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CULTURAL WORK

Charlie Chaplin di Ngamplang, 1927 / Charlie Chaplin at Ngamplang, 1927

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Abstract

'Charlie Chaplin di Ngamplang, 1927' is an Indonesian-language poem by Australian poet Ian Campbell, and is a humorous meditation upon certain imaginary events that befell Charlie Chaplin at the Dutch colonial-era hill station of Ngamplang in West Java in 1927. In historical terms Chaplin did in fact visit the Dutch East Indies three times between 1927 and 1932, including the area around Ngamplang. The poem was included in Campbell's poetry and prose collection *Tak ada Peringatan* (Vivid Publishing, Fremantle, 2013). The Indonesian language version of the poem first appeared in 2012 in the literary pages of the Jakarta mass media daily *Kompas*. An English-language back translation from the Indonesian is also included here.

Keywords

Ian Campbell; Charlie Chaplin; Ngamplang, West Java

Charlie Chaplin di Ngamplang, 1927

Konon bisa dilihat dari kejauhan, bertongkat,
berjalan kaki secara pincang;
kepincangan asli atau kepincangan palsu,
tergantung pendapat Anda, saya kira,
'kepincangan' antara kebenaran dan kepalsuan,
seperti sajak ini.

tapi lebih dekat terlihat kedua kakinya terentang,
seperti di garis lurus,
lurusnya, tidak berbelit-belit apa pun,
kaki-kaki aneh ini. seperti prajurit dalam barisan,
sejajar di deretannya, ayo.

pada umumnya pegawai-pegawai dan pelayan-pelayan
di hotel Ngamplang ini tidak melaporkan permintaan
atau permohonan 'khusus' atau 'luar biasa'
dari tamu ini, ahli dunia film *silent* di Hollywood.

ketika beliau bermain golf hanya mengarahkan
bola golf dengan menggunakan kaki-kakinya berderet-deret,
diliputi sepatu-sepatu hitam dan cemerlang, sebagai garis
lurusnya. pegolf. seorang pendek, Charlie sangat kuat;
dalam aksi memukul bola golf, dengan tongkat jalannya,
putter-nya.

kadang-kadang beliau suka turun lewat tangga-tangga
dari ruang umum ke arah kolam renang pribadi hotel
yang letaknya memberi pemandangan indah
ke lembah Garoet jauh di bawahnya.

aduh. suatu hari, sebab alasan yang tak bisa dipahami
Charlie turun ke bawah, secepat kilat, hilang:
dalam kenyataan sudah terjatuh di kolam.
topinya terapung-apung beberapa detik, seperti kapal,
sampai tenggelam, basah dan berat, di bawah air.

yang beruntung tongkat jalannya mengapung,
pelayan-pelayan hotel mengangkatnya dari kolam,
didampingi oleh Charlie yang basah pakaiannya total.

handuk-handuk disediakan oleh pelayan-pelayan
supaya badan kurusnya bisa dikeringkan lagi.

kasihan selama Charlie dibawa kembali ke kamarnya di hotel
ada 'kesulitan'—tongkat jalannya patah ketika pelayan-pelayan
coba membawa Charlie lewat pintu-pintu berputar-putar
di belakang hotel.

konon manajemen hotel menawari Charlie membayar
ongkos tongkat dan topi baru. beliau hanya senyum tanpa
berkata apa pun; tetap di hotel beberapa hari lagi, tanpa
kecelakaan, atau kejadian.

bersantai-santai di tempat tidur sebelum, dengan kesehatan
refreshed, melanjutkan jadwal perjalanan
—ke Hollywood, lewat Bandoeng.

(Jakarta/Sydney—May/August 2011)

Charlie Chaplin at Ngamplang, 1927 (English-language back translation from the Indonesian)

They say that he could be observed from afar, with that walking stick of his,
walking as if with a kind of a limp, or at least unbalanced;
whether it was a 'true limp' or just make-believe, even false,
depends on your point of view, I guess;
let's say, like this poem actually,
somewhere between truth and falsehood.

But the closer you came the easier it was to see that
both his feet were stretched out as if in a straight line,
in fact there seemed to be no curve at all,
such strange feet. Like soldiers on parade,
in line, ready-set-march, let's go.

Rarely, almost never, the employees and waiters at the Ngamplang Hotel
reported any 'special' or 'extraordinary' requests
from our guest, that doyen of the world of silent film in Hollywood.

When he played golf he simply aimed the ball by using
his spread-eagled feet as his line of play; those feet, covered
in shoes so black and shiny.

Yes, he was a golfer. For a short man he was really quite powerful;
as he put all his strength into his swing to hit the ball,

his walking stick now doubling as his own ‘personal putter.’
Sometimes Charlie liked to go down the steps
from the hotel’s recreational room at the rear
to the private swimming pool whose
splendid location gave commanding views over the Garoet valley far below.
But, my goodness. One day, for reasons that just cannot be explained,
he went down, then in a flash, had disappeared.
In truth, he had fallen into the pool.
His bowler hat was afloat for a few minutes, like a ship,
then it too disappeared, sunk below the water-line,
drenched, a dead-weight.
But fortunately his walking stick continued to float;
servants leaped to fish it out of the pool,
along with a right Charlie hanging on for grim life, clothes wet right through.
Miraculously, servants appeared from out of nowhere,
hand towels at the ready, in arms outstretched, to dry that wafer-thin body of his.
But even then, while Charlie was being brought back to his room in the hotel
there was another ‘little difficulty’; his walking stick
caught in the revolving doors at the rear of the hotel, snapping in two.
They say that hotel management offered Charlie to pay for the cost
of a new hat and stick; at this point he just smiled and said nothing.
remained at the hotel several more days, without further accident or mishap,
recuperated, rested in his bed, before, somewhat ‘refreshed,’ continuing his journey,
on schedule—to Hollywood, via Bandoeng!

(Jakarta/Sydney—May/August 2011)