THE WAJANG AS A PHILOSOPHICAL THEME*

P. J. Zoetmulder, S.J.

There exist large numbers of modern Javanese texts relating to the wajang. There are, in particular, collections of short resumés of wajang lakon, that is, of plots or scenarios of wajang performances. These collections, called pakem, are more or less manuals for dalang and may contain, apart from the stories themselves in bare outline, technical instructions concerning the music which is to accompany the various scenes, the chants sung by the dalang, etc. A good dalang would, however, consider it beneath his dignity to use these pakem, as he is the bearer of a tradition transmitted orally from father to son or from guru to pupil. That is why there are so few "librettos" of these Javanese "operas" written down just as the dalang speaks them in his eight-to-nine-hour-long performance. Those that exist were written down in the nineteenth century for the benefit of those westerners whose interest in the wajang was aroused and who wanted to read and to study at their leisure what they had heard in those fleeting moments when the wajang was performed, or to study the peculiarities of the dalang's language. Indeed, these pakem (as manuals) can hardly be called literature at all. The complete lakon texts are only to be thought of as literature in a rather general way. But during the literary revival at the court of Surakarta in the early nineteenth century the wajang stories also became a source of inspiration for important works of considerable literary merit. Some of them, put into verse, belong to the best specimens of modern Javanese poetry.

My subject here, however, is only indirectly connected with the wajang and belongs to a quite different domain of modern Javanese letters, the domain of religious and in particular mystico-religious literature. Like nearly all Javanese literature, it is written in verse, but the literary form is of minor importance. It is not read because of the poetic value it might have, but for what it teaches. For these works contain an introduction to and an exposition of a higher knowledge, a gnosis, not destined for the common people. They intend to give to one who is striving after perfection the final answers to the all-important questions about the meaning of life and existence and the end of man. They teach man's place and position in the universal order, the cosmos, and his relationship to the divine. The knowledge about these fundamental matters leads to the perfection the student craves, or better: it is itself the highest perfection. This knowledge, which is perfection, this gnosis, is in Javanese called ngèlmu from the Arabic 'ilm (knowledge), or often more explicitly ngèlmu kasampurnan (knowledge of perfection). It is a wisdom which should remain hidden from the common people, from the uninitiated. But he who has got an inkling of its existence or has heard vague allusions to it in veiled terms will feel so attracted

*. This is a revised version of a lecture delivered at the University of Hawaii, Honolulu, on March 5, 1971.
that he will go in search of it and will spare no pains to attain it. For him it is, to use a Biblical expression, the precious pearl, in order to buy which one sells all that he has. One sets out in quest of a guru, who is able and willing to introduce one into this esoteric field, becomes his pupil, and lives with him for some time. Finally, at the end of the instruction, the teacher imparts what he considers the essence of his doctrine, often in a short and intentionally obscure formula, communicated at dead of night in an atmosphere of secrecy and mystery. It may happen that the newly initiated, after having gone away and lived with his treasure for some time, feels that it does not give him the satisfaction he had expected from it, or perhaps he suspects that what has been given is after all not the highest obtainable in the field of gnosis--because his guru was unable or unwilling to give him more. Then he will set out again in search of another and better guru and so, wandering about on his quest, he goes from one place to another, until finally he has the feeling of having got what he desired and of having at last attained his goal.

I have in my possession a set of exercise books, thumbed and soiled, in which such a seeker of ngelmu wrote down his experiences in a journal of his years-long quest, of his expectations and disillusionments, of all the guru he visited and of the differing solutions he received to his questions. As I received it from this student's son and had known the man himself, it was for me a striking proof that what I knew from my books was still an actuality, very much alive not long ago, and perhaps still alive at the present time.

This gnosis is basically a wisdom for the elect, a kind of esoteric or secret knowledge, and the personal contact between the pupil and his guru, the initiandus and his initiator, is considered extremely important. We find this idea expressed also in old literature, Sanskrit as well as Old Javanese, and especially in the Mahabharata, in the relationship between the Pandawa and their teachers, Bhishma and Droña. When the Old Javanese Bharatayuddha describes the scene immediately before the great battle, when Arjuna hesitates at the sight of his adversaries who for the major part are his own relatives, the text says:

On seeing them, Arjuna was visibly overcome with emotion and sadness, as these enemies were all his kindred, without any stranger among them. There were his brothers [cousins] from his father's as well as from his mother's side, his uncles . . . and among them first of all Bhishma and the brahmin [that is, Droña], his own teachers.

It is above all the idea that he has to fight his teachers which is repellent to him. Before the battle starts, the Pandawa come down from their chariots, on foot and unarmed, and proceed to the other side to ask forgiveness, not from their relatives there, but from these same teachers, Bhishma and Droña, for being forced to fight them.

What we find in Old Javanese fiction lives on still in the reality of the present day. I recall vividly the close relationship which existed between Prince Mangkunegara VII and Ir. J. Moens, both famous in the field of Javanese studies. The former
was the last great ruler of the Mangkunegaran principality, the latter a western scholar (born in Indonesia) of great brilliance and originality. This was a relationship which was much more than common friendship. Moens explained to me that they had sat at the feet of the same guru, and therefore were "brothers" in a very special sense.

In spite of the esoteric character of this wisdom and the personal character of its communication, it appears that there has never been an absolute prohibition to commit it to writing. Mystico-religious treatises of this kind belong to the oldest products of Old Javanese literature. They constitute also a very substantial part of the religious literature written in modern Javanese. One can get an impression how popular this literature still is in certain circles by visiting a bookshop in Jogjakarta or Surakarta. Since Bahasa Indonesia has become the official language of Indonesia, there has been very little printed in Javanese. Yet for these mystico-religious books or booklets there is still a good market, and the shelves are filled with newly printed treatises on Javanese ngelmu, either reprints of already existing works or modern adaptations.

It is now that we turn to the subject of this paper: the wajang as a theme in mystico-religious literature. Wajang similes were used in the ancient Old Javanese literature, but there they were for the most part merely a literary device, a poetic figure of style. But in one case, in Indra's instruction to Arjuna the Arjunawiwaha the purpose of a wajang simile was to illustrate and to make intelligible a certain aspect of doctrine. We find also similar wajang comparisons used in later modern Javanese speculative literature. Here comparisons and allegories play an extremely important role. They serve to enliven and to make palatable expositions which by their very nature are theoretical and somewhat arid. They serve also to illustrate the abstract doctrine with concrete examples which appeal to the imagination, bringing some light to obscurities and explaining or even proving argumentation. Exempla non probant (examples prove nothing) may be a sound scholastic axiom, but those who practice it consistently are few, and for most people examples have a great convincing power.

At the same time, however, comparisons and allegories in modern Javanese religious literature achieve something which in a certain sense is the opposite of elucidation, but which in this esoteric literature is valued very highly and more or less belongs to its nature. The supreme wisdom is not something to be communicated in plain and unambiguous terms or to be revealed in its naked truth. It has to be partly veiled and hidden. In this way it remains a mystery. To the seeker of wisdom perhaps it is more attractive and valuable in this form, but it certainly serves also to preserve and to protect the doctrine against the unwarranted intrusions of the uninitiated or from attacks on the part of more puritan Islamic orthodoxy. From a strictly Islamic point of view, this wisdom may seem very near the boundary which separates orthodoxy from heterodoxy or, indeed, to have crossed it.

There is, finally, a third factor to be taken into consideration. Zeller, in his Philosophie der Griechen, speaks about the use of comparisons in Neo-Platonism:

This need of using images as a means of expression points to a lack of clearness in thinking; it shows that the speaker has grasped his idea only in and
through the image, and consequently, only vaguely and
indeterminately. It will, in nine out of ten cases, have its cause in the fact that vagueness is the only
means to cover up a contradiction.

We must also take into account this possibility in the case of
Javanese ngelmu, in which, as we shall see, the essential unity
between God and man is a central topic. That there is always a
difficulty in uniting the Absolute with the Limited, the Uncon-
ditioned with the Conditioned, will be immediately apparent.

Moving from generalities to the concrete, we will now con-
sider a specific example of how the wajang simile can be used.
The example is taken not from any of the theoretical treatises
mentioned above but from the Serat Tjen tüni, a very important
work of modern Javanese literature, written probably at the
beginning of the nineteenth century. Although composed in the
form of a story, it is a veritable encyclopedia of Javanese lore
and customs and especially of the Javanese ngelmu. The principal
characters are all ardent seekers of esoteric wisdom. On their
wanderings through the country in Central and East Java, they
miss no opportunity to discuss this wisdom whenever they find a
knowledgeable host.

In the passage used as an illustration here, they find them-
selves together at a village feast, where, among other perform-
ances, a wajang play is staged. Most of those who are present
belong to a world in which the specific commandments and pro-
hibitions of Islamic law are living realities to be reckoned with.
So it happens that, as they observe the wajang puppets moving on
the lighted screen, a question arises which for the orthodox
Moslems among them is a matter of conscience: what of the injunc-
tion, going back to the Prophet and the earliest Islamic law,
ever to represent human beings in painting, sculpture, or other-
wise? Do not wajang puppets fall under this prohibition, and is
not the wajang play therefore in open defiance of Islamic
orthodoxy? Kidang Wiratjapa, the host, may perhaps feel that the
question touches him personally and that it is indirectly a
censure of his conduct for making the wajang part of his feast.
Yet he shows no embarrassment and, as a clever debater, begins his
reply by conceding the objection in part and by acknowledging that
it is well founded. He who sees the story represented by the
wajang as no more than a tale of human beings, however remote in
a legendary past, is indeed guilty of misconduct and transgresses
the Law. The results are there for everyone to see. Once a man
grows addicted to the wajang and becomes so enslaved to his passion
for it that he goes from one performance to another, he ends by
forgetting his religion altogether. To him Batara Guru (the supreme
god in the wajang story) means more than Allah; Arjuna and
Wrekodara mean more than the Prophet and his companions. But in
regard to himself (the host) and to people such as his much honored
guests, matters are quite different. They are not beguiled by
outward appearances but see through them to what is hidden behind
these stories of human events. They are able to grasp the lessons
conveyed to them with the help of these figures carved in leather.
One has to thrust through to what he calls the "perfect insight,
the deeper meaning of the wajang, the innermost truth and reality,
which remains hidden to the common man, and reveals itself to the
initiate only." In the eyes of those who strive after perfection
this is all a mere symbol pointing to God. The true meaning of the
dalang and of the wajang is discovered when one sees them as an
external expression of the various ways in which God acts and works
in the world.

In order to explain this point, the host then proposes to his
guests the following allegory, which, as we shall see, is only an
introduction.

The illuminated screen is the visible world. The
puppets, which are arranged in an orderly fashion at
both edges of the screen at the beginning of the play,
are the different varieties and categories created by
God. The gedebog, the banana trunk into which the
dalang sticks his puppets whenever they have no role
to fulfill in the play, is the surface of the earth.
The bléntjong, the lamp over the head of the dalang
behind the screen, which brings to life the shadows
on the other side, is the lamp of life. The gamelan,
the orchestra which accompanies the play with its
motives and melodies fixed in accordance with the
various persons and events projected on the screen,
represents the harmony and mutual relationship of
everything that occurs in the world.

The creatures, which appear in the world in
uncounted numbers and in an astounding variety of
forms, may become an obstacle to true insight,
impeding understanding of the deeper meaning of
all that is created. He who refuses to be led by
one who is wiser than he [that is: the uninitiated
who is unwilling to put himself under the guidance
of a guru] will never see that God is in and behind
everything. He is deceived by form and shape. His
sight becomes troubled and confused, and he loses
himself in a void, while the true significance of
the universe remains hidden to him. He goes astray
on a path full of obstacles for, lacking the right
knowledge, the true meaning of all that appears
before his eyes continues to evade him.

God is not described explicitly as the dalang conducting the
show. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to recognize here a repre­
sentation of the relationship between Creator and Creation, which is
also found in the religious literature of other countries. God is
the invisible puppeteer of the shadow play or marionette theater,
who holds in His hands and moves every single human being in all his
actions, and who orders and guides all events according to His
Sovereign Will. In Islamic mysticism we find this idea in the words
of the great Ibn-al-'Arabi:

Whosoever wishes to grasp the full significance
of the truth that it is God who works behind the
veil of created things, let him observe the shadow
theater and the shadows on the screen. . . . Con­
fronted with the world in its manifold shape, most
people behave like those little children in the
audience whose minds are wholly absorbed by what
appears on the stage. Only those who are versed
in divine things, the "knowers of God," reflect
and recognize that Allah has made it into a symbol for His servants so that they may understand that the world is related to God in the same way as the puppets are related to him who moves them.

In an example from India, Jñānadeva, a mystic of the twelfth century, writes in his Jñānesāvarī:

Man vainly says that he is the agent of actions. He forgets that he is only an occasional cause. . . . Creatures are like inanimate puppets in a show. The dolls fall down in a confused fashion as soon as the string that holds them together is taken away.

It is the creatures' total dependence on their Creator, and also the danger of becoming so preoccupied with the created as to forget the Creator, which is expressed by these images. But let us go back to our host and his esoteric speculations. After having used the allegory of the wajang to explain that the world can be an obstacle to finding God, he abandons for a moment the wajang comparison to choose different imagery: Creation is like a piece of writing, left by God to be read by those that love Him, a communication from Him by which they may learn to know Him, or at least may be incited to inquire into the full truth that is expressed by these symbols in an imperfect way.

The beauty of that writing inspires one with a longing of love; it arouses the desire to go beyond these revelations of His Divine Will and to penetrate into the cognition of His Divine Being, with which this Will is identical. For He is the Most High, in whose Power it is to create and to direct the universe. His Sovereignty is without alteration. He is the One only and no other is associated with Him. His Holiness is supreme and eternal.

And then, suddenly, the comparison with the wajang is taken up again and presented in a form which is so full of paradox that it must have had a confusing and bewildering effect on the audience.

Inflamed by love, the eminent dalang takes the decision to make himself known. He wants to be seen; he prepares himself to reveal his secret being by the use of symbols in such a way that what becomes visible seems to be a plurality, although He is One and there is nothing beside Him. He is like a dalang in a state of rapture and beside himself. There are no wajang puppets to be seen and, nevertheless, he speaks as if in a trance. It is not his intention to present a lakon [the special plot chosen for the performance] and, nevertheless, the whole story is finished with, complete with all its necessary parts: the hero has accomplished his apprenticeship in the house of a guru and received his initiation, and the story has been concluded in the traditional way with a wedding. He who hires the dalang to perform the play is not yet there, and lo, the man has already received his pay. The play is finished, and the dalang has not
yet started. The story proceeds and develops, although the kekayon has not yet been pulled out of the banana trunk.

The accumulation of paradoxes continues.

The screen is still and deserted, and nevertheless full of life and motion. The gamelan orchestra drones, but not a single instrument is visible, no kečuk, keťêr, or gender, no violin or flute, no saran or gambang, no drum or gong. The play is about to start, the puppets stand ready—and the story has already ended. But where is he, then, the puppeteer? The spectators feel confused and bewildered, unable to understand it, as if overcome by sleep. Who is it that invited the dalang to give a performance, while the puppets were not even made ready?

But now the host puts an end to his guests' bewilderment. Here are his own words:

This all is an expression in symbolic language of the Highest Wisdom. Its meaning is as follows: God Most Holy is the exalted dalang. He, the Creator of the Universe, Who has made it all, has unalterably predestined and fixed our lot before we were born. Fortune or misfortune, a short or a long lifespan, success or failure, it has been apportioned to us when we were still leading a hidden existence in the place of concealment. At the moment man is conceived in the womb, his life story has already been enacted and completed. Nothing is missing; nothing is superfluous. It is the wisdom of the All-Knowing which has arranged everything to the last detail. The Most High is the exalted dalang. The outward shape and the division into categories and species of all visible things, in short the coming into appearance of everything that exists, these are the puppets on the screen. It is the dalang who disposes and guides them in all their actions and movements.

This explanation resolves the apparent contradictions and brings light into the obscurity. God is the Most High, One without a second, alone in His Divine Solitude, before the Creation comes forth from His hands. But it is not an aloneness which is emptiness, not a solitude which is devoid of life, but which is instead fullness and richness. For His Infinite Being contains everything, and His Supreme Intellect and Sovereign Will have predisposed and arranged all things before they come into existence.

These beliefs could all be fitted very well into the doctrine of Allah and his takdîr (predestination) as it is taught in orthodox Islam. It is, however, not this doctrine which is alluded to by the wajang allegory as developed by Kidang Wiratjapa, the host in the Tjentini story, but rather the allusion is to a conception of the

1. The kekayon is the trigonal figure in the middle of the screen, which is set aside when the play begins.
All that exists forms one great unity, which is seen as unfolding and developing along seven stages or grades of being, the seven martabat. These seven stages range from the undifferentiated, unqualified and undivided One to the concrete fullness of the visible world, with the Perfect Man as the final stage. He is the end of the emanation, of the descent of being from the One to the Multiple. He is the starting point for the reascent. All stages bear Arabic terms. The first three are called Ahadlyah, Wahda, and Wahidiyah, terms which all contain the word "One" and connote a certain form of "oneness." Ahadlyah is the stage of complete non-differentiation. Individuation begins in Wahda but only as a state of general cognoscibility and of potential distinction. Not until the third stage, Wahidiyah, do distinct notions arise. These three stages constitute the sphere of the intelligible and the abstract, as distinguished from the phenomenal and the concrete. It is the sphere of the divine and partakes of its Oneness. In the first stage we find the Absolute in its transcendence, inexpressible in words, inconceivable by concepts. The second stage is that in which the Absolute contemplates itself and sees its own being as containing the potentiality for a differentiation into multiplicity. This contemplation develops in the third stage to a cognition, in which all things are conceived according to their proper individuality, with their proper qualities and activities, but still joined together in this one divine cognition and so constituting a oneness-in-multiplicity. The transition from the One to the Multiple, from potential to actual plurality, is called in orthodox terminology (although philosophically inexact) the transition from the sphere of the Creator to that of the Created. In the triple division of the following stages (the world of the spirits, the world of forms, and their combination in the world of the bodies), we perceive an echo of Aristotelian hylomorphism, adapted to the needs of the Neo-Platonic system. This is not, however, relevant to our subject here.

What the wajang passage quoted above is intended to express in its paradoxical way is the divine sphere of the three first martabat. In this sphere the whole world of created beings is already present but in an invisible way. All beings have already enacted their life stories before they have been begun. The gamelan is sounding its melodies in perfect harmony and in the right arrangement before there is a single instrument to be seen.

In the explanation given by the host to enlighten his audience the expressions which he uses to speak about God as the exalted dalang point in the same direction. They are what I might call "technical" terms, which are in common use in the expositions of the wujudiyah, the doctrine of the oneness of all that exists, in which the cosmic scheme of the seven stages has been inserted. It forms the doctrinal background of most of Sumatran mysticism and of Javanese mysticism as well, insofar as the latter is closely connected with Islamic ideas and thought. These allusions were enough for those among his audience who were no strangers to this field. For them another passage in the allegory, omitted above, also would not have had the obscurity which
it may have for us. After having said, "Who is it that invited the 
dalang to give a performance, while the puppets were not even made 
ready?" the host continues: "The story [the lakon] is that of the 
Prince of Janggala on his wanderings over the earth, while the 
kraton of Janggala accompanies him and does not remain behind in a 
far distance." The Prince of Janggala is indubitably Panji, who 
leaves his kraton to wander about, concealing his identity and giving 
wajang performances under the name Dalang Jaruman. The meaning of 
this passage cannot have caused difficulties for a really knowledgeable 
audience. In other places in this mystico-religious literature, Panji 
is used as a symbol for God, present in everything in the world, as 
it is his emanation, and thus, as it were, wandering about in dis­
guise, unnoticed by those who are ignorant of his real identity. That 
he seems to have left his kraton, the divine sphere, is only an 
ilusion. The visible world is an unfolding, a manifestation of 
his divine being. It is essentially one with him. He has not left 
his kraton but has taken it with him. That the world has its own 
existence is an illusion. Apart from him there is no reality at all.

Thus, here there are echoes of Neo-Platonism, of the medieval 
Arabic monism of Ibn-al-'Arabi and his school, of the Sumatran 
mysticism of unity, and all included in a wajang performance in a 
village of the Javanese countryside. This mixture is typical for a 
culture which through the centuries underwent influences of various 
kinds, absorbing them without losing its own specific character.

We might think this allegory very profound and its teaching 
esoteric in the highest degree. But Kidang Wiratjapa appears to be 
of a different opinion. When he continues his exposition of the 
ggelmu, occasioned by the wajang play before him, it turns out that 
the foregoing is only the outer aspect of what has to be considered 
as the "true meaning of the religion of the Prophet." There is an 
inner aspect, too. "Outer and inner" are expressed in Javanese with 
terms borrowed from the Arabic: lair-batin. These are the stereo­
typed expressions in this literature for "exoteric-esoteric." So 
now we are prepared for a sequel to these wajang speculations, in­
tended to impart a still higher wisdom, a second part which is valued 
more highly than the first.

Now the dalang is no longer presented in opposition to his 
puppets. He is no longer the man who handles them from the outside, 
but rather he enters them and moves them from within. The image is, 
therefore, no longer based on the reality of what is seen in the 
wajang. But can there be any objections to that? Is such an uncom­
mon and rather perplexing image not exactly what is wanted and most 
appropriate to convey that higher insight into the relationship 
between God and man, which only a few are allowed to approach?

Now everything takes place inside man. That which gives life 
and moves him and causes him to exist is like the dalang who has 
entered his puppets. There he lives and acts in an invisible way. 
Only he who has not yet attained that higher wisdom thinks that the 
puppets move themselves and shape their own life stories. We have 
here the idea of the indwelling of God in man, the concept of the 
one divine life present in every person, a theme that again and again 
recurs in the nggelmu.

The first part of our wajang allegory was based on the wujudiyah, 
the doctrine of the oneness of all existence, a doctrine which had 
developed within Islam and which betrayed its origin in its Arabic
terminology. Now, in the second part, we are dealing with a different mysticism, which I might call suksma-mysticism. In its doctrinal content and terminology it points to India. The individual soul is part of the universal soul, which dwells in the innermost depth of man. To find the Absolute, one need only look into oneself. In India the divine element in man is generally called \textit{atman} (in its transcendental form, \textit{paramatman}, the supreme soul). In Javanese it is designated by various terms: \textit{rasa}, in which the meanings of Sanskrit \textit{rasa} (essence, taste) and Sanskrit \textit{rahasya} (secret, mystery) have blended; \textit{urip} (life); and especially \textit{suksma} (the immaterial, the soul), to which is prefixed \textit{sanghyang} when used to denote its supreme state. The suksma in man is united and indeed identical with \textit{Sanghyang Sukasma}, the Divine Absolute.

So, we find in the esoteric part of Wiratjapa's exposition passages such as:

\textit{Dalang and puppets, the gamelan, the banana-trunk, the screen, and the lamp, they are all united in one being. The dalang is life itself. The body, acting and speaking, is the puppet appearing on the screen of the world and moved by that life. \ldots The entering of the suksma into the body is the entering of the dalang into the puppet. \ldots So we are all dominated by the suksma in us, which is life itself. Our life story is the lakon of the wajang. We are the spectacle ourselves.}

But who is the spectator? The host answers this question somewhat obscurely: "The witness of all that lives." The meaning of these words becomes clear in another \textit{ngelmu} text which contains the popular story of Wrekodara, or Bhima, the second of the Pândawa brothers, who in the Javanese tradition has also become a seeker of wisdom, sent out in quest of the elixir of life. After a dangerous journey which takes him to the bottom of the sea, he meets Dewarutji and is initiated into the "knowledge of perfection." His guru, too, uses the comparison of the wajang to explain this teaching. He says explicitly that \textit{Sanghyang Sukasma} is the owner of the house who decides to give a wajang performance and who therefore invites the dalang, but he stays in his house and remains unseen. This dalang is the individual soul, the one who moves the puppets but from the inside. Here the relationship between the Divine in its Absolute-ness, unqualified and immutable, inaccessible to the senses and to the intellect and, on the other hand, its partial manifestation as the individual soul in man has found an appropriate expression.

In the foregoing we have seen the two principal trends of thought in Javanese mysticism. On the one hand, all that exists was seen as an emanation or diffusion of the One, the Absolute, united with it and not separated, in a unity of being. On the other hand, God was said to dwell in the innermost part of man as his deepest reality, his soul, his true ego. These two trends come together in and are superseded by a much more radical doctrine, a complete monism, in which every distinction between God and man vanishes. It was the aim of both trends to achieve union with the Divine. They were an attempt to bridge the abyss which, according to orthodox Islamic doctrine, separates the Absolute from the
Contingent, the Creator from his Creation, the Master from the Servant (in Javanese, 
guati and kawula). In ngelmu the final goal of all 
endeavors to attain perfection is summed up in the words manunggiling 
kawula-guati, "the becoming-one of Master and Servant." In the terms 
of the wajang allegory, it is an endeavor to understand the true 
nature of the relationship between dalang and wajang, between the 
puppeteer and his puppets. Now, however, the question is unavoidable: 
Has not every relationship an element of reciprocity? The puppets 
depend upon the dalang in all their doings. But is not the reverse 
equally true? Does not the dalang depend upon his puppets? That is 
indeed what observation of the wajang teaches us. The puppets move 
in the way the dalang moves them; they say what the dalang causes them 
to say. But is the dalang totally independent of his puppets? Can he 
do with them what he likes, make them move and speak as his fancy takes 
him? Can he cause the demon king to act as if he were a princess, or 
Arjuna as if he were his clownish companion Pêtruk? The idea is too 
absurd to be taken seriously. It is therefore evident that there is a 
mutual interdependency. Without dalang no wajang, but also without 
wajang no dalang. And the same applies to what is signified in the 
esoteric comparison, the relationship between God and man. As long 
as one speaks about the union between master and servant, the very 
words master and servant include the concept of mutual dependency. 
Without master no servant, but also without servant no master. Can 
manunggiling kawula-guati, the becoming-one of master and servant, 
be the highest perfection, if there is still an element of dependency 
in it? Can it fulfill the aspiration of him who strives after Absolute 
Oneness, radically and without compromise, if it is a union of two 
beings? For him the final word must be: There is no master and there 
is no servant.

The confession of faith in orthodox Islam is: Lā ilâha illâ 'llâh 
("There is no God but Allah"). But he who seeks Absolute Unity retains 
only the first part: There is no God. That is the highest wisdom. 
That is the unconditioned surrender to the quest of the One, which is 
true Islam. And he is perfectly aware that in this way he has placed 
himself outside the fold of Moslem orthodoxy. We find statements like: 
One is not a true Moslem so long as one has not become a kafir, an 
infidel. Or, again,

What is the final word about dalang and puppets? 
What is the highest truth concerning master and 
servant? . . . Dalang and wajang, master and 
servant, even your own being, these are something 
relative only, which do not deserve consideration. 
This is the final solution which ngelmu offers. Every-
thing has vanished from sight, overpowered by the One. 
The perfect faithful, prophets and saints, have be-
come blind and have lost hearing, speech, and taste. 
Soul and body are absorbed into nothingness, as in 
the time when they did not yet exist. This is True 
Perfection: to have done away with all praise and 
worship and with the acknowledgment of any as Lord. 
All duality has been eliminated in a state of Pure 
Nothingness. The servant has gone, without becoming 
master. This is the highest vision.

With this climax our survey of the various forms of Javanese 
gnosis has come to an end. We proceeded from the doctrine of the
essential Oneness of all being, via that of the indwelling of the Divine in man, to an extreme and radical monism. We saw how the basic tenets of each of them were illustrated and explained with the help of a comparison with the wajang theater, and how in particular the relationship between dalang and puppets was used to illustrate the relationship between the Absolute and the Contingent, between God and man. Here we reached also a sort of climax, albeit a rather negative one. When monism was carried through to its logical conclusion, the distinction between dalang and puppets was seen as the last vestige of a duality which had been definitely done away with. They did not merge into each other; they just vanished. And with this rather suicidal end our discussion, too, must close.