



A Study of Power Relations Identification in the Drama Script *Panembahan Reso* by W.S. Rendra: An Analysis Based on Michel Foucault's Theory of Power

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ABSTRACT

Power relations in literary works are a key area of study for understanding how power operates through characters' actions and ways of thinking. However, an in-depth examination of power relations over the body and mind in W.S. Rendra's drama script *Panembahan Reso* from the perspective of Michel Foucault remains rare. This study aims to describe the representation of power relations over the body and mind in the play. The method employed is a qualitative descriptive approach using Michel Foucault's theory of power relations. Data collection techniques involved reading, note-taking, and analyzing dialogues that reveal power practices within the play. The findings indicate that power relations over the body are represented through surveillance, control, compliance, and the subjugation of individuals to maintain royal power. Furthermore, power relations over the mind are represented through influence, doctrine, ideological hegemony, the suppression of critical reasoning, and the manipulation of characters' perceptions to keep them submissive and loyal to the ruler. Thus, power in the drama script *Panembahan Reso* operates not only through physical force but also through the control of individuals' consciousness and ways of thinking.

Keyword: power relations, drama script, theory of power

Pembelajaran Identifikasi Relasi Kekuasaan dalam Naskah Drama *Panembahan Reso* Karya W.S. Rendra: Kajian Teori Kekuasaan Michel Foucault

ABSTRAK

Relasi kekuasaan dalam karya sastra menjadi salah satu kajian penting dalam memahami bagaimana kekuasaan bekerja melalui tindakan maupun cara berpikir tokoh. Namun, pemahaman mengenai relasi kekuasaan atas tubuh dan pikiran dalam naskah drama *Panembahan Reso* karya W.S. Rendra masih jarang dikaji secara mendalam menggunakan perspektif Michel Foucault. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan representasi relasi kekuasaan atas tubuh dan pikiran dalam naskah drama tersebut. Metode yang digunakan ialah metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan teori relasi kuasa Michel Foucault. Sumber data adalah naskah drama *Panembahan Reso* karya W.S. Rendra. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui kegiatan membaca, mencatat, dan menganalisis dialog-dialog yang menunjukkan praktik kekuasaan dalam naskah drama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa relasi kekuasaan atas tubuh direpresentasikan melalui pengawasan, pengendalian, kepatuhan, dan penundukan individu demi mempertahankan kekuasaan kerajaan. Selain itu, relasi kekuasaan atas pikiran direpresentasikan melalui pengaruh, doktrin, hegemoni ideologi, pembungkaman nalar kritis, serta manipulasi persepsi tokoh agar tetap tunduk dan setia kepada penguasa. Dengan demikian, kekuasaan dalam drama *Panembahan Reso* tidak hanya bekerja melalui kekuatan fisik, tetapi juga melalui pengendalian kesadaran dan cara berpikir individu.

Kata kunci : relasi kekuasaan, naskah drama, teori kekuasaan

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INTRODUCTION

In literary studies, drama often presents issues of power as a crucial element of the narrative conflict. Power is understood not merely as a form of physical domination but also as a mechanism that shapes an individual's behavior, consciousness, and mindset. It operates through surveillance, control, threats, language, doctrine, and psychological influence, compelling individuals to submit to those in authority. Consequently, power relations constitute a significant and compelling aspect to analyze in literary works, particularly in drama.

One Indonesian play that prominently features power struggles is *Panembahan Reso* by W.S. Rendra. The play depicts a battle for power within a royal court rife with political intrigue, betrayal, manipulation, and clashing interests among the characters. The protagonist, Panembahan Reso, is portrayed as a figure capable of influencing and controlling others to attain power. The conflict within the play reveals not only the use of physical force but also how power functions through psychological influence, the cultivation of loyalty, and the shaping of individual mindsets.

Power relations in *Panembahan Reso* can be analyzed using Michel Foucault's theory of power. According to Foucault (1977:26), power is not the absolute possession of a single ruler; rather, it is dispersed across various social relationships and operates through mechanisms of surveillance, discipline, control, and the construction of knowledge. Foucault explains that power does not always manifest as direct violence; it can operate subtly through language, doctrine, rules, and influences that shape individual consciousness. In Foucault's view, power is inextricably linked to knowledge, as those who hold power can define the truths that society must accept.

Foucault's theory of power relations is considered relevant for analyzing *Panembahan Reso* because the play illustrates how characters influence and control one another, as well as how they instill obedience, in order to maintain royal power. In the play, power manifests not only

through threats and warfare but also through the manipulation of minds, the instilling of fear, the cultivation of loyalty, and the surveillance of individuals. The character Panembahan Reso employs language, influence, and political strategies to shape the mindset of the Aryo, Panji, and Senapati figures, ensuring their continued submission to the power structure he has established.

Furthermore, the play *Panembahan Reso* illustrates power relations concerning both the body and the mind. Power over the body is evident through surveillance, the control of actions, the restriction of freedom, and the utilization of individuals' bodies for the kingdom's political interests. Meanwhile, power over the mind is manifested through indoctrination, the manipulation of consciousness, ideological hegemony, and the fostering of obedience and loyalty toward the ruler. These power relations demonstrate that power operates in complex ways and is not always exercised through physical violence.

Research into power relations within literary works is significant as it provides insight into how power is represented in social life. According to Sugiyono (2019:18), Razak (2017), qualitative research aims to gain a deep understanding of social phenomena based on the meanings inherent within them. Through literary analysis, readers can grasp that power relates not only to political dominance but also to the control of human consciousness. This research also highlights how literature serves as a medium for critiquing power practices within society.

Based on this context, the present study focuses on analyzing power relations in the play *Panembahan Reso* by W.S. Rendra, utilizing Michel Foucault's theory of power. The study aims to describe and analyze the various forms of these power relations.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method, specifically aiming to describe power

relations concerning the body and mind in the play *Panembahan Reso* by W.S. Rendra, utilizing a sociology of literature approach through the lens of Michel Foucault's concept of power relations. The primary data source is the script of the play *Panembahan Reso* by W.S. Rendra. The data consist of dialogue excerpts, character actions, conflicts, and narrative passages that depict practices of power relations over the body and mind within the drama. Data collection was conducted using a "read-and-note" technique, involving repeated readings of the script to identify data relevant to the research focus. Data analysis proceeded through stages of reading, data classification, analysis, description, and interpretation, culminating in conclusions regarding the forms of power relations present in the play *Panembahan Reso* by W.S. Rendra.

RESULTS

The analysis of the play *Panembahan Reso* by W.S. Rendra reveals representations of power relations concerning the body and mind, manifested through the dialogue and actions of the characters. The study focuses on the mechanisms of power—specifically surveillance, control, compliance, and the subjugation of individuals—exercised by rulers over their subordinates to maintain royal authority. Power relations concerning the body are evident in the regulation of the characters' actions, freedoms, and private lives, while power relations concerning the mind are represented through influence, doctrine, and the shaping of mindsets to ensure loyalty and submission to the Maharaja and Panembahan Reso. The findings of this analysis are presented below.

Power Relations Concerning the Body Represented in the Play *Panembahan Reso* by W.S. Rendra Rendra

Jambu : "That is a relief. We are also deeply grateful to His Majesty for the great care he has shown our wives. How are they faring? I personally miss my wife

terribly, having been separated from her for so long by our duties to the kingdom." (Rendra: 2)

Reso : "Do not worry. They are living in luxury and comfort. They were brought to the palace for their own safety—to ensure they do not fall victim to the turbulence of change. Once you have had your audience with the Maharaja, your wives will certainly be escorted back home. Queen Dara and Queen Kenari spend their time keeping them company." (Rendra: 2)

In the excerpt above, the ruler controls the wives' bodies through spatial construction ("brought to the palace") and the inversion of meaning ("safety" and "luxury"). The wives' individual bodies are forcibly isolated within the palace grounds, serving as covert political hostages. The ruler disciplines and restricts their physical mobility to control the behavior, decisions, and obedience of their husbands—the political actors—outside the palace, ensuring they do not defy the Maharaja.

Reso : "Excellent! Excellent! I can quickly gather that the four of you are loyal subjects who know your place and understand your obligations. Excellent. Excellent. His Majesty will surely be delighted to receive your devotion."

Jambu : "How are they faring? I personally miss my wife terribly, having been separated from her for so long by our duties to the kingdom." (Rendra: 2)

This excerpt illustrates how power severs the most intimate biological and domestic human bonds to serve a political agenda. The phrase "separated by roles for the sake of the kingdom" confirms that individual bodies—those of husbands and wives—have been sorted, scheduled, and geographically regulated by the apparatus of power. The husband's body is positioned in the realm of external duty, while the wife's body is isolated elsewhere. This enforced physical

separation demonstrates that subjects no longer possess sovereignty over their own bodies and time; their bodies have been entirely reduced to functional property of the kingdom.

Jambu : “In short, we acknowledge the sovereignty of His Majesty Maharaja Gajah Jenar and submit to all decrees proclaimed by His Majesty.”

Sumbu : “We have performed roles we deem vital to maintaining the kingdom's integrity. We remain obedient and stand ready to defend the kingdom's needs under the aegis of His Majesty Maharaja Gajah Jenar.” (Rendra: 1)

This excerpt represents the voluntary submission of the social body to the authority of a singular sovereign. The acknowledgment of "His Majesty" signifies that the aggregate body of society integrates its collective physicality into the kingdom's biopolitical system. This mass somatic compliance serves as the primary foundation legitimizing the ruler's management and mobilization of the population to serve the interests of the existing power structure.

Power Relations over the Mind as Represented in the Play *Panembahan Reso* by W.S. Rendra

In the play *Panembahan Reso*, W.S. Rendra vividly illustrates that the royal throne is not seized solely through physical warfare, but rather through the conquest of the mindsets held by the political actors within it. Based on a structural reading of the script, the representation of power relations regarding thought in this work falls into three intertwined typologies:

Bambu : “With your support as a pemangku [dignitary], our Maharaja will surely be able to crush his rival at Tegalwurung!”

Jambu : “We place great faith in your ability to handle this situation, Panembahan.” (Rendra: 2)

This excerpt illustrates the silencing of critical reasoning, as political discourse is channeled solely toward the destruction of an opponent. There is no room to question the fairness or justice of such

actions. The character Bambu immediately frames support for the Maharaja as the only correct course of action. Power dynamics are evident here: individuals are steered to align their thinking with the ruler's interests, while any potential for critical reflection on the conflict is suppressed.

Lembu : “Prince Bindi has occupied the entire Tegalwurung Duchy, declared his opposition to our Maharaja's sovereignty, and proclaimed himself King.”

Reso : “Aryo Sumba, do you share that same conviction?” Sumba (clearly and firmly): “Yes, Panembahan.” (Rendra: 3)

This excerpt constructs a perception of a threat to the kingdom. Prince Bindi is portrayed as a dangerous figure who challenges the legitimacy of the Maharaja's rule. Such a narrative fosters a collective sense of fear and suspicion, leading the royal establishment to feel compelled to defend its power by any means necessary. In the realm of shaping public perception, the ruler instills the idea that political adversaries are grave threats that must be eliminated immediately.

Dara : “So, he defies our Maharaja's rule!”

Reso : “Can our Maharaja eliminate him, or can he eliminate our Maharaja? That is the only question.” (W.S. Rendra: 2)

This quotation illustrates a cognitive distortion wherein the conflict is reduced to a life-or-death struggle between two parties. There is no room for a peaceful resolution or any alternative other than mutual elimination. This mode of thinking constitutes a paranoid construct that leads all parties to perceive their opponents as absolute threats. Power relations operate by fostering fear and a binary mindset, thereby compelling individuals to endorse repressive measures in order to maintain power.

DISCUSSION

Representations of Power Relations over the Body in W.S. Rendra's Play *Panembahan Reso* through the Lens of Michel Foucault's Theory.



Power over the body is defined as a mechanism through which ruling agents control, subjugate, manipulate, and direct human bodies—both individually and collectively—to align with geopolitical agendas and state stability. Consistent with Michel Foucault's fundamental premise regarding the concept of somatopolitics (the politics of the body), the body is not a neutral biological entity but rather a primary arena where power is invested, inscribed, and exercised. Foucault asserts that power does not merely operate at a macro-conceptual level; rather, it permeates the very pores of life and exerts a grip on the human physique. Through this somatic control, the ruling power is able to discipline individual movements while simultaneously managing the population as a whole. In the script of *Panembahan Reso*, W.S. Rendra vividly illustrates that the royal throne is not maintained solely through abstract narratives, but rather through the subjugation, hostage-taking, and physical mobilization of the political actors involved. Based on a structural analysis of the text, the representation of power relations over the body in this work falls into two primary, intertwined typologies:

According to the theory of disciplinary power proposed by Michel Foucault (cited in Nensilanti, 2025: 1688), the individual body is treated like a machine that must be subjugated, ...are separated, and their movements regulated to enhance utility while ensuring compliance (creating "docile bodies"). Those in power manipulate geographical space and individual physical freedom, isolating bodies and subjecting them to constant surveillance. Such measures of physical restriction are often framed within narratives of protection or privilege to quell resistance from the bodies in question.

In practice, disciplinary power aims not only to control individual behavior but also to instill habits, mindsets, and a state of enduring compliance. Individuals within a surveillance system tend to internalize prevailing rules, thereby regulating themselves without the need for direct coercion by those in power. As Foucault posits (in

Haryatmoko, 2016:18), discipline is a technique of power that operates through surveillance, normalization, and examination to produce individuals who are compliant and easily controlled. Thus, disciplinary power serves as an effective instrument for maintaining dominance over individuals by controlling their bodies and daily behaviors.

Unlike the anatomy of an individual body, which is particular in nature, the concept of bio-power or biopolitics proposed by Foucault shifts to the macro level—specifically, the "social body" or the population as a whole. In line with Foucault's perspective (cited in Nensilanti, 2025:1689), power no longer focuses on disciplining a single body; instead, it manages, mobilizes, and regulates the survival, security, and collective biological capacity of society to maintain stability or prevail in state conflicts. Through biopolitics, the state possesses the authority to regulate various aspects of public life, such as health, reproduction, education, and social security. Such regulation is enacted through policies that ostensibly aim to improve public welfare but simultaneously expand the scope of state control over citizens' lives. According to Agamben (cited in Hardiman, 2018:243), biopolitics demonstrates how human biological life becomes a primary object of power management, causing the boundary between protection and control to become increasingly blurred. Consequently, biopolitics enables those in power to exercise broader control over society by regulating both social and biological life.

"Power over thought" is defined as a mechanism through which ruling agents construct, manipulate, and direct the thought patterns, perceptions, and reasoning of their subjects to align with specific political agendas. Consistent with Michel Foucault's fundamental premise regarding the concept of power/knowledge, power is not merely top-down or centralized; rather, it is dispersed and interwoven within the discourses or knowledge produced by society. Foucault asserts that all knowledge generates effects of power, and conversely, power determines what is regarded as

"truth" within the human mind. Through this discursive control, those in power can dominate, control, and manipulate the thoughts of their subjects. Control over information, language, and narratives enables the formation of a specific worldview that is accepted as natural and unquestionable. According to Berger and Luckmann (in Bungin, 2011:15), social reality is shaped through a process of social construction influenced by the knowledge and interpretations that evolve within a society. Consequently, those in power can shape individual consciousness through the continuous production of discourse, leading society to accept the values and interests of the ruling group as legitimate truths.

According to the theory of hegemony proposed by Antonio Gramsci (cited in Amir, 2022:2), enduring power operates not through physical force (coercion), but through voluntary agreement (consent). Those in power manipulate the consciousness and mindset of the public or their subordinates, causing them to adopt the rulers' perspective as a universal truth and a noble moral standard. Actions by the ruling group that are inherently amoral are transformed into something that appears noble in the minds of those they dominate. Hegemony functions through social institutions—such as education, media, religion, and culture—that continuously reproduce dominant values. As a result, the dominated groups remain unaware of the unequal power relations they inhabit, as the ruling ideology has been accepted as something natural. Consistent with Gramsci's view (in Simon, 2004:19), hegemony represents a form of moral and intellectual leadership that allows one group to secure the consent of another without resorting to overt violence. Thus, hegemony serves as a highly effective strategy of power, as it operates through the consciousness and consent of the governed.

According to Slavoj Žižek's theory of subjectivity and psychopolitical manipulation (cited in Priyanggono, 2022:89), those in power can infiltrate the symbolic realm of their targets'

consciousness to instill ideological fantasies or manufactured fears. The ruler acts as a psychological architect, distorting the target's perception of reality and triggering acute paranoia, thereby leading the target to make erroneous decisions that actually advance the ruler's covert agenda. Psychopolitical manipulation operates through the creation of images, symbols, narratives, and fears that make it difficult for individuals to distinguish between reality and ideological constructs.

Under these conditions, individuals tend to act based on perceptions engineered by the ruler rather than on objective facts. Consistent with Žižek's view (in Priyanggono, 2022:90), ideology does not always function through conscious lies, but rather through everyday beliefs and practices that cause individuals to unconsciously uphold the very system of power that oppresses them. Thus, psychopolitical manipulation emerges as a form of power operating within the realms of consciousness and the subconscious, allowing individuals to be controlled without realizing that their way of thinking has been steered by specific interests.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the play *Panembahan Reso* by W.S. Rendra demonstrates that power relations operate not only through physical force but also through the control of the characters' bodies and minds. Applying Michel Foucault's theory of power relations, this study finds that power is represented through surveillance, the restriction of freedom, subjugation, and the mobilization of bodies to maintain royal authority, as well as through ideological hegemony, doctrines of loyalty, the silencing of critical reason, and the manipulation of perception to ensure individual submission to the ruler. This drama demonstrates that power operates in complex ways and is diffused throughout social relations; consequently, individuals are not merely physically controlled,

but their ways of thinking and their consciousness are also shaped to serve the political interests of those in power.

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