

Eroticism: One Common and Universal Ground of Literary Texts

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Abstract

Eroticism has long universally colored all aspects of human life, including literary texts. Assuming that eroticism is one of the most basic and universal issues, literary texts from different places and periods of time acknowledge the need to include erotic expressions in the construction of a story.

This article aims at observing (1) the universality of aspects of eroticism, (2) how they are positioned in a story, and (3) how they contribute to the work. For these purposes, this article examines literary works from different cultural backgrounds and different periods of time.

It is observed that erotic expressions always include two universal aspects: (1) the description (either literal or metaphorical) of sexually-arousing parts of a female (and sometimes a male) body and (2) the description of scenes of sexual activity. Related to the development of the story, these erotic expressions might be positioned (1) as peripheral elements (i.e. unimportant, they could actually be omitted), (2) as integral elements (i.e. part of plot development, if omitted this will ruin the story, and (3) as central elements (i.e. their presence is inevitable). With regard to their contribution, these erotic expressions might be used in a story as (1) appealing elements to draw the readers' attention, (2) supporting devices to convey the writer's idea, and (3) as main topics of the story.

Keywords: *Eroticism, woman's body, sexual activity*

Erotica, Pornography, and Sex

As piece of writings, erotica and pornography are two types of texts which cannot be precisely distinguished. Erotica or erotic literature is "a type of writing characterized by treatment of sexual love in more or less explicit detail", while pornography is defined as "writing designed to arouse sexual lust." Added to this definition is "without major serious or aesthetic intention" (Harmon and Holman, 2003: 395). Both erotica and pornography center on the arousal of sexual desire. However, erotica does not necessarily have to be pornography. In erotica, the sexual element is a portion of the aesthetic, thematic, or moral aspect of the work. Pornography, on the other hand, employs sexual material as an end in itself (Harmon and Holman, 2003: 395). It is oriented toward one purpose, i.e. the presentation or narration of

scenes of sexual activity in such a way to create in the audience or the readers a pleasurable state of sexual excitement, both physical and mental. Erotic literature, indeed, stimulates vague sexual emotions, but it has no pornographic intention because "*it leaves everything to the imagination*" (Read, 2002: 152). In pornography a visual or verbal image acts as a direct stimulus to those erotic drives or impulses which are always ready to be stimulated in normal people.

This definition is far from satisfactory because it definitely cannot differentiate erotic literature from pornography. Furthermore, an erotic expression might be considered pornographic by some people, but might, at the same time, be "*aesthetic*" to other people. To make matters worse, the word "*aesthetic*" itself is difficult to define. As generally understood, "*aesthetic*" describes the perception and appreciation of what is beautiful (Wales, 2001: 10), but tastes of beauty vary from culture to culture, from period to period. And, isn't beauty in the eye of the beholder?

The same question can also, definitely, be proposed concerning the word "*pornographic*": isn't it the result of the evaluation of an observer? Hayakawa, a Japanese-American linguist, once stated that

when a man and a woman make love, enjoying themselves and each other fully and unself-consciously, a rich relationship is affirmed and made richer by their love making. However beautiful and sacred that love relationship may be to that man and woman, it would have an entirely different significance to a Peeping Tom (in Muller, 1982: 135).

Sexual behavior is indeed not obscene or pornographic. Obscenity and pornography happen only when sexual events are seen from the outside. Under the light of the ambiguous definitions above, discussions on eroticism, especially in literary texts, are not necessarily about whether or not it is pornographic, but whether or not it is appropriately and contextually "*inserted*" in the literary texts.

Erotic expressions, which are identical with the description of sexual genitals and activities, have colored human cultures throughout the recorded history of human life. A painting of prehistoric people, showing a woman (the goddess of earth or mother nature) who is arising from the earth and is suckling animals (a snake on the right breast and a cow on the left), suggests that there is a link between humanity and the rest of nature. Common pictures on Greek vases (ca. 430 BC), showing a woman watering phalluses that are set on the ground, strengthens the idea that phallic symbols were thought to promote fertility (Bishop, 1996: 17). A Mayan painted dish depicting a woman being fondled by a monkey implies the importance of sexual excitement. In one Egyptian creation myth, the world is created by the copulation of the Sky and the Earth. This myth is documented on a papyrus painting, depicting a female (the sky) and a male (the earth) who are copulating. These instances clearly show that erotic expressions and human life are inseparable.

Sex, the basic element for erotic expressions, has always been deeply internalized in the human mind. Although Michel Foucault once said that "*on the subject of sex, silence became the rule*" (1990: 3), the sexual instinct has always found ways to manifest itself. This is because in the problem of sex also

lies the problem of truth. According to Foucault, there are two procedures for producing the truth of sex: *ars erotica* (the erotic art, i.e. the presentation of sex through the medium of art) and *scientia sexualis* (the confession of sex, i.e. the presentation of sex through sciences). In *ars erotica* truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is considered in relation to itself. In *scientia sexualis*, the confession plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relationships, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life (1990: 56-59). Regardless of the two procedures, the sexual instinct needs to surface and be expressed within human consciousness.

In psychology, sexual desire is the center of Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud's second model of the human psyche, called the Economic Model, suggests that the human psyche is governed by two principles, namely the pleasure principle and the reality principle. The pleasure principle craves only pleasures and it always needs the fulfillment of instinctual drives, ignoring moral and sexual boundaries established by society. The reality principle, on the other hand, recognizes the need for social standards. According to Freud these two principles are always at war. Further, Freud states that "*the sexual instincts obviously show their aims of pleasurable excitement*" (1920: 309). Thus, it is understandable that the problem of sexual desire is innate in human beings. Freud states that even the infant is "*a raging lustful sexual maniac from the moment of birth*" (in Read, 2002: 153).

Discussing human psychological needs, Harry Berger states that there are two conflicting impulses in human beings.

Man has two primal needs. First is the need for order, peace, and security for protection against the terror of confusion of life, for a familiar and predictable world, and for life which is happily more of the same..... But the second primal impulse is contrary to the first: man positively needs anxiety and uncertainty, thrives on confusion and risk, wants trouble, tension, jeopardy, novelty, mystery, would be lost without enemies, is sometimes happiest when most miserable (in Cawley, 1976: 16).

These two conflicting needs will be reconciled in the experience of escape and relaxation, and sexual activities undoubtedly offer these two experiences.

Aside from the fact that the problem of eroticism and pornography is never satisfactorily resolved, this article tries to observe several points concerning eroticism in literary works, focusing on: (1) universal aspects of erotic expressions, (2) their positions in a story, and (3) how they contribute to the work. It is expected that the study of these areas will reveal more insights into and understanding of the significance of eroticism as one underlying ground of literary texts all over the world.

Erotic Expressions in Literature

1. Erotic Expressions as Appealing Elements

Regardless of the role of erotic parts or scenes in the development and unity of the plot, most literary texts spare some room for such scenes. They

might just serve as a lure or appealing element, a part of the story which functions, for instance, to keep readers attentively reading the story, to satisfy readers' expectations, to break readers' tension, and to keep readers from boredom. When reading a long (and complicated) text, breaking time is very important to make readers stay focused and avoid fatigue. In such situations, the presentation of erotic scenes, as Cawelty puts it, can be "*an extremely effective form of escape*" (1976: 14). Positioned in this way, erotic narrations or scenes usually do not really contribute to the development and unity of the story. In other words, they are not necessarily "inserted" in the plot of the story. These erotic parts are there for the sake of eroticism itself, functioning as a tedium-breaker. Many instances of this can be seen in popular novels such as the famous melodramas by Harold Robbins. If the insertion of these erotic scenes is uncontrolled, however, this may turn the story into pornography.

Many of Harold Robbins' melodramas can be examples of such stories in which sexual scenes are unnecessarily inserted. Extravagant parties, rich and sexy women, worldly pleasures such as sex and drugs are described everywhere in his melodramas (Wijanarka, 2002: 25). In *The Storyteller*, for instance, Robbins is actually portraying the struggle of Joe Crown, a poor young man, to be a successful and well-off writer. However, in almost all parts of the story, Robbins inserts erotic scenes, be it a description of women's sexy bodies or descriptions of sexual activities. So many are such descriptions that some readers may find this story neglects the real plot and focuses on sexually arousing scenes.

When Robbins describes Joe Crown's trip on a crowded train, he inserts the following scene

The crowd behind her pushed her more tightly against me. She looked at me..... I think it took less than thirty seconds and I was rising hard. She had her buttocks jammed into my groin. I began trying to think of other things but nothing worked. My hard kept getting more confined in my shorts..... (The Storyteller, p.7).

On another occasion, Joe went to a business acquaintance's house to talk about some business, and this was the first thing he saw in the house:

*A three-quarter sofa bed stood in the middle of the room. His mouth fell open in surprise. Three very pretty black girls, also naked, were on the bed. Jamaica glanced at him and smiled. "Don't pay attention to them," he said. "I have six more of them."
"How can you take care of them?"
"It's easy. I never take on more than three of them at the same time."
(The Storyteller, p. 44).*

And when he was typing his story, his girlfriend seduced him, and then

He looked down at her face, his eyes searching deep into her. Slowly he moved his lips to her forehead, then to her cheek, finally to her mouth. He felt heat from her body pressing heavily against him. His phallus sprang wildly toward her (The Storyteller, p. 89).

Referring to the development of the story, the above scenes are unnecessarily inserted. The girl on the train, Jamaica, and the girl who seduced Joe are never again mentioned in the later part of the story, and their existences are never referred to. Those scenes are immediately forgotten as the story moves on to the next step of the plot. Perhaps Harold Robbins tries to emphasize that Joe Crown is a sex-maniac, but what does it have to do with the central theme: the struggle to be a famous writer? Such erotic events are present everywhere in almost all parts of the story, a story which should actually be concerned with Joe Crown's difficult path to be a successful writer. These erotic parts make no direct contribution to the plot of the story. As a result, the readers' focus is distracted by these erotic parts and as a consequence they will ignore the messages and ideas Robbins might try to convey.

Robbins make similar use of erotic scenes in *The Piranhas*. In *The Piranhas*, Robbins does not give much space to erotic scenes, and, to make matter worse, these erotic scenes do not make any contribution to the story. This is the story of a mafia family (represented by Rocco di Stefano, Jed Steven, and Angelo) who struggle hard to expand the market for their illegal business: cocaine. The plot is dominated by the dangerous adventures of Jed Steven and his cousin Angelo —tricky conflicts, murderous trips, deadly gunfights. However, in some parts of the story Robbins feels the need to present erotic scenes whose contribution to the story is questionable. Here are two examples of such scenes:

Slowly she spread the soap over me with a light hand. "Now it's my turn," she said, handing me the bottle. I felt clumsy. My touch was not as light as hers. She turned slowly and let me do her back, and then turned again to face me. I looked at her questioningly. She smiled. "Don't be silly. Finish." Quickly I spread the soap over her. Her breasts felt heavy in my hand and her belly strong and flat. Very lightly I spread the soap over her pubis (The Piranhas, p. 77).

She reached me down to hold me. "You have a hard-on," she said. "She's turning you on." "Bitch!" I kissed her and pulled her on top of me. "And you think your hands all over me don't turn me on?" (The Piranhas, p. 224).

These scenes do not reveal anything related to the plot. What they tell the readers is that Jed Steven is surrounded by women. But again, what is the point of such information when the story is about a hard way to expand an illegal business?

Although different in the quantity, both the erotic scenes in *The Storyteller* and in *The Piranhas* are the same in terms of their position and significance, i.e. they are peripheral and do not contribute to the development of the plot. Seen from the unity of the plot, these erotic scenes are even distracting.

From the perspective of popular literature, the abundant description of erotic scenes is understandable. According to Nachbar and Lause, popular literature (as opposed to elite literature) possesses two dominant aspects:

first, it balances the author's point of view with audience expectation, and secondly, it serves as a means of escapism (1992: 18). As a popular novelist, then, it is necessary for Robbins to exploit all possible means to satisfy his audience, and eroticism is one of them. This is supposed to guarantee a better readership for the works and secures Robbins financially. The unity of the story is, therefore, of second priority.

2. Erotic Expressions as Supporting Devices to Convey Ideas

A significant erotic scene should make a meaningful contribution to the structure and theme of the story. Since theme is the unifying idea of the story, then it must account for all the details of the story (Perrine, 1974: 108), including the insertion of eroticism. Therefore, erotic parts must not contradict the theme or the main idea of the story. Their presence must significantly support the delivery of the writer's main idea or the theme of the story.

The first instance is Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, one of the oldest comedies (ca. 411 BC) which includes eroticism in a comic way. Generally speaking, the play deals with the idea that women, too, have a certain kind of power to defeat men: they use sexual activities as a weapon to force their husbands to meet their demands. Lysistrata and the other women swear to avoid having sex with their husbands unless their husbands promise not to go to war anymore. Women are humorously described as the ones who have the full control of sexual activities in the play, and men are the inferior.

The first erotic expression in *Lysistrata* can be seen in the oath uttered by the women, stating that

*I will withhold all rights of access or entrance
From every husband, lover, or casual acquaintance
Who moves in my direction in erection*

.....

*If he should force me to share the connubial couch
I refuse to return his stroke with the teeniest twitch
I will not lift my slippers to touch the thatch
Or submit sloping prone in a hangdog crouch
(Lysistrata, pp. 32-34).*

Considering the period in which the play was written, it is understandable why the erotic element is not as explicit and direct as that in Harold Robbin's novel. However, its presence is crucial because it will be the starting point for the development of the story. It is this erotic oath that triggers the conflicts of the play. In the erotic scene in which Myrrhine intentionally seduces her husband, Kinesias, who impatiently desires sexual intercourse, Aristophanes shows the power of women in controlling sexual activities.

*MYRRHINE. Here. You hurry to bed while I undress [Kinesias lies down]
Gracious me—I forgot. We need a mattress.
KINESIAS. Who wants a mattress? Not me!*

MYRRHINE. [Entering with the mattress] Here we are. Our mattress. Now hurry to bed while I undress [Kinesias lies down again] Gracious me—I forgot. You don't have a pillow.... (Lysistrata, pp. 88-89)

Another erotic scene is the appearance of Peace (representing the goddess of peace) on stage. This erotic scene will probably be more observable when the play is performed on stage. This scene reveals the irresistible power a female body might emanate.

The gates to the Akropolis open, and Lysistrata emerges, accompanied by Peace—a beautiful girl without a stitch on. Surveying Peace like a map as he addresses the Spartans. KINESIAS..... Uh let me see, let's try Thessaly. First of all Easy Mountain.... Then the maniac gulf behind it.... And down to Megara for the legs..... (Lysistrata, pp. 104-105).

Obviously, the female body and sexual activity are the main elements of eroticism in this scene. Using the body of Peace as a metaphor for the geographical map of Thessaly, Aristophanes stimulates erotic imagination in the audience's mind. Since the play centers on female sexual power, then such a description is definitely important. The above erotic scenes are used to convey the idea that, indeed, women's sex-appeal has a powerful effect on men, and thus, contributes to the delivery of the theme which is about the power of women.

Contrary to *Lysistrata* is Linus Suryadi's insertion of erotic narration in *Pengakuan Pariyem*. In this lyric-prose novel Linus Suryadi portrays the spiritual life of a Javanese woman through the eyes of a simple and innocent housemaid, Maria Magdalena Pariyem. By telling her experience as a housemaid working in the house of a Javanese aristocrat, nDoro Kanjeng Cokro Sentono, *Pengakuan Pariyem* is actually reviewing, analyzing, appreciating, criticizing, and lecturing on Javanese culture (particularly related to Javanese women). It makes the claim to readers: that the life of a Javanese women is surrounded by the spirit of submissiveness.

The insertion of erotic scenes in this novel is contextually appropriate, meaning that they directly support the idea of submissiveness. Pariyem (one typical representative of innocent and traditional Javanese women) accepts her fate as it is and takes it for granted that God has already planned everything in her life. If the readers skip (or are unaware of) this part, they might still understand the general idea of the story, but a deep and thorough understanding is not guaranteed. The following scene happens when Den Bagus Ario Atmojo, Pariyem's young master, sexually seduces her:

*Selagi saya membersihkan kamarnya
Tiba tiba saya direnggut dari belakang
O, Allah saya kaget setengah mati, mas
Sekujur tubuh saya digerayanginya
Pipi, bibir, penthil saya dingok pula
Paha saya diraba-raba
Diraba-raba paha saya*

*Alangkah mringing urat sarap saya
Tapi saya pasrah saja kok,
Saya lega lila,
(Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 43-44).*

In another part Pariyem remembers her first erotic experience when she was still in her village in Wonosari. After a long walk on their way home from watching *wayang kulit* performance, Pariyem and her boyfriend, Kliwon, stopped in a dark place near a field to have some rest. This was what finally happened

*O, Allah Gusti nyuwun ngapura
Kami telanjang bulat!
Bibir saya diciumnya
Ciuman pertama dari seorang pria
Penthil saya diremasnya
Remasan pertama dari seorang pria*

*Dan kuping bawah saya dikulumnya
Kuluman pertama dari seorang pria
(Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 78)*

And again Pariyem feels that it was natural for Kliwon to treat her in such a way. Deep in her heart, she, too, felt this sexual urge.

The *Song of Songs* employs erotic expressions to show how intimate, beautiful, and instinctual love is. Some scholars suggest that it was a collection of songs assembled as a repertoire for wedding celebrations (Metzger and Coogan, eds., 1993: 709). Another interpretation suggests that the man and the woman in the poem stand for God and His people, or Christ and the Church (*Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version*, p.862). Considered as a poem by many other scholars, it can also be interpreted as stating that such an ideal, deep and powerful (physical) love can be experienced by a man and a woman. The act of kissing is used to convey how intimate and close a man and a woman can be when they are united by love:

She speaks:
*Kiss me tenderly! Your love is better than wine,
and you smell so sweet
All the young women adore you;
the very mention of your name
is like spreading perfume.
Hurry, my King! Let's hurry. Take me to your home.
(Holy Bible: CEV, p.863).*

In the following lines, sexually-arousing parts of a woman's body are described as sources of admiration.

He speaks:
*Your lips are crimson cords, your mouth is shapely;
behind your veil are hidden beautiful rosy cheeks.*

*Your neck is more graceful than the tower of David,
decorated with thousands of warriors shield.
Your breasts are perfect;
they are twin deer feeding among lilies.
I will hasten to those hills sprinkled with sweet perfume
and stay there till sunrise.
(Holy Bible: CEV, p.865).*

Such admiration can also be seen in Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." Marvell describes how it needs hundreds of years to adore the beauty of a woman's body:

*An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
(in Perrine, 1976: 623).*

Just like in *Song of Songs* and *Lysistrata*, the adoration of sexually-arousing parts of a woman's body—lips, neck, breasts—can reveal an intimate and fully understanding relationship between a man and a woman: an ideal relationship. With regard to the theme, the poem suggests that such love is comparable only to the love between God and us. Thematically, the use of erotic description in this poem is very significant.

Other examples of the insertion of erotic expressions to convey writer's ideas are *Larung* by Ayu Utami and *Shanghai Baby* by Wei Hui which describe the impact of cultural changes on young people. The two novels use erotic expressions and scenes to support the ideas of openness and rebellion which are identical with young people. *Shanghai Baby* is a story of a young urban woman, Coco Chanel, living in cultural transition who tries to interpret modernism in her own ways, one of which is by exploring her sexuality. Thus, eroticism appears in this novel to convey the spirit of rebellion against the old belief in sexuality which was supposed to be a taboo and indecent topic to discuss.

In many parts of the story, Coco frankly relates her experiences of making love to her boyfriends as well as expressing her attitude towards love-making. In the following quotations, Wei Hui demonstrates how she considers love-making as something to be enjoyed and states that nothing should be concealed. It also reveals how new generations are getting more and more overt in perceiving and expressing sexual relationship.

In the male world, being able to perform sex normally is as important as life itself, and any shortcoming causes unbearable pain. He cried, and so I did. For the rest of the night we kissed, touched, murmured to one another..... Kissing with the tip of the tongue feels like ice cream melting. It was he who taught me that a kiss has a soul and colors all its own (Shanghai Baby, p. 5).

.....when he put his hand covered with body shampoo between my legs, gently washing away our mingled juices; when he got excited again and grabbed me, pulling me down on his crotch; when we made love

again.....; when I saw him catch his breath between my spread thighs.... (Shanghai Baby, p. 207).

Behind these erotic descriptions, lies the new spirit of openness and rebellion. Wei Hui treats sexual activities as parts of life which must be enjoyed fully and in a leisurely way because they provide fulfillment for human emotional needs, so their truth must not be concealed. This is in opposition to the traditional belief that sexuality should be treated personally and secretly and it is indecent to talk about it openly. Today's young people believe that women too have the privilege of enjoying sexual activities. Sex does not exclusively belong to men. In short, Wei Hui implicitly attacks the idea of *phallocentrism*

Similar ideas are conveyed by Ayu Utami in *Larung*. Her candid description of sexual activity (both hetero and homosexual) indicates that a woman, too, can take the same active role as a man in sexual relationships. *Larung* fights against the female stereotype and bring readers away from the idea of "heteronormative" and "phallocentrism" (Bandel, 2006: 102). And like *Shanghai Baby*, *Larung* is also representing a cultural transition in Indonesia in the present era of globalization.

Waktu itu aku masih kelas satu SMA. Aku masih takut kehilangan keperawanan. Jadi pacarku melakukannya dengan belahan dadaku sampai orgasme. Sakuntala terkejut mendengar cerita itu. Soalnya puyudaranya nyaris rata sehingga itu tidak mungkin buat dia. Dia takut pakai kutang karena tak ada yang bisa dikutangi (Larung, p. 82).

Tapi di tempat tidur dia anak yang manis, yang menunggu aku melucuti pakaiannya. Dan dua menit putus, kayak telepon. Aku baru mencari posisi yang enak ketika tiba-tiba, lho kok loyo?, dia ejakulasi. Aku rada kecewa..... Sedikitnya ia menambah pengalamanku (Larung, p. 88).

In describing the female sexual organ, *Larung* also implies the denial of male domination in society. According to Shakuntala, in sexual intercourse, the vagina is fully active (*mengundang, menghisap, memeras*), and is not just a passive object of penetration by a penis.

Sebuah vagina adalah sejenis bunga karnivora sebagaimana kantong semar. Namun ia tidak mengundang serangga, melainkan binatang yang lebih besar, bodoh, dan tak bertulang belakang, dengan manipulasi lender sebagaimana yang dilakukan bakung bangkai. Sesungguhnya bunga karnivora bukan memakan daging melainkan menghisap cairan dari makhluk yang terjebak dalam rongga dibalik kelopak-kelopaknya yang hangat. Otot-ototnya yang kuat, rerelung dindingnya yang kedap, dan permukaan liangnya yang basah akan memeras binatang yang masuk, dalam gerakan berulang-ulang, hingga bunga ini memperoleh cairan yang ia hauskan (Larung, p. 153).

A subtle way of presenting eroticism can be seen in *Lady Chatterley's*

Lover. One of the ideas Lawrence tries to convey in this novel is the search for integrity and wholeness: in body and mind, in nature and civilization. The sexual affair between Connie and Mellor is one of the ways of describing the wholeness of body and mind. Making love is not only a matter of legality or of following social norms. It is a matter of the unity between body and soul. Thus, when Connie can no longer make love with Clifford, her legal husband (because of his being crippled), she turns to Mellor. And it is with Mellor that she finds wholeness in sexual intercours.

Ah, too lovely, too lovely! In the ebbing she realized all the loveliness. Now her body clung with the tender love to the unknown man, and blindly to the wilting penis, as it so tenderly, frailly, unknowingly withdrew, after the fierce thrust of its potency. As it drew out and left her body, the secret, sensitive thing, she gave an unconscious cry of pure lust, and she tried to put it back. It had been so perfect! And she loved it so! (Lady Chatterley's Lover, p. 181).

In the following quotation, the erotic description of Connie and Mellor's behavior during their love-making reveals the wholeness in nature: the unity of human beings and nature.

She opened the door and looked at the straight heavy rain, like a steel curtain, and had a sudden desire to rush out into it, to rush away. She got up, and began swiftly pulling off her stockings, then her dress and underclothing, and he held his breath. Her pointed keen animal breasts tipped and stirred as she moved. She slipped on her rubber shoes again and ran out with a wild little laugh, holding up her breasts to the heavy rain and spreading her arms..... (Lady Chatterley's Lover, p. 230).

Clearly, the erotic expressions in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* significantly support the delivery of the ideas or meanings with the work, i.e. the wholeness of nature, the unity of human beings and nature. The erotic expressions are so appropriately positioned that their presence really contributes to the unity of the work.

A Japanese writer, Yasunari Kawabata, places small portions of eroticism in his *Beauty and Sadness*. Generally speaking, the message this novel tries to convey is that beauty is so close to sadness—what is good and what is bad are separated only by a very thin line. This novel presents a complicated love affair involving a married man (Oki), a young woman (Otoko), and a lesbian (Keiko), which happened 24 years before. Kawabata significantly inserts erotic scenes in the story to describe the intimate relationships that existed between the three major characters. Erotic scenes are always related to the love affairs of the main characters and function as important factors in building the atmosphere of beautiful and romantic love.

In the early part of the story, readers are introduced to the intimate love affairs between Oki, a married man, and Otoko, a girl of sixteen. Kawabata describes their relationship in such a way that the readers aware of how their affair began and what kind of affair they had.

Oki stayed at their house to help take care of her. Hour after hour he massaged her thighs, swollen and hard from massive injections..... Otoko lay nude under a light kimono. Still only sixteen, she had very slender thighs, and the injections made them swell up grotesquely. Sometimes when he pressed hard his hands slipped down to her inner thighs (Beauty and Sadness, p. 21)

Kawabata does the same when introducing the affair between Oki and Keiko, a woman who loved Otoko and who had an affair with Oki because she wanted to hurt him. This shows how close love and revenge can be.

Although she did not resist, he had difficulty uncurling her. Meanwhile it became obvious that she was not a virgin. He began to handle more roughly.

Just then Keiko cried out plaintively from beneath him: "Oh!... Otoko, Otoko!"

"What?"

Oki had thought she was calling out to him, but his strength ebbed when he realized she is actually calling Otoko (Beauty and Sadness, p. 85).

First, he saw one of her nipples. It was a pink nipple, almost transparently pink..... It was like a flower bud against her creamy breast. It had no ugly little wrinkles or glanular texture, and was just the right modest size to suckle on lovingly.

But it was not only its beauty that brought the image of Keiko's nipples back to Oki. Although she had allowed him her right nipple at the hotel that night, she had avoided giving the left one. When he tried to touch it, she pressed down hard on it with the palm of her hand (Beauty and Sadness, p. 143).

On one level, Kawabata inserts the above erotic scenes to give the readers clues on who and what kind of woman Keiko is. In the first quotation, the erotic scene is employed as a device to characterize Keiko, while in the second quotation the erotic narration of Keiko's nipple symbolically reveals Keiko's love triangle. On the other level, these erotic scenes underlie the main idea of the story: how thin the line between beauty and sadness is.

Serat Centini or *Suluk Tambanglaras*, one of the oldest Javanese literary lyrics, can be added as an example of the use of eroticism to help convey the writer's ideas. The original was written around 1714, *Centini* is more like an anthology of Javanese wisdom and knowledge (and advice) rather than a story with a plot. In this 672-verse (Javanese: *pada*) work, many things are discussed, among others are: history, prophecy, ethics, religion, miracles, love and sexuality, medicine, education, psychology, and art. Including erotic scenes in *Serat Centini* is therefore contextually justifiable.

Paku Buwono V, the compiler of the lyrics, interestingly placed erotic narrations alternately with religious teachings or wisdom on particular subjects. One possible reason is because Paku Buwono realized that the contents of *Serat Centini* were hard to understand, thus he needed an effective way of delivering that content, and erotic narration was the choice.

The preface of *Ringkasan Centini*, however, implies that Paku Buwono V, indeed, intended to discuss sexual problems more openly and precisely. This is proved by the fact that it was Paku Buwono V himself who "wrote the narration on sexual activities and relationship" (*Ringkasan Centini*, p. 7).

Chapter VII, verses no. 88 and 89, for example, are very erotic in describing a widow's lustful sexual desire:

88. *Nuripin ditelanjangi, celananya dirobek secara paksa, kemudian dilihat, ternyata hanya sebesar jenang grendul, atau hanya sebesar puser bodong. Nyi Janda tercenung kecewa.....*
89. *Duljaya datang dari pintu belakang, lalu menghadap, lalu disuruh meniduri Nyi Janda. Sudah menjadi adatnya, demikian jika ia kecewa. Sesudah menghabiskan tingkahnya, Nyi Janda menjadi lelah, sehingga nafasnya kembang kempis, namun sudah puas. Ketika ditanya untuk mengulang, ia menjawab mau, akan tetapi menanggukannya sampai nanti. (Ringkasan Centini, p. 90).*

When discussing sexual activities, *Surat Centini* describes them in detail. The following quotation is a part of the sex-education included in *Serat Centini*:

Semua masih perawan tua, yang belum mengerti peri pergaulan dengan seorang pria. Akan tetapi sering melihat ayahnya, sewaktu tidur bersama dengan ibunya. Yang mereka lihat, ibunya di atas, ayahnya diduduki. Tampak oleh anaknya yang mengintip, kedua orang tuanya turun naik. Mereka mengira sudah demikianlah adatnya. Yang perempuan di atas, si laki-laki tidur terlentang. Demikian dugaan mereka karena tidak mengerti bahwa ayahnya yang sudah tua tak begitu kuat lagi untuk bersikap merangkak (Ringkasan Centini, Chapter 9, verse no. 77, p.111).

To sum up, erotic scenes in the works already discussed, are positioned as integral elements of the story. They are necessarily inserted in the works because they help emphasize the writers' ideas and without these scenes the readers will have less thorough comprehension. An interesting phenomenon is the fact that erotic or sexual activities can be used to help convey various ideas, for example: women's power (*Lysistrata*), women's submissiveness (*Pengakuan Pariyem*), intimate relationships (*Song of Songs*), openness and rebellion (*Shanghai Baby, Larung*), wholeness of body and mind (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*), the thin line between good and bad (*Beauty and Sadness*), and the essence of life (*Centini or Suluk Tambanglaras*). Beyond the scenes of sexual activities, there lie a lot of human issues. This list of issues can be added to the generally understood idea that "sexual intercourse is a sign of harmony, of the conjunction of opposites, and of course, fertility (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996: 356). As one of the most instinctual drives of human beings, sex can be integrated with any other issues of human life.

3. Eroticism as the Central Idea

When eroticism is the central idea of a literary text, it will be very difficult to judge whether or not the text is pornography. The only criterion seems to be the aesthetic factor which is, unfortunately, not easily understood. One definition of "aesthetic" is "the perception and appreciation of what is beautiful" (Wales, 2001: 10). But what is "beautiful" is another problem: whether it is intrinsic or in the eye of the beholder.

It is generally agreed that what distinguishes a literary text from other forms of writing (including pornography) is its aesthetic quality, regardless of where the criteria for judging the beauty of a literary work reside. Following the ideas of New Criticism, this beauty can be seen in the harmonious whole or the organic unity of the literary text which demands "coherence or interrelatedness" of all the intrinsic elements. Organic unity itself is understood as "the concept that all parts of a poem (literary text) are interrelated and interconnected, with each part reflecting and helping to support the poem's central idea" (Bressler, 1999: 43). This is the ground on which the following discussion will be based.

A very nice positioning of eroticism can be observed in Ovid's "The Art of Love" (ca. 1 AD). This poem is a kind of lecture on the love relationship between a man and a woman. In the first line of the poem Ovid writes "Should anyone here in Rome lack finesse at love-making / let him / try me—read my book, and results are guaranteed!" ("The Art of Love", lines 1-3). This long poem is divided into three books. In Book I Ovid gives a lecture on the art of love relationships; Book II is especially addressed to men, a lecture on how to win women's hearts; Book III is addressed to women, on how to act in front of men and how to win men's love.

Without having to be obscene, eroticism is step by step inserted in the poem with its climax in the art of sexual activity. A sexual relationship is a logical consequence of an intimate love between a man and a woman, and thus, describing sexual scenes will be inevitable.

*So the bed, as though consciously, has received its two lovers.
And the door is shut. Muse, you must wait outside:
They don't need you, now, to prompt their whispered endearment,
Their hands won't be idle, fingers will learn
What to do in those hidden parts where Love's unnoticed
Darts transfix the flesh*
(*"The Art of Love"*, Book 2, lines 7003-705)

Erotic expressions also appear when Ovid describes what men and women must do during their love making. For instance in Book 3, lines 773-775 "Let the girl with a pretty face lie supine, let the lady / Who boasts a good back be viewed from behind", or lines 781-782 "the girls who has perfect legs and bosom / Should lie sideways on, and make her lover stand", or the following lines:

*Keep up a flow of seductive whispered endearments,
Use sexy taboo words while you're making love,
And if nature's denied you the gift of achieving a climax,*

Moan as though you were coming, put in an act!
 ("The Art of Love", Book 2, lines 795-798).

The presentation of erotic lines in this poem is indispensable since the central idea of the poem is something to do with eroticism, i.e. the love relationship between a man and a woman. Omitting such erotic lines will spoil the main theme of the poem.

John Cleland's erotic masterpiece *Fanny Hill* (1748) can be another good example of the presence of eroticism as a central idea. This novel recalls the early disreputable life of Fanny Hill before finally she became a respectable married woman who was able to enjoy a happy romantic sexual life with her husband. On the surface, this novel is very close to pornography. In the later period after its publication, however, it rises to respectability. Its publisher, Penguin Books, claims that behind its erotic scenes this novel exemplifies the philosophy of libertinism and the sexual attitudes of 18th Century bourgeoisie. In her memoir, Fanny Hill opens the story by stating that in the scandalous stage of her life she could make "more observation on the characters and manners of the world" (*Fanny Hill*, p. 15). Now, the novel has its rightful place in the English canon as an excellent example of erotica (not pornography).

Using long-sentence style, John Cleland's language in describing erotic scenes is also artful and metaphoric.

Whilst they were in the heat of the action, guided by nature only, I stole my hand up my petticoats, and with fingers all on fire, seized, and yet more inflamed that center of all my senses: my heart palpitated, as if it would force its way through my bosom; I breathed with pain; I twisted my thighs, squeezed, and compressed the lips of that virgin slit..... (Fanny Hill, p. 42).

Her gallant began first, as she stood, to disengage her breasts, and restore them to the liberty of nature, from the easy confinement of no more than a pair of jumps; but on their coming out of view, we thought a new light was added to the room, so superiorly shining was their whiteness; then they rose in so happy a swell as to compose her a well-formed fullness of bosom that had such an effect on the eye as to seem flesh hardened into marble, and far surpassed even the whitest, in the life of its colors, white veined with blue. Who could refrain from such provoking enticements in reach? (Fanny Hill, p. 144-145).

Fanny Hills primarily tells the readers of the sexual behavior of the bourgeoisie at that period of time. The abundant sexual scenes in this novel are thematically justified.

A little bit different is the case of Anais Nin's *Delta of Venus*. Not intended as a criticism of the sexual behavior of a certain class of people, *Delta of Venus* is trying to prove that women, too, have their own perspectives in sexual matters; and to protest against the fact that so far sexual activities are always seen from a man's point of view. It is interesting to see Anais Nin's postscript in the preface of *Delta of Venus*.

In numerous passages I was intuitively using a woman's language, seeing sexual experience from a woman's point of view. I finally decide

to release the erotica for publication because it shows the beginning of efforts of a woman in a world that had been the domain of men (Delta of Venus, p. xiv).

The above quotation is perhaps the first reason not to arbitrarily judge *Delta of Venus* as pornography. As a feminist, Anais Nin uses her erotica to make the readers realize the existence of woman's point of view in erotic writings. The erotic sexual activities in *Delta of Venus* do not, therefore, function solely for the purpose of sexual-desire arousal. Beneath them lies a grand purpose: to show the essence of female sexuality and to see female perspectives on sexual activities. To understand this idea more clearly, consider the following quotations:

Mathilde's pleasure in caressing the men was so immense, and their hands passed over her body and fondled her so completely, so continuously, that she rarely had an orgasm. She would only become aware of this fact after men had left (Delta of Venus, p. 12).

When she closed her eyes, she felt he had many hands, which touched her everywhere, and many mouths, which passed so swiftly over her, and with a wolf-like sharpness, his teeth sank into her fleshiest parts. Naked now, he lay his full length over her. She enjoyed his weight on her, enjoyed being crushed under his body. She wanted him soldered to her, from mouth to feet (Delta of Venus, p. 77).

Women are the subjects in the above quotations, and they are presented as the ones who get the benefit in such sexual activities. The description of sexual scenes is therefore inevitable.

To close the discussion, it is appropriate to closely examine the legendary *Kama Sutra* by Vatsyayana. This is a book about male-female relationships, consisting of six parts: (1) The General Remarks, (2) Amorous Advance, (3) Acquiring a Wife, (4) Duties and Privileges of the Wife, (5) Relation with Other Men's Wives, and (6) About Courtesans. Referring to these six parts, the presence of erotic expressions and scenes is definitely needed. Compared to Ovid's "The Art of Love" (which was written in the form of lyrics and, thus, the language should conform to poetical rules), *Kama Sutra* is presented in more direct style and is constructed in the form of instructions. Any erotic narration in this text is significant to support the organic unity of the text: that is to reveal the secret and to provide guidelines in love-relationships and love-making.

2. Good places for giving blows are on the shoulders, the head, the gap between the breasts, the back, the sexual area, the sides (The Complete Kama Sutra, Part 2, p. 160).

17. Overcome with passion, she caresses him with one hand; with the other arm, she arouses him by touching him and massaging him, as though by chance (The Complete Kama Sutra, Part 5, p.341)

Considering the themes and the sexual issues explored in the above

literary writings, the presence of eroticism is inevitable. It must be there because it is what the writings are about, i.e. the central idea of the writings. Referring to Foucault's idea about sexuality, *Delta of Venus*, "The Art of Love", *Fanny Hill*, and *Kama Sutra* might be classified into *ars erotica* in which sexuality is presented in an artistic form (writing) and in an artful way.

Conclusion

Although found in many literary works from all over the world, and from any period of time, the existence of eroticism is somewhat a dichotomy, a double-edged sword. Including it might be beneficial for some reasons, but at the same time might also provide an aspect which shatters the unity of the text itself. Thus, the insertion of eroticism in literary texts should be in accordance with its purpose and context. Otherwise it may degrade the texts into less aesthetic ones, and even worse into pornography. From the above discussion, several points can be drawn.

Firstly, in all the works under discussion, eroticism always includes two common and universally-accepted aspects: (1) the description (either literal or metaphorical) of sexually-arousing parts of a female (and sometimes a male) body, and (2) the description of scenes of sexual activities. However, since this world is male-dominated, male perspectives are prevalent and as a consequence female bodies are much more frequently explored (*note: in gay or lesbian literature, the case might be totally different*).

Secondly, related to the development and unity of the story (thus, eroticism is seen as one intrinsic element), eroticism might be positioned in three different ways: (1) as a peripheral element (i.e. unimportant and can actually be omitted), (2) as an integral element (i.e. part of plot development, if omitted they will ruin the story), and (3) as the central element (i.e. the presence of eroticism is inevitable).

Thirdly, with regard to their role and function in the delivery of the theme message, these erotic expressions might be used in a story as (1) appealing elements to draw the readers' attention and for further purposes of for example: keeping readers reading, satisfying readers' expectations, breaking readers' tension, and preventing readers from boredom; (2) supporting devices to convey the writer's ideas (i.e. only one of several other devices used to convey the same ideas); and, (3) as the main topics of the story (i.e. the main topics to be discussed in the text—thus, eroticism for eroticism's sake).

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