahardjo 30–31). Ultimately, in May 1998, students protested against the rampant corruption and the ailing economy. This incident led Soeharto to resign. However, his regime's tradition of corruption has endured (Margana 137).

From this elucidation of corruption in the New Order era, the connection between capitalism and corruption is clear. In New Order Indonesia, capitalism referred almost implicitly to close relations between entrepreneurs and government officials, which laid a foundation for corruption (either collusion or bribery). As a result, Baswir identifies capitalism in Indonesia as crony capitalism, a dangerous system prone to collusion and bribery (30).

Through *Opera Ikan Asin*, Riantiarno sought to emphasize the corrupt acts of state officials, in this case the Indonesian police under the New Order government. The corruption of the government was no secret and government agents—including the police—commonly perpetrated corruption. Collusion occurred between the police and criminals, enabling certain criminals to escape punishment. Those criminals who were financially capable of doing so would pay bribes to the police, and as such receive protection as they committed their crimes. Bribery also led the police to undertake certain actions (or avoid taking certain actions) in an official capacity, even when these actions (or this lack of action) meant neglecting their duties. During the New Order, the police also frequently colluded with the wealthy entrepreneurs who were the cronies of the ruling regime; this increased

the amount of collusion and bribery that occurred throughout the country. According to Brown, the Indonesian military—which, at the time, included the Indonesian police—played an important role in the creation of a culture of bribery and in protecting the cronies (and business interests) of those in power (953–992). Corruption was widespread and massive, having an increasingly detrimental effect on the Indonesian society and economy as it grew.

Even though in the drama the collusion took place between the police and officials, Riantiarno actually intended to emphasize the collusion problem that occurred among the political elites. During the New Order era, as stated by Baswir, the power structure was conducted in such a way that almost all state institutions did not dare to disagree with the authorities. Such a structure caused *crony capitalism* to develop rapidly. This trend is directed at the business world so that collusion is growing (31-32). The phenomenon caught Riantirno's attention so that the collusion in *Opera Ikan Asin* was depicted more openly.

The close relationship between officials and businessmen opens the door for collusion, which is then followed by bribery. Collusion can occur because there are opportunities given by state officials to entrepreneurs to exert influence over them. This exercise of power affects their willingness to make several policies to the advantage of these entrepreneurs. Thus, the action taken by the official is because the official has received a bribe from the businessman.

The temptation to engage in collusion arises when the government gets the opportunity to cooperate with the private sector. This temptation will take shape if both parties have the desire to reap large profits from their cooperation. On one hand, private entrepreneurs certainly have an interest, namely legal approvals from the government on projects they consider would benefit them. On the other hand, the government benefits from capitalizing on the entrepreneurs' need for approval. In fact, the granting of approval is intended so that the government can control the existence of companies operating within the State. When the government chooses to benefit rather than carry out its mandated functions, collusion occurs.

The temptation to mutually take advantage both sides causes collusion to occur more frequently, which results in losses for the State and also leads to economic decline. Policy-making by the government on the basis of collusion and bribery will only benefit certain groups, which then affects the greater people's economy. Finally, this condition causes inequality in the economic sector so that, in the end, collusion and bribery correlate with the suffering of the people.

From an economic perspective, corruption can indirectly cause poverty and social injustice. Corruption affects economic growth as it creates uncertainty



among investors and can even reduce the value of investments. Corruption can also limit the entrepreneurial potential of the common people, thus injuring public welfare. Collusion between law enforcement and criminals, meanwhile, enables criminals to act without fear of repercussion, thus creating social anxiety. Such a situation, in turn, limits the ability of economic actors to conduct their business activities. As a result, workers receive lower salaries and the public welfare is injured. This exacerbates the economic gap between the rich and the poor, driving increased crime rates. Prostitution, theft, and begging have all been latent effects of Indonesia's pervasive corruption.

From this discussion, it can be seen that corruption and collusion rates have been influenced by Indonesia's bureaucracy—in other words, the government. The power and pervasiveness of Indonesia's bureaucracy, in turn, contributed to the rise of corruption in the country. In Riantiarno's *Opera Ikan Asin*, the police—despite having the duty of enforcing the law and maintaining public order—are easily bribed, and as such, willing to compromise their duties by (among other things) protecting criminals instead of citizens. Under the New Order regime, the police offered protection to political leaders' cronies and their economic activities; this contributed to the spread of corruption around the country.

Seeing the collusion between Macheath and Brown—which results in the Bandit King offering bribes to Officer Brown, Officer Smith, and the Constable—in *The Threepenny Opera*, Riantiarno considered the reality of collusion and bribery in Indonesia. He saw similarities between Macheath's actions (i.e., his collusion with the Chief of Police, to their mutual benefit) and contemporary Indonesian society. In *The Threepenny Opera*, collusion is maintained to ensure that the Bandit King can commit crimes without fear of reprisal, thus posing a great danger to London society. Such a situation was also being experienced by Indonesia, where law enforcement was willing to accept bribes from criminals and other persons with nefarious intentions; indeed, such collusion was not a new phenomenon, but rather practiced widely and openly. As such, it posed a grave threat to Indonesia's security and made proper governance increasingly difficult. Bribing a prison guard to ensure one's freedom, as done by Macheath in *The Threepenny Opera*, was common. Many Indonesians would "prove" their innocence by paying not only the guards, but also the judges and prosecutors, and thereafter be released from prison. Bribes would not only be paid by convicts, but also by wealthy entrepreneurs seeking access to the highly profitable government projects. The perpetrators, forms, and reasons for bribery in Indonesia were thus more diverse than those depicted in *The Threepenny Opera*.

Recognizing the corruption in New Order Indonesia, Riantiarno made several additions while writing *Opera Ikan Asin*. In this play, he depicted collusion as

more explicit and transparent. The collusion between Mekhit and Kartamarma is practiced more openly, and both men show their close ties in public. Likewise, in *Opera Ikan Asin*, Riantiarno depicted more characters as giving bribes than in *The Threepenny Opera*; bribes are not only given by Mekhit, but also by Poli, Panjul, and Leni. The police in *Opera Ikan Asin* are likewise more open to bribery; Kartamarma readily accepts Mekhit's bribe, and the prison guards are likewise open to giving the Bandit King lighter shackles when he shows a willingness to pay. Similarly, the guards readily accept bribes from Poli and Panjul when the latter visit Mekhit in prison. Elsewhere, they happily accept another form of bribery, lusting for Leni's body when she exposes her breasts.

Furthermore, in *Opera Ikan Asin* more diverse forms of bribes are given; the bribes are not only monetary, but also involve the exploitation of characters' bodies. This scene clearly criticizes Indonesian officials' tendency to be easily swayed by beautiful women. The collusion between Mekhit and Kartamarma is also further developed. *Opera Ikan Asin* clearly shows how the characters divide the proceeds of Mekhit's crimes. Thus, Riantiarno highlights the theme of corruption.

In depicting the reality of corruption in Indonesia through *Opera Ikan Asin*, Riantiarno also draws on the alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*). As stated above, alienation is intended to awaken audiences by recontextualizing and alienating the depicted reality, reflecting a philosophy that the unusual is more easily remembered than the usual. In Brecht's play, the reality of capitalism is depicted using a form of alienation known as *Sprechen zum Publikum* (speaking to the public). For instance, in an early act, the character Peachum tells the audience about his business. His business is an unusual one as he is a purveyor of suffering. Peachum has attempted to repackage suffering as a commodity that can be sold for a profit. The character then confides in the audience, telling them that it is difficult to sell suffering while still remaining adored by one's community. Peachum's speech to the audience creates an alienation effect, one intended to make the audience begin thinking critically about the reality it is seeing. This is a defining trait of Brecht's style.

Efforts are also made to convey reality through a process of historization (*Historisierung*). Brecht understands historization as the process of depicting events and characters in a historical or temporal context (*Verfremden heist also Historisieren, heist Vorgänge und Personen als historisch also als vergänglich darstellen*) (997). He argues that similar situations may be faced by contemporary audiences and thus particular responses to these situations may be presented historically or temporally. In Brecht's dramaturgy, historization is intended to depict an event or incident on stage as though it formed part of lived history. Through historization, this event or incident can gain the attention of audiences as it involves people and actions from a particular place and time. In Brecht's play,

historization is realized by setting the play in Victorian England—even though the work is criticizing the growth of capitalism in Germany's Weimar Republic.

Unlike most realist works, which present reality on the stage as though it were real life, Brecht's oeuvre shows reality as alien, as unreal. Using the techniques of the alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) and historization (*Historisierung*), he ensures that audiences are aware that his stories are nothing but stories, and thus not reality as it is lived every day. By doing so, Brecht enables his audiences to become critical of reality. This holds true of *The Threepenny Opera* as well through which Brecht criticizes the capitalism of contemporary Germany.

Although Rintiarno used alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) and historization (*Historisierung*) in *Opera Ikan Asin* to depict corruption in the form of collusion and bribery, there is a novelty made by Riantiarno. For example, Leni's bribery of the prison guard by baring her breasts has an alienation effect, as it draws the attention of the audience. Meanwhile, historicization is manifested in the play being set in colonial Indonesia (the Dutch East Indies) despite being intended as criticism of New Order Indonesia's corruption. Seeing acts of corruption that occurred in the Dutch East Indies, the audience pays greater attention to the play, and as such, its anti-corruption messages are more readily received.

In Riantiarno's hands, Brecht's play is recontextualized and transformed into a stark depiction of pervasive corruption. *Opera Ikan Asin* provides a new context as it criticizes the rampant corruption in New Order Indonesia. Riantiarno presents corruption as being more explicit than in *The Threepenny Opera*, not only increasing the number of perpetrators, but also the variety of media used for bribery. No longer are bribes limited to cash and checks; they expand to include the female body (i.e., breasts).

Riantiarno's criticism of corruption, which is different from Brecht's drama, shows that *Opera Ikan Asin* is a distinctively Asian drama despite their similarities. Brecht's influence on Riantiarno in presenting the corruption theme was limited merely to the form of corruption. However, in the depth of the message conveyed by Riantiarno, there is a fundamental difference. The corruption that was conveyed by Riantiarno was not only in the form of collusion between a criminal and the police, but also bribery committed by criminals to the police.

In *Opera Ikan Asin*, Riantiarno wants collusion as well as bribery to not only happen between the police and criminals, but also to other characters. Collusion and bribery will easily be carried out by other figures who have their own interests, which certainly are for their own sake. The various interests possessed by political and economic elites cause them to do everything they can to secure these interests.

Meanwhile, for those who are invited to collude and are bribed, they end up taking policies that benefit those who had benefited them before, and ignore the interests of the people and the State. If this continues unabated, it will result in State losses and eventually the suffering of the people.

The disclosure of corruption, which is different in *The Threepenny Opera*, shows that *Opera Ikan Asin* is independent from it, although there are also similarities between them. The existence of Riantiarno as an Indonesian gave him the opportunity to raise the theme of corruption in *Opera Ikan Asin* with unique characteristics. The problem of corruption that has plagued the country was brought up in a clearer way. Riantiarno's closeness to traditional theater influenced his works, especially *Opera Ikan Asin*. The traditional theater pattern included in it shows that it is a theater that has a distinctive style. The existence of a storyteller as a substitute for the long *Nebentext* reminds us of the presence of the *Dalang* in traditional Indonesian theater. Riantiarno's interaction with traditional Indonesian theater since he was a teenager, even his prior trips to various regions in Indonesia to get to know various traditional arts, show Riantiarno's closeness to and familiarity with it. His contact with Western theater, especially with the Epic Theater of Brecht, did not make Riantiarno abandon that traditional theater, but instead he embraced it more by assimilating their elements into his drama.

Riantiarno tries to combine his knowledge of traditional Indonesian theater and Western theater to produce distinctive works. Traditional theater styles such as *Masres* and *Lenong* are combined with Western theater (Epic Theater) to enrich Riantiarno's drama performances (Mardjono 424). *Opera Ikan Asin* proves Riantiarno's closeness to traditional Indonesian theater. This is further strengthened by the opinion of theater critic Henry Gendut Janarto who said that, through the *Opera Ikan Asin*, Riantiarno was increasingly gaining recognition as a reliable performer by combining various elements in his drama into an interesting performance (143). This admission shows that with his *Opera Ikan Asin*, Riantiarno increasingly presents his identity as a skilled theater expert, who, although close to Western theater, does not forget traditional Indonesian theater in his works, especially in his *Opera Ikan Asin*.

## CONCLUSION

Corruption, in the form of collusion and bribery, is depicted in *The Threepenny Opera* and represents an aesthetic potential of that drama. Riantiarno develops and expands this aesthetic potential through *Opera Ikan Asin*. In *Opera Ikan Asin* corruption is the main theme. In both *The Threepenny Opera* and *Opera Ikan Asin*,

the practice of corruption consists of collusion and bribery. Collusion is practiced by Macheath and Brown—respectively the Bandit King of Soho and Chief of Police—and actualized by Mekhit and Kartamarma in colonial Batavia. Meanwhile, while bribery is committed by Macheath in *The Threepenny Opera*, in *Opera Ikan Asin* it is not only perpetrated by Mekhit but also by Poli, Panjul, and Leni.

Riantiarno's horizon of expectation in reading the practice of corruption in *The Threepenny Opera* resulted in him developing its potential in *Opera Ikan Asin*. In the latter work, collusion is practiced more explicitly and transparently. The collusion between Mekhit and Kartamarma is practiced unwaveringly in public. Meanwhile, in *The Threepenny Opera*, Brown attempts to present himself to the public as a serious police officer. Similarly, in *The Threepenny Opera*, the act of bribery is perpetrated only by Macheath, while in *Opera Ikan Asin* it is committed not only by Mekhit but also by Poli and Leni. Also expanded is the means of bribery; where bribery in *The Threepenny Opera* involves only the exchange of money, in *Opera Ikan Asin* it involves not only the exchange of money but also the display of the body.

Under the New Order government, corruption was practiced rampantly and transparently, such that some perceived it as being expected and normal. This situation was utilized by Riantiarno in his drama. As such, by actualizing *The Threepenny Opera* as *Opera Ikan Asin*, the playwright utilized a cultural, specifically literary, approach to protest and criticize the practice of corruption in Indonesia.

This article has discussed the depictions of corruption in *The Threepenny Opera* and *Opera Ikan Asin* using a reception perspective. This perspective has shown how Nano Riantiarno's horizon of expectation influenced his expansion and actualization of *The Threepenny Opera* through *Opera Ikan Asin*. Riantiarno's horizon of expectation, influenced by the rampant practice of corruption in Indonesia during the New Order government, led him to write *Opera Ikan Asin* with more blatant depictions of corruption. The realities of corruption presented by Riantiarno in *Opera Ikan Asin* show how *The Threepenny Opera* received a new context in the Indonesian playwright's hands. The corruption depicted by Brecht, which was intended as a critique of capitalism in Germany's Weimar Republic, found a new context as it was used to criticize the corruption of Indonesia's New Order. In other words, the corruption presented by Riantiarno in his *Opera Ikan Asin* has a new face. However, further exploration is necessary to understand corruption in *The Threepenny Opera* and in *Opera Ikan Asin* using other perspectives.

## Acknowledgments

This article is part of the author's dissertation presented to the Humanities Study Program, Gadjah Mada University. The author would like to thank Prof. Faruk and Dr. Lono Lastoro Simatupang for their supervision of this work.

## Notes

1. The translation of the passages from Riantiarno's opera was made by Hari T. Santoso for the author, specifically for this research.

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