



Razak Abdul Aziz's *Pepatah Episodes*: Re-Imaging the Malay Proverbs through Piano Music

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Abstract

Proverb sits under the umbrella of figurative language and is used to sweeten speeches. In Malay, *pepatah* is the equivalent of this form of figurative language. Razak Abdul Aziz, a Malaysian composer, selected a set of Malay proverbs and adapted them into his piano work, *Pepatah Episodes*. The composer follows the tradition of piano programme music that uses figurative language elements championed by composers such as Alexander Scriabin, Claude Debussy, and Maurice Ravel. This paper aims to investigate the *pepatahs* chosen to be paired with the written music, expounding the programme in the movements for piano. Using the programme music analysis framework by Burkholder et al. (2014) and Kregor (2015), the finding shows that the composer chose the *pepatahs* for one of the three (3) portrayals: (i) imageries in the *pepatah* (ii) imageries in the meaning, and (iii) imageries in *pepatah* and meaning. The programme analysis shows that from the nine (9) movements written for piano, four (4) movements portray imageries in the *pepatah*, three (3) movements portray imageries in the meaning, and two (2) movements portray imageries in the *pepatah* and meaning. Razak Abdul Aziz challenges the conventions of programme music by having the *pepatah* set after the music is written, demanding the performer to read it aloud before performing and having the portrayal of the *pepatah* in the mentioned ways. This provides a different perspective for other composers to produce works using similar frameworks and scholars to analyse musical works.

Keywords: proverb, piano programme music, Razak Abdul Aziz, programme music analysis, Malaysian contemporary composer

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INTRODUCTION

This section provides the necessary background for this paper. It begins with an introduction to proverbs according to scholars from the English and Malay context and recognising it as part of a bigger literary umbrella – figurative language. It is then followed by briefly mentioning Razak Abdul Aziz's *Pepatah Episodes* and short biography, and related past studies

on this composer, citing scholarly and non-scholarly sources.

Proverb, *pepatah*, and Razak Abdul Aziz

What is a proverb? Various scholars have made many attempts to define proverbs through time. Mieder (1996) defines proverbs as:

concise traditional statements of apparent truths with currency among the folk. More elaborately stated, proverbs are

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short, generally known sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form and that are handed down from generation to generation (p. 597).

Winick (2003) agrees with Mieder (1996, p. 595), stating that proverbs are "brief (sentence-length) textualized utterances which derive a sense of wisdom, wit, and authority, from explicit and intentional intertextual reference to a tradition of previous similar wisdom utterances." As "proverbs are part of the language medium of every culture, certainly of every literature culture" (Honeck et al., 2019, p. 128), they are an important tool of communication as "proverbs sweeten speeches" (Amuah & Wuaku, 2019, p. 134). Proverb belongs to a larger literary body called figurative language. Katz (1998) stated that among the prominent and most studied forms of figurative language are metaphor, irony, idioms, and indirect requests, though Roberts and Kreuz (1994) listed eight (8) commonly used forms of figurative language: (i) hyperbole, (ii) idiom, (iii) indirect request, (iv) irony, (v) understatement, (vi) metaphor, (vii) rhetorical question, and (viii) simile.

In Malay literature, *pepatah* is the equivalent of a proverb. According to Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, *pepatah* is defined as an "idiom that contains wisdom and the teachings of the elderly." Mat Piah (1986) characterized *pepatah* as containing lessons, representations, and the values of the Malays (p.25). Bakar et al. (1981) stated the word *pepatah* derives from the doubling of *patah* (to break). Hence *pepatah* in Malay literature is a delicate way to "break off" arguments (usually opposing) using sarcasm and/or representation (p.6). In short, *pepatah* is a Malay proverb that holds wisdom, lesson, and representation, which is used as a delicate way to break arguments that typically contain sarcasm. These qualities of *pepatah* are made clear in Razak Abdul Aziz's *Pepatah Episodes*. Further discussion on this piece can be found in the latter part of this research.

Razak Abdul Aziz (1959 -) is a Malaysian contemporary composer. Possibly the earliest of its kind in Malaysia (Zamani et al., 2019), he has been composing contemporary music since the 1980s (Hall, 1988, p.30). Among his notable compositions include *10 Pantun Settings*, *Maria Zaitun*, *For Violin and Piano*, *Etudes for Piano Solo*, and *5 Early Songs*. His works have been performed on local and international platforms (Zamani et al., 2019). However, full-scale recitals consisting of works by this composer alone only took place in 2019 and 2020, as Zamani (2021) reported. Last served at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) before retiring in November 2019, Razak Abdul Aziz is still active in composing new music and revising his older works. *Pepatah Episodes*, which this paper intends to investigate, was first written in 2019 and revised in 2020, after the composer thought that he needed to make improvements to the work as his musical directions had slightly changed and matured over this period (Abdul Aziz, 2 August 2021). The idea of incorporating Malay proverbs in a piano composition derives from his knowledge and understanding of the standard piano repertory of Western classical music, where past composers had used figurative language (mainly short and long poems) as their source of inspiration in writing programme music. However, instead of using poems, Razak Abdul Aziz wanted to be different and incorporated another form of figurative language - *pepatah*. The composer wrote the piano music by re-imagining a set of *pepatah* to be suited to the written music. Further discussion on this will be revealed further down this paper.

Literature on the Use of Figurative Language in Piano

To position *Pepatah Episodes* in the piano literature, the author would like to continue this discussion by reviewing the standard piano repertory of Western classical music. The review contains a brief overview of programme music and figurative language in music and discussions on several significant piano works by past

composers that had used figurative language (poem) in their thought processes. The author chooses poems instead of proverbs because the use of proverbs in the standard piano repertory does not exist (at least to the knowledge of the author). Since poems and proverbs are under the umbrella of figurative language, the author believes this commonality shall do justice to the reader's comprehension of figurative language in piano programme music. Finally, the review will reveal how *Pepatah Episodes* is positioned in the piano literature in the context of programme music locally and globally.

Programme Music and Figurative Language

The use of figurative language in the standard piano repertory probably became prominent from the Romantic era, when programme music was adapted into the musical vocabulary. Programme music refers almost exclusively to works in the European classical music tradition (New World Encyclopaedia, 2019). Kamien (2011) stated that "Romantic composers were particularly attracted to program(me) music - instrumental music associated with a story, poem, idea, or scene (p. 238)." Though the tradition of using the element of programme in writing instrumental music had existed as early as the Renaissance through the Classical eras, the author would not be discussing it in this review as piano (as a musical instrument) did not exist during the Renaissance era and was not a prominent instrument in the Baroque era. Though piano started to gain more attention in the Classical era, this musical period was known for its peak in musical forms and absolute music (New World Encyclopaedia, 2019).

There is an array of programme music in the piano literature. However, the number of piano works that incorporated figurative language in the music literature is relatively small. This statement might be controversial if one were to conduct a cursory examination on this matter, only to be confused perceiving works such

as Franz Liszt's *Three Sonnetto of Petrarca*, Chopin's *Ballades*, or Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons* as using figurative language elements when the fact is Liszt wrote piano transcriptions after his art songs of the same title. In contrast, Chopin, though deemed as "poet of the piano," never intended his music to be programmatic. *The Seasons* uses epigraphs from various Russian authors that were chosen by the magazine editor, not the composer.

The author would like to continue the discussion by reviewing a few programmatic piano works that used figurative language (poem) in their creative processes. This is vital to position the use of this element to understand the thought and creative processes in the selected works from the perspective of composers and scholars, which would be an important component to link towards the centrepiece of this paper.

Scriabin, Debussy, and Ravel

Composers Alexander Scriabin (1875-1915), Claude Debussy (1862-1918), and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) were known to have written some of the most notable piano works that incorporated poems as part of the compositional body. The author chose these composers and their selected works to represent the entirety of this category, as these works could demonstrate the general idea of how poems are being translated into music, as discussed and analysed by various scholars.

Scriabin was known to write his poems and set them to his piano compositions. For example, Bowers (1974) stated that Scriabin intended to write a piano ballade based on his first poem. "Oh country of visions!/ How different from life,/ Where I have no place,/ But there, I hear voices,/ A world of beatitudinous souls,/ I see." However, this work was left unfinished and later adapted into his fourth prelude from *Preludes Op. 11*. This feeling of "not belonging to the country of visions" yet appreciating the world of utmost bliss and happiness is translated into the music with beautiful melodies on both hands,

indicated with *tenutos*, with the left-hand melody being perceived as the most exquisite between the two (Hinson, 2003). Scriabin also wrote a poetic programme for his Fourth Piano Sonata. Possibly his most played sonata, Scriabin set the said work to the following poem (Scriabin, 1903-1904, in Ballard & Bengston, 2017):

In a light mist, transparent vapor
Lost afar and yet distinct
A star gleams softly.

How beautiful! The bluish mystery
Of her glow
Beckons me, cradles me.

O bring me to thee, far distant star!
Bathe me in trembling rays
Sweet light!

Sharp desire, voluptuous and crazed yet sweet
Endlessly with no other goal than longing
I would desire

But no! I vault in joyous leap
Freely I take wing.

Mad dance, godlike play!
Intoxicating, shining one!

It is toward thee, adored star
My flight guides me.

Mad dance, godlike play!

Intoxicating, shining one!

Toward thee, created freely for me
To serve the end
My flight of liberation!

In this play
Sheer caprice
In moments I forget thee
In the maelstrom that carries me
I veer from they glimmering rays.

In the intensity of desire
Thou fadest
O distant goal.

But ever thou shinest
As I forever desire thee!

Thou expandest, Star!
Now thou art a Sun
Flamboyant Sun! Sun of Triumph!

Approaching thee by my desire for thee
I lave myself in they changing waves
O joyous god.

I swallow thee
Sea of light.

My self-of-light
I engulf thee!

Ballard and Bengston (2017) describe the poem and sonata as erotic. Buranaprapuk (2013) expounds on the correlation between the poem and this sonata. She concluded that the structure of the poem is similar to the structure of the piano work, stating "the contrasting affects (effects) of the poem – the first part sounds static, while action occurs in the second part – correspond with the characters of two attacca movements of the Sonata (p.44)." Buranaprapuk also explained how the colouristic elements in the poem were transformed into music using various harmonic procedures combined with Scriabin's condition as a synesthete.

Debussy was regarded as the first French Impressionist composer, though he rejected the label (Nichols, 1998). The composer had written several programmatic works using descriptive titles that are considered significant to the standard Western music repertory such as *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* (1894), *Reflection in the Water* and *And the Moon Descends on the Temple that was from Images* (1901-1905), *The Sounds and Fragrances Swirl through the Evening Air*, *Footsteps in the Snow*, *What the West Wind Has Seen* from *Preludes for Solo Piano Book 1* (1909-1910), and *Moonlight (Clair de lune)* from *Suite Bergamasque* (1905). He was also inspired by works written by Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) and Paul Verlaine (1844-1896), who were among the great French poets. Possibly Debussy's most-played solo piano piece that was inspired by the poem is *Clair de lune* from *Suite Bergamasque* (Debussy,

2007). Based on a poem of a similar title by Verlaine, the music stands out from the rest of the set as it is the only piece in the suite that is not using dance form. Guo (2019, p. 28) concluded that *Clair de lune's* beauty lies in its "simple musical texture, filled with delicate and romantic feelings, depicting the beauty of the moonlight." A musical translation of Verlaine's poem, Debussy stated, "it is inscribed in nature. It must be in intimate accord with the scenery" (Schmitz, 1950, p.53).

Ravel was another French composer who was associated with the Impressionistic movement alongside his elder contemporary, Debussy. Known to have written a vast number of musical works for various mediums of instrumentation, his contribution to piano music repertory is undeniable, although he only composed fewer than 30 piano works that demonstrated his wide range of musical language (Orenstein, 1991). Possibly the most substantial set of work in the standard piano repertory to date, *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908) has a beauty and originality with a deeper inspiration "in the harmonic and melodic genius of Ravel himself" (Sackville-West & Shawe-Taylor, 1951, p.613). This three-movement solo piano work is a musical depiction of two (2) mystical creatures (*Ondine* [Water nymph] and *Scarbo* [Goblin]) and one (1) disturbing visual (*Le Gibet* [The gibbet]), portrayed in Aloysius Bertrand's poems *Gaspard de la nuit* (1846). Tomić (2020) found that Ravel uses "diverse harmonisations of thematic materials to manipulate the formal and harmonic outlook" to portray the water spirit in *Ondine* (p.84). The disturbing visual in *Le Gibet* is depicted in music using unclear harmonic progression and tonal ambiguity (p.85) while the mischievous *Scarbo* is characterised through Impressionistic harmony combined with Spanish musical folklore (p.92), concluding that Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit* employs timbre as its fundamental component (p.190).

From the examination of Scriabin's Fourth Prelude and Fourth Piano Sonata, Debussy's *Clair de lune*, and Ravel's

Gaspard de la nuit, one could observe how each work translated the figurative language (poems) into musical elements. Understanding that figurative language could be translated into music through the composer's personal musicality is essential to appreciate how Razak Abdul Aziz translated figurative language (*pepatah*) into his *Pepatah Episodes*, which would be examined later in this writing.

Research Background and Problem

This section provides a brief description of *Pepatah Episodes*, a table consisting of the *pepatahs* chosen with their respective literal translations and meaning (as provided by the composer in the piano score), and the background problem for this study. Providing this information is vital to aid the reader's comprehension in understanding the succeeding sections, which are Methodology and Result and Discussion. **Brief description of *Pepatah Episodes***

As mentioned earlier, *Pepatah Episodes* was written in 2019 and revised in 2020. Zamani (2021) reported its premiere in early 2020, where he performed the 2019 version as part of his academic recital, as the revised version was only completed in October 2020 (Abdul Aziz, 2 October 2020). The revision consists of 12 short movements, with one (1) *pepatah* assigned to each. The *pepatahs*, their literal translation, and their meaning (as written by the composer in the score) are as Table 1.

Research problems

Razak Abdul Aziz has been consistent throughout the interviews (2 October 2020; 2 August 2021; 4 August 2022), stating that each *pepatah* was only chosen after he had completed writing the music. Though the composer had already planned to use *pepatah* during the initial creative process, he had yet to determine the exact *pepatahs* to use. Only after scoring the music in 12 short movements the composer took a second look at the work, listened closely to the written music, and then determined and assigned one *pepatah* to each movement. This is true for both versions

Table 1. *Pepatahs*, literal translation, and meaning

Pepatah	Literal translation	Meaning
<i>Alah bisa tegal biasa.</i>	Poison loses its potency when one is accustomed to tackling it.	Custom makes things easy.
<i>Air dicincang tak akan putus.</i>	Water does not break up when diced.	Blood ties do not break.
<i>Kalau tak dipecahkan ruyung, manakan dapat sagunya?</i>	If you don't break the kernel, how are you to obtain the sago?	If you don't expend effort, how will you reap the reward?
<i>Yang bulat tidak datang bergolek, yang pipih tidak datang melayang.</i>	Round things do not come rolling, flat things do not come flying.	Nothing good comes from not putting in any effort.
<i>Kuman di seberang lautan nampak, gajah di depan mata tidak kelihatan.</i>	A germ across the ocean is seen, (but) the elephant in front of one's eyes is not.	We see someone else's small faults, but not our big shortcomings.
<i>Hendak seribu daya, tak hendak seribu dalih</i>	When we want something, we'll expend a thousand energies. When we don't something, we'll give a thousand excuses.	
<i>Kokok berderai-derai, ekor begelumang tahi.</i>	The cock crows loudly, though its tail is coated with faeces.	Someone who proudly proclaims his qualities but is unaware of his shortcomings.
<i>Ikut resmi padi, makin berisi makin tunduk. Jangan ikut resmi lalang, semakin tegak tiada berisi.</i>	Follow the way of the rice stalk, the fuller it becomes, the more it hangs down. Do not follow the way of the weed, whilst the blade grows taller, the content stays empty.	The more successful one becomes, the humbler one should be.
<i>Melentur buluh biarlah dari rebungunya.</i>	Bend the bamboo while it is still sprouting.	As the twig bend, so grows the tree (Start young).
<i>Alang-alang menyeluk pekasan, biar sampai ke pangkal lengan.</i>	If you're putting your hand into the pickle jar, you may as well put in your arm.	If you're undertaking a task, do it wholeheartedly.
<i>Alang-alang berdakwat, biar hitam.</i>	If you're using ink, let the colour be dark (black).	If you are intending to perform a task, do it as best you can.
<i>Terlajak perahu boleh diundur, terlajak kata buruk padahnya.</i>	An overpassing boat can be towed back, an unfiltered word causes harm.	A word once spoken cannot be recalled.

(2019 and 2020). The first nine (9) movements are to be played on the piano while the last three (3) movements of this work require the performer to either partially sing the music or play the written music on any surface or a percussion instrument of choice.

Although the composer mentioned that he had retrospectively chosen the *pepatahs*, he never specified which section(s) from each movement inspired him to assign the selected *pepatah*. In the first interview (2 October 2020), the composer sta-

ted that "one should be able to hear and imagine this without my help" and stood by this in the remaining interviews with the author. His stance may cause problems for other musicians in understanding the programme within the piano piece. Hence, this opens an opportunity for the author to analyse *Pepatah Episodes* using the framework of programme music within the figurative language, offering one way to approach this work towards understanding the "re-imagining the selected Malay proverbs through piano music" process,

which would be explained in the following section.

METHODS

As this is a qualitative study, the author had chosen a case study as the research approach in analysing the programme of *Pepatah Episodes* by Razak Abdul Aziz. Hence, the research instruments used are non-directive interviews, document analysis, and archival research. The author interviewed the composer Razak Abdul Aziz on three separate occasions, as mentioned earlier. These interviews were centred around understanding the composer's creative process in both score versions. The author chose the 2020 version for this study as the composer has finalised it. The author also did adequate archival research to help in analysing this piece, mainly using Burkholder et al. (2014) and Kregor (2015), while being supported by Beard and Gloag (2005) and Parker and Abate (1989). The author chooses the movements that consist of music written for piano only, as this is the focus of the study. This includes the works' first nine movements – from *Alah Bisa Tegal Biasa* to *Melentur Bulu Biarlah Dari Rebungya*. The last three (3) movements (*Alang-alang Menyeluk Pekasam Biar Sampai Ke Pangkal Lengan*, *Alang-alang Berdakwat Biar Hitam*, and *Terlajak Perahu Boleh Diundur Terlajak Kata Buruk PAdahnya*) are not analysed as the first two (2) of these three (3) movements require the performer to partially sing and the last demands the performer to play the notated rhythms on any surface or using a percussion instrument of choice.

To understand the correlation between the chosen *pepatahs* to the written music, the author would be using music analysis defined by Beard and Gloag (2005) and Parker and Abate (1989), within the framework of programme music as proposed by Burkholder et al. (2014) and Kregor (2015). Music analysis is the result of an interaction between the music itself, music theory, aesthetics, and history (Beard & Gloag, 2005, p. 9). However,

to go beyond mechanical conversions of musical notation into written words, the analysis must uncover something beyond or behind the mere sonic surface (Parker & Abate, 1989, pp.1-2). This includes analysing musical effects that can express ideas and programmes, which often involve harmonic and melodic innovations and instrumental colour.

There have been discussions on the distinctions in programme music. Hoffmann (1810) in Burkholder et al. (2014) categorized music with programmes into two (2); programme music and character piece. The earlier recounts a narrative of a sequence of events, often spelt out in an accompanying text, while the latter depicts or suggests a mood, personality, or scene, usually indicated in its title. Kregor (2015) gave more details on the definition of programme music. He stated that the building blocks of programme music are topics (a gateway through which music expresses and creates meaning) and character pieces, as programme music sought a dialogue with other arts, especially literature, a pursuit that led to depictive character pieces, programme symphonies, symphonic poems, and tone paintings (Kregor, 2015). This is apparent in the examples of programme analysis on Henselt's *Etude no. 6* and Dittersdorf's *Ovid Symphony* in Kregor (2015).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Using the framework of programme music analysis, the author would begin by quoting the composer Razak Abdul Aziz in one of the interviews. He claimed that the *pepatahs* were only chosen after the music had been written out, while quoting Schumann, as mentioned in Burkholder et al. (2014), saying:

“(Schumann) did not always know the title of a piece until the music was written, making clear that the title is itself part of the composition, one that can be decided at any stage from initial conception to final finish. The main function of titles for character pieces was not to specify mea-

nings but to indicate possible avenues for exploration, inviting the player and listener to enter the composer’s musical world and become in one sense cocreators of that world by devising their own narratives to explain how the music justifies the title and vice versa (p. 610)” (Abdul Aziz, 4 August 2022).

Having this in mind, the composer also claimed that the chosen *pepatahs* are represented in either one of the three (3) ways: (i) imageries in the *pepatah* (ii) imageries in the meaning, or (iii) imageries in the *pepatah* and meaning.

Alah Bisa Tegal Biasa

As this is the first movement of the piece, it introduces the harmonic language that is used in the entire work – non-functional, non-tonal harmony and non-pitch centric. This could be estranged for some listeners as this type of harmony is not something the general audience is accustomed to. Hence, the movement acts as an introduction, aurally paving the way into the audience’s ears. It is written at a moderate speed, chordal texture, simple note values, and utilises relatively loud dynamics (as shown in Figure 1). This combination aids in fashioning the music easier to be perceived, making the composer choose this *pepatah* for its meaning to represent this movement.



Figure 1. An excerpt from *Alah Bisa Tegal Biasa*

Air Dicincang Tak Akan Putus.

The second movement begins with two voices, each melodically, moving independently in 2^{nds}, and using various rhythmic divisions (quaver triplet, semi-quaver triplet, semiquaver quintuplet, etc.)

to create polyrhythm, as shown in Figure 2. This creates the effect of interlocking, mimicking an attempt to “dice water.” The “attempt” later occurs at a higher register, written on the treble clef, as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 2. The first three (3) bars of *Air Dicincang Tak Akan Putus*

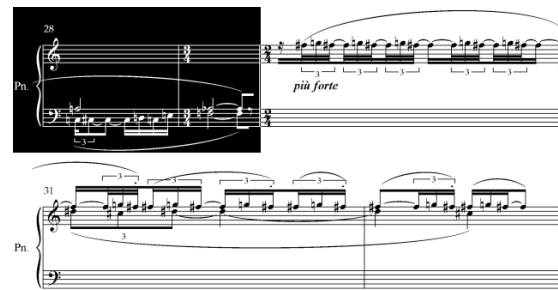


Figure 3. The attempt to “dice water” recurring in treble clef

This attempt to “dice water” intensifies when four (4) layers of voice are sounding simultaneously in both staff in treble and bass clefs, each voice having its own rhythmic pattern (as shown in Figure 4), creating intense rhythmic interlocking while these voices melodically move independently in 2^{nds} with a loud dynamic, emulating an intensified effort to “dice water.”



Figure 4. The attempt to “dice water” intensifies

Regardless of the recurring, multi-

le attempts to “dice the water”, these attempts ultimately failed as it is within the nature of water not to break. This can be seen in the last bar of this movement (as shown in Figure 5). Despite the continuous attempt to “dice” until the end, all four (4) voices finally come together at the end of the movement. With this programme, it is concluded that the composer chose this *pepatah* for its literal imagery, imagining the act of “dicing water” when listening to this movement.



Figure 5. The “diced water” finally comes together

Kalau Tidak Dipecahkan Ruyung, Manakan Dapat Sagunya.

Musically, this movement is quite like the first - being a continuity, where it reiterates the harmonic materials in chordal texture using a moderate pace, simpler note values, and loud dynamics. This is to regain the attention of the listeners, harkening back to the ideas at the beginning of this piece. By gauging their attention to continue listening to the work, the composer is preparing for what is to come in the later movements of the composition, which, the composer believes, is rewarding. Hence, this *pepatah* was chosen for its imagery in the meaning to describe the listeners’ effort to continue listening to this work and the reward that awaits the listeners in the following movements.

Episode 2b: Kalau tidak dipecahkan ruyung, manakan dapat sagunya.
 Literal translation: If you don't break the kernel, how are you to obtain the sago?
 Meaning: If you don't expend effort, how will you reap the reward?



Figure 6. The reiteration of harmonic materials *alla* the first movement.

Yang Bulat Tidak Datang Bergolek,
 Yang Pipih Tidak Datang Melayang.

There are two (2) distinctive image-ries portrayed in this movement - *bulat* (round thing) and *pipih* (flat thing). *Bulat* is attempting to roll, but the movement is somehow halted. This is portrayed in the music with the melodic movement on the LH, which begins smoothly in 2nds (as demonstrated in Figure 7) at a lower register, within a range of an octave, and using small note values, creating the rumbling effect and imagery of a round object rolling back and forth.

Episode 3: Yang bulat tidak datang bergolek, yang pipih tidak datang melayang.
 Literal translation: Round things do not come rolling, flat things do not come flying.
 Meaning: Nothing good comes from not putting in any effort.



Figure 7. The portrayal of *bulat* on LH

However, this smooth-moving line on the LH becomes increasingly disjunct with rapid changes of note register within almost two (2) octaves compass, with more rhythmic play, creating interruption - an attempt to halt the rolling movement of the *bulat* (Figure 8).



Figure 8. The interruption of *bulat* movement on LH and introduction of *pipih* on RH

One could observe that a new material is introduced in Figure 8 (RH of bar 72), portraying *pipih* - written using notes in a higher register and smaller, more intricate note values than *bulat*. *Pipih* (on RH) gradually begins to exist concurrently with

bulat (on LH), before dominating the conversation later, with more rhythmic play and notes of the higher register, imitating “small, flying things” (possibly small aviaries), as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. *Pipih* dominating the conversation

Based on the programme analysis made, it is concluded that the composer had chosen imageries of objects (*bulat* and *pipih*) in the *pepatah* to pair this proverb to the movement.

Kuman di Seberang Lautan Nampak, Gajah di Depan Mata Tidak Kelihatan.

Two (2) distinctive imageries are mentioned in this *pepatah* – *kuman* (germ) and *gajah* (elephant). As *kuman* is diminutive and *gajah* is enormous by comparison, these imageries represent sarcasm – one noticing someone else’s small fault but not their own big weakness. The composer translated these imageries using two (2) contrasting note registers – low to represent *gajah* and high to represent *kuman* – playing in loud dynamics (*f*, *ff*, *piu ff*), as shown in Figure 10.

Episode 4: *Kuman di seberang lautan nampak, gajah di depan mata tidak kelihatan*.
 Literal translation: A germ across the ocean is seen, the elephant in front of one's eyes is not.
 Meaning: We see someone else's small faults, but not our own big shortcomings.

Figure 10. *Gajah* in the low register and *kuman* in the high register

These imageries occur alternately and respond to each other as antecedents and consequents (question and answer) throughout most parts of this movement. This continuous alternation is to portray bickering between two parties – both yelling out each other’s weaknesses without acknowledging their shortcomings, as exemplified in Figure 11.

Figure 11. The continuous alternation between *gajah* and *kuman*, portraying bicker between two (2) parties

Ultimately, both parties fail to overpower the other. Instead, they decide to bicker louder, gradually accentuating their arguments until they reach their peak. This is represented by the voices moving outward in contrary motion – ascending movement (*kuman*) and descending movement (*gajah*) – with both voices increasing their dynamics reaching *ff*.

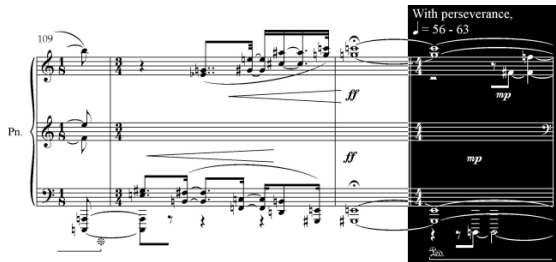


Figure 12. The voices getting louder and moving outward in contrary motion

Based on the programme analysis made, we can determine that the composer had chosen this *pepatah* for its imageries of objects (*gajah* and *kuman*) in the *pepatah* and imageries depicted in the meaning when reflecting on this movement.

Hendak Seribu Daya, Tak Hendak Seribu Dalih

Two (2) contrasting situations are portrayed in this *pepatah* – *daya* (energy/effort) and *dalih* (excuse). *Dalih* occurs first in this movement. It is portrayed with the use of long, sustained chords, passive inner voices, and soft dynamics to depict minimal effort/energy, as shown in Figure 13.

Episode 5 **Hendak seribu daya, tak hendak seribu dalih.**
 Literal translation and meaning: When we want something, we'll expend a thousand energies, when we don't want something, we'll give a thousand excuses.



Figure 13. The portrayal of *dalih* using long, sustained chords, passive inner voices, and soft dynamics

A new material is immediately introduced, with more active rhythmic gestures, louder dynamics, and frequent chords changes. This material represents *daya*, which would later be further developed.



Figure 14. The introduction of *daya* material into the movement

The *daya* material grows exponentially with more complexity. The rhythmic gesture becomes significantly more active in all voices while the dynamic used is generally loud (*f* and *piu forte*). This material is also developed using a contemporary rhythmic notation called feathered beam, as shown in Figure 15 at *piu forte*. Feathered beams are used to notate the gradual transition from one note duration to another in *accelerando* or *ritardando* mode (Lombardi, 2021, p.65).

With relentless determination, ♩ = 56 - 63

122 *f* *piu forte* *f* *piu forte*

125 *subito f* *piu forte*

Figure 15. *Daya* material gets developed

Daya gets more potent with a wider range of dynamics (from *mf* to *piu forte*), rapid change of register in chordal pattern, and more feathered beams at the climax of this movement. This is a depiction of the “thousand energies” described in the *pepatah*, which could also be observed from the visual perspective of the performance.

129 *(mf)* *f* *piu forte* *f*

131 *mf* *f* *piu forte* *subito mf*

Figure 16. The climax of *daya*

From the programme analysis, the author deduced that the composer chose this *pepatah* for the imageries portrayed in the *pepatah* to accompany this movement – one being passive and soft, representing *dalih*, and the other being aggressive and loud, representing *daya*.

Kokok Berderai-derai, Ekor Bergelumang Tahi

Similar to many previous movements, this *pepatah* has two (2) distinctive imageries; (i) cock (rooster) crowing loudly (ii) tail feathers coated (covered) with faeces. The first imagery of this *pepatah* is portrayed in two (2) ways – (i) a 4-part voice in the middle and high registers (Figure 17) and (ii) a 2-part-highly-chromatic voice (RH of Figure 19) – both being very loud in dynamic (*ff*). The second imagery is also portrayed in two (2) ways; (i) notes on the low register in chordal pattern in moderately soft dynamic (*mp*) (Figure 18) and (ii) 2-part-highly-chromatic voice (LH of Figure 19) in very loud dynamic (*ff*).

Episode 6: *Kokok-kokok berderai-derai, ekor bergelumang tahi*.
 Literal translation: **The cock crows loudly, though its tail is coated with faeces.**
 Meaning: Someone who proudly proclaims his qualities, but is unaware of his own shortcomings.

Self-righteously, ♩ = 66 - 69

136 *f* *ff*

Figure 17. The first portrayal of “cock crowing loudly”

139 *mp*

Figure 18. The first portrayal of “tail feathers coated with faeces”

The second portrayal of both imageries begins to occur concurrently starting from bar 146 (as shown in Figure 19) and gets more intense for the next 12 bars, before calming down at bar 157 onwards until the end of this movement (bar 164), getting rhythmically and dynamically more passive with time, as shown in Figure 20. This is to depict the scene where the crowing

rooster finally realises that the tail is getting heavier due to the amount of faeces that gradually increases with the intensity of the crow and starts to tone down.



Figure 19. The second portrayal of both imageries happening concurrently



Figure 20. The crowing rooster starts to calm down after realising the condition of its tail feathers

From the programme analysis made, the author deduced that the composer “heard” the imageries in the *pepatah* when he reflected on this movement – rooster crowing and the faeces-coated tail feathers happening alternately in the beginning and eventually become concurrent – hence decided to choose the *pepatah* to accompany this movement.

Ikut Resmi Padi, Makin Berisi Makin Tunduk; Jangan Ikut Resmi Lalang, Semakin Tegak Tiada Berisi

This *pepatah* is like many previous ones; having the portrayal of two (2) contrasting imageries in its words: (i) rice stalks hanging low (ii) weed grass blades growing taller. These imageries are representations of two (2) types of personas. As the full rice stalk is a representation of

a positive persona (successful, knowledgeable, and humble), the weed grass blade represents the opposite – a negative persona (empty-headed and arrogant). The positive persona is portrayed as “full and laying low” using chordal writing and moderately soft dynamic (*mp*) on both hands, as shown in Figure 21.

Episode 7. Ikut resmi padi, makin berisi makin tunduk.
 Jangan ikut resmi lalang, semakin tegak tiada berisi.
 Do not follow the way of the weed, whilst the blade grows taller, the content stays empty.
 Meaning: The more successful one becomes, the humbler one should be.



Figure 21. The portrayal of the persona with substance using chordal writing and moderately soft dynamic

On the other hand, the negative persona is portrayed as “empty-headed and arrogant” with the use of a single-line melody at a high register in a loud dynamic (*f*). This persona “talks over” the positive persona, having the former’s voice (the single-line melody) over a chordal passage as demonstrated in Figure 22.



Figure 22. The negative persona “talks over” the positive persona

The negative persona then takes over the conversation. This is translated into music by continually using loud dynamics, the addition of three (3) lower voices with these voices mimicking each other (Bass mimics Soprano, Tenor mimics Alto), with each voice using a very narrow range of notes, describing this persona as being full of itself yet shallow.



Figure 23. The negative persona is full of itself and shallow

This continues until the end of this movement, gradually getting softer to a soft dynamic (*p*). Possibly the superficial person is eventually ignored but persists in staying arrogant.



Figure 24. The negative persona remains arrogant despite getting ignored

From the programme analysis, the author deduced that the composer “heard” the imageries portrayed in the meaning when he reflected on this movement – two (2) contrasting personas; one of positive and the other, negative – hence decided to choose the *pepatah* to accompany this movement.

Melentur Buluh Biarlah Dari Rebungnya

This *pepatah* mentions two (2) different stages of growth of bamboo – a mature bamboo (*buluh*) and a bamboo sprout (*rebung*), which is a representation of two stages of growth of man – mature and young, respectively. *Buluh* is materially hard and very difficult to shape and bend – an analogy of a mature person that is already set with their habit. Changing the habit would be a monumental and delicate task to undertake. This is translated into music using loud dynamics (*f* and *piu forte*), rapid passages, heavy chordal patterns, and big leaps; all to be executed smoothly (*legato*).

Episode 8: Melentur buluh biarlah dari rebungya.
Literal translation: Bend the bamboo while it is still sprouting.
English equivalent: As the twig is bent, so grows the tree.



Figure 25. The portrayal of undertaking the task of bending *buluh* (changing the habit of a mature person)

Unlike the hard *buluh*, *rebung* is young and still sprouting, hence shaping and bending it would be a much easier task, comparatively. This is an analogy for a young person, who is still growing and learning, hence shaping their habit and behaviour is (although still a delicate matter) facile. Musical translation for this is made using softer dynamics (*p*, *mp*, *mf*), a calm chordal passage which begins quite passively with longer note values that gradually becomes more intricate as the movement progresses to portray the gradual shaping process, and smooth articulation (*legato*).



Figure 26. The portrayal of bending *rebung* (shaping the habit and behaviour of a young person)



Figure 27. The music becomes progressively more intricate, portraying the gradual shaping process

From the programme analysis, the author deduced that the composer had imageries portrayed in the *pepatah* and meaning when he reflected on this movement – *buluh* and *rebung*, and a mature and young person – hence decided to choose this *pepatah* to accompany this movement.

CONCLUSIONS

The programme analysis conducted in all nine (9) movements for piano found that four (4) movements inspired the composer to choose their respective *pepatah* for the imageries portrayed in the *pepatah*,

three (3) for the imageries portrayed in the meaning, and two (2) for both.

Razak Abdul Aziz's *Pepatah Episodes* challenges the convention of programme music in three (3) ways: (i) the *pepatah* is to be recited aloud before performing each movement, as other programme music does not require the performer to read out the programme (ii) the choice of *pepatah* is made in a retrospective manner rather than setting the music to predetermined *pepatahs* (iii) the portrayal of imageries in the music is either from the *pepatah*, its meaning, or both. This offers possibilities for other composers to explore music composition using a similar framework and compositional process utilised by this composer. It also provides opportunities for scholars to investigate and study works by Razak Abdul Aziz and/or other composers that are unique and worthy of scholarly attention.

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