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The Perspectives of Autobiography in Malay Historiography

Rahimah Hamdan*^a, Arba'ie Sujud^a, Jama'yah Zakaria^a and
Shaiful Bahri Md.Radzi^b

^aDepartment of Malay Language, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication,
Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

^bSchool of Malay Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and
Humanities, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: rahimahhamdan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Western colonialism, especially by the English and Dutch who came to the Malay world in the 17th and 18th centuries, introduced a new trend in literature that had expanded rapidly in line with the Industrial Revolution in Europe, known as realism. This trend emphasized the manifestation of 'reality', which means creating literature without 'supernatural' element or embellishment. This new trend forms a new genre known as autobiographies and biographies. Abdullah Munshi's work titled *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah*, was considered as the earliest autobiography to be written in Malay language. However, it has invited debate from several scholars that extended to a number of other autobiographical and biographical texts that emerged in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Local and Western scholars such as Syed Naquib al-Attas, Liaw Yock Fang, C. W. Watson and A. Sweeney attempt to justify their scale and classification of the terminology and interpretation of this genre as to suit the values and thinking for conventional Malay literature. This paper aims to compare and analyse the arguments of several scholars with regard to the classification and significance of autobiographies and biographies in Malay historiography. Hence, through the use of descriptive method, this paper will discuss the opinions of the above scholars, and eventually this study would be reasoned as to what autobiographies and biographies genre that fit into Malay perspective.

Keywords: Autobiography, biography, Malay historiography

1. Introduction

Islamic tradition also introduced the deeds of the reed pen to Malay authors in Malaya (Braginsky, 1989; 1993:1). Malay authors were alerted to the importance of literature in their lives or to 'literary awareness', as it was termed by Braginsky (1993; 1998; 2001). This literary awareness, that was born together with the spread of Islam, led the society to know the objectives, aims, essence, facts, and kinds of literary creation processes in line with matters relating to these 'deeds of the reed pen'. Accordingly, the most valuable treasure that has been passed down to the present generation is the 'written literature' that was mostly composed after the arrival of Islam (Braginsky, 1993:1). The main factor in the development of Malay writing, other than the introduction of the Jawi script, was the tolerance of Islam with regard to the beliefs and original culture of its adherents inherited from the age of animism, especially those myths and legends that cannot be completely uprooted. This is reflected in Malay literary works such as their folk tales, history, sagas, scrolls, epics and several others which mainly include these elements in order to magnify or glorify literary figures.

The need to proclaim the greatness of a state (*combat de prestige*) among the governments of the Malay Archipelago also enabled these elements to be applied by authors in their works (Sweeney, 1987; Siti Hawa Salleh, 1997 and 2009; Koster, 1997; Braginsky, 2004). Thus,

this led to the introduction of several Malay historiographical works (historical literature) to fulfil this purpose such as *Hikayat Raja Pasai* (Samudera-Pasai), *Sulalatus Salatin-Sejarah Melayu* (Melaka), *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (Kedah), *Hikayat Aceh* (Aceh) and *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (Johor-Riau) (just to mention a few texts). This genre was not directed at the masses but was only composed for the ruling kings in addition to the compositions that were centred on the palace. Thus, everything was written to delight and satisfy the king (Sweeney, 1980: viii, and Braginsky, 2004). Since the king was regarded as ‘Allah’s representative on earth’, this indirectly gave rise to the concepts of sovereignty, plague and rebellion, which reinforced the concept of ‘raja-centeredness’ in the production of every literary piece during that era. In this way, a heavy responsibility was placed on the shoulders of every Malay writer (*Malay court’s scribe*) to combine all the values and ideas to produce a cohesive *welstanschauung* that could be successfully delivered through their writing activities.

2. The Arrival of the West and the Impact on the Conventions of Malay Literature

Western colonization arrived in the Malay World as early as the 15th century. In the first three centuries (1511 to 1800), the Western colonialists were not interested in knowing and understanding the colonised community (Sweeney, 1987). The Portuguese, who conquered Malacca in 1511, were not considered to be successful colonialists because they did not leave a mark on the acquisition of knowledge in the land that they colonised (Ismail Hussein, 1974). Their presence was more economically motivated so as not to have had a profound impact on Malay literary activities (Ding Choo Ming, 2004). However, the development of the era of Romanticism, which swept Europe in the 18th century (around 1800 to 1850), saw these colonialists being fired with a passion to explore the literature, culture and language of the colonised society in response to the growth of the Industrial Revolution in Europe (Ismail Hussein, 1974; Sweeney, 1987).

At the same time, the theory of Darwinism grew rapidly in Europe, giving rise to the concepts of the “white man’s superiority” and the “white man’s burden”, which reinforced the perspective of racism in Western societies. Directly, the world community is now classified into inferior (colonised) and superior (colonist) groups. According to colonial ideology, European officials and their inherent ideas create characters that are biased towards the indigenous communities. These colonial scholars ignored the negative aspects of colonialism but instead preached that Western methods and culture were superior, that Westerners should lead the world, that they are entitled to the wealth of the Eastern World, and that they make the best administrators. At the same time, the colonialists blamed those colonised for their backwardness and exploitation. Their exploitation of the colonised society was seen as a noble process of improvement and a form of education (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1977). This resulted in many research reports on the colonised communities, including their flora and fauna, culture and literature, which were securely preserved in their academic journals, as described by Knaap (1994:637-638) below:

‘In order to rule the colonies properly, the colonial power of the time were of the opinion that they needed not only a strong army and navy and a well-trained civil service, but also scholarly and practical knowledge of the indigenous society. Scholarly interest in the colonies can thus be interpreted as an offspring of the process of colonial state formation. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in England and France as well as in the Netherlands, all sorts of journals came into being to disseminate knowledge about the colonies. Few of these journals survived the wave of decolonization after the Second World War. In the Netherlands only two survived, *Bijdragen* and (*Nieuwe*) *West-Indische Gids*, founded in 1919. The other well-known journal on Southeast Asia from this period that is still in

existence is the Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, founded in 1878'

Also, in the 18th and 19th centuries, a number of Malay compositions appeared in those states that were under the rule of the West. Malay literary works that had all along consisted of 'palace and raja-centric' topics, were now being composed to meet the demands of the Western administrators, who were referred to as 'rajas'. The purpose of these writings was to reveal the significance of their presence to the colonised societies (Sweeney and Phillips, 1975: xxiii). Local individuals who were serving as teachers or 'munshis' would write, either on their own initiative for their European patrons (such as *Hikayat Raja-raja Siam*, which was written for van der Capeller) or on the orders of the Western administrators (*Adat Raja-raja Melayu* for De Bruin and *Memoirs of a Malayan Family* for the British Resident, Butter Hunnings).

The control of the European courts over Malay literary works based in Singapore intensified when Abdullah Munsyi appeared with his autobiographical work titled *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* (1838) and *Hikayat Abdullah* (1843). Abdullah Munsyi's closeness to the colonialists, by virtue of his job as a translator for them, added greater value to his writing activities. He was free to experiment with new genres that were emerging in Europe at that time, namely the trend of realism, which considered literary works as actual recordings of the life of the society. Hence, all the depravity and poverty that were being experienced should be specified in a transparent manner based on the senses. Milner (1995) described the realism genre adopted by Abdullah Munsyi as "*the use of first person pronouns, reality descriptions of historical events and harsh criticisms of the culture, socio-political culture and practices of the Malay community*". Obviously, this style of writing was totally unfamiliar to Malay writers and even challenged the old conventions of Malay literature that had been handed down. Nevertheless, based on this 'aberration', Abdullah Munsyi was crowned the 'Father of Modern Malay Literature' in 1907, which directly marked the end of the traditional period and the beginning of a modern era in the corpus of Malay literature.

3. Abdullah Munsyi Was Not The Earliest Malay Autobiographer?

Abdullah Munsyi's earliest appearance as a teacher of the Malay language as well as a translator for the English presented the Malay literary world with a new phenomenon. Due to his closeness to the colonialists, he was easily influenced by the introduction of realism. This trend obviously promoted a manifestation of the realities of human life without mixing in mythical and supernatural or transcendent elements. This change proved to be a cultural shock to the conventions that had been supported by the Malay writers in particular and the entire traditional Malay society in general, where, according to Skinner (1978: 468):

'For writers to break out of the established pattern and begin to subject their society and its norms to an even moderately critical scrutiny, an a result of which new themes, new forms, new styles - in fact, a new 'modern' literature - would emerges, required some form of 'cultural shock'.

Abdullah Munsyi's courage in changing the conventions of Malay literary works introduced a new style of writing into Malay literature, thus giving rise to autobiographies, biographies, memoirs and several others in the late 19th century and early 20th century (Skinner, 1978: 469). The emergence of 'new Malay' writers who were English educated, such as Ibrahim Munshi, Mohamed Salleh Perang and Mohamad Said Sulaiman (just to mention a few) continued to present a new phenomenon to the advancement of national literature, so much so that in 1907 Abdullah Munsyi was crowned the 'Father of Modern Malay Literature' for his ability to introduce Western notational conventions into his works. According to Skinner (1982), Abdullah Munsyi demolished the traditional conventions of '*raja-centeredness*' and confirmed that the focus of his writings was founded on realism. This crowning title was

further supported by Western and local scholars such as Winstedt (1940:107-112), Zaaba (1940:142), Emeis (1949:200-201) and several others [just to name a few].

Abdullah Munsyi's right to this title was challenged by Syed Naquib al-Attas (1970:9), who promoted Hamzah Fansuri, a figure from the 17th century, as the most likely 'Father of Modern Literature'. According to him, the works of Hamzah Fansuri were based more on rationalism, thus appealing to the Malay-Muslim audience, not to mention Hamzah Fansuri's greatness in producing the first Malay autobiographical work such as *Syair Dagang*, which clearly highlighted the individualism and self-expression that had not been seen in previous Malay writers. He was the first writer to use the third person pronoun as in *Syair Dagang* which reads, "**Hamzah Fansuri in Makkah, searches for God in the House of Ka'abah, from Barus to Kudus he wearily goes, at last he finds (Him) in the house**". Being a true Malay-Muslim native, he should be given that title based on his 'innovations' in Malay literature, such as in the excerpt below:

"[...] **Syair Dagang as part of an early autobiography**, [...] then it seems that his parents died when he was still young, leaving him in straitened circumstances which eventually forced him to lead the wandering life of a trader in many lands. During this period of travelling he must have made his acquaintance with Sufism into which he finally became fully initiated. From the life of a wandering trader Hamzah now passed on to the life of a wandering mystic learned in the doctrine of the Sufis. He had travelled in the Middle East and in Java. He had been in Siam and in Malaya. He tells us that, notwithstanding the fact that he had journeyed far and wide in quest of God - his travels extended from Makkah to Kudus - he finally discovered God within himself".

Syed Naquib al-Attas (1969:28-29) also highlighted the great contribution of Hamzah Fansuri that eventually led to Aceh becoming the most renowned Malay-Muslim government from the aspect of the development of knowledge and religion in the 16th and 17th centuries. As a result of that, Syed Naquib al-Attas (1970) argued that Hamzah Fansuri is a figure who is most qualified to be given the title 'Father of Modern Malay Literature' instead of Abdullah Munsyi for his contributions to the world of Malay-Muslim knowledge covering religion, language, literature and culture. This view was shared by Hassan Ahmad (1976:289) on the grounds that although Abdullah Munsyi was said to have brought about innovations through his techniques and language, but the outcome did not reflect the genuine conventions and true identity of the Malays (Hassan Ahmad, 1976:289). Furthermore, according to Syed Naquib al-Attas (1969), the concept of the 'modern' West must be explained in detail in view of the close connection between that concept and humanism in the Western sense. The concept of the 'modern' West, which appeared in the 14th century, focused on rationalism, individualism and internationalism, which rejected any relationship with God (Syed Naquib al-Attas, 1969). Thus, the Malay-Muslim community cannot be labelled with this 'modern' West concept because the concepts of rationalism, individualism and internationalism must be in harmony, rather than in conflict, with religion (Syed Naquib al-Attas, 1969: 5, 6-10, 30-31).

According to Syed Naquib al-Attas (1969) as well, the arrival of Islam in the Malay world brought about a paradigm shift in the language, literature and world view of the Malay community both aesthetically and scientifically. This new direction in thinking was reflected in the language used to convey logical reasoning and scientific analysis. In this connection, Hamzah Fansuri was the first Malay to intellectually compose a Malay scientific paper based on rationalism and thus, is entitled to be recognized as the 'Father of Modern Malay Literature' (Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, 1970: 178).

Besides Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1970), who rejected Abdullah Munsyi as the first author of an autobiographical work in the Malay world, several other scholars also attempted to individually highlight the works that were studied as **the first Malay autobiography and biography**, such as Skinner (1976) with *Hikayat Perintah Negeri Bengkulu*, Amin Sweeney

(1980) with *Tarikh Datuk Bentara Luar Johor*, Mohd. Salleh Perang, and E. U. Kratz (1991) with *Surat Keterangan Syeikh Jalaluddin* (Fakih Saghir). Nevertheless, Amin Sweeney's (1980) recognition of the work by Muhamad Salleh Perang (*Tarikh Datuk Bentara Luar Johor*) gave rise to controversy among some other scholars who came after Abdullah Munsyi. For example, Liaw Yock Fang (1985:167) refused to accept *Tarikh Datuk Bentara Luar Johor* as the first Malay autobiography. According to him, an autobiography is "[...] a self-portrait or retrospective account in prose that a real person makes of his own existence, stressing his individual life and especially the history of his personality". However, according to Liaw (1985), *Tarikh Datuk Bentara Luar Johor* did not have much to say about the life of Muhamad Salleh Perang but rather only made brief mention of the life of this figure, described the history of the opening of the state of Johor. In fact, in its third volume, this work seemed to be more of a diary of the Sultan of Johor because it mainly described the life activities of the Johor ruler.

Thus, according to Liaw Yock Fang (1985:167), this work does not come close to the format of an autobiography. Moreover, its title, 'Tarikh' means 'annals or history'. Accordingly, Liaw (1985) opposed the statement by Amin Sweeney (1985) promoting the work of Muhamad Salleh Perang as the first Malay autobiography and instead promoted *Hikayat Abdullah* as being most worthy of the title.

Another scholar who criticized the crowning work of Muhamad Saleh Perang as the first Malay autobiography was C. W. Watson. He (1989:3) defined 'autobiography' in detail, citing the opinion of Dilthey as follows:

"[...] autobiography provided the best entrée into the task of historical interpretation. Through the autobiography, [...] the reader is in an ideal position to recover an individual's perception of historical change". [...] autobiography in this way subsequently gave rise to the historical study of the autobiography as a literary genre which directly reflected certain stages in the evolution of Western consciousness. The suggestion was made very early on the autobiography was a peculiarly Western form of literature predicted as it was on a concept of self, an individualism which was absent in other cultures".

According to Watson (1989:30), there were three categories of autobiographical writers in the 19th and 20th centuries in the Malay world, namely writers who had received a Western education, authors of European descent, and authors who were sponsored by Westerners, such as Christian missionaries and European administrators. Overall, all these authors wrote for non-native audiences, i.e. European audiences. Watson (1989:3) also criticised the recognition of Abdullah Munsyi as the first Malay autobiographical writer, his reasons being that Abdullah Munsyi was too much of a 'Malay', he did not write for Malay audiences, he placed too much emphasis on his individualistic personality, and his works were for the benefit of European audiences for the sake of maintaining his status as a recognized author.

Watson (1989:5) also criticised Sweeney and Phillips (1975) as well as Sweeney (1980) who held the view that '*Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar*' was the 'first Malay autobiography'. He agreed with Liaw Yock Fang (1985:1) that *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar* was a description of the political situation as seen through the eyes of the author and which was hidden from the view of the readers. Thus, according to Watson (1989:6), *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar* should be more accurately categorized as a memoir because Muhamad Salleh Perang had "*set down for self-justification his own version of events*". Watson's (1989:6) argument as to how an autobiography can be changed to a memoir is given below:

"[...] the autobiographers are seen as presenting hard factual information and even when the data are in error, they can be usefully exploited in order precisely to highlight the accuracy of the scholar's own account. The last fifteen years have in fact witnessed a remarkable flowering of Indonesian autobiography as elder statesmen and important figures have retired

and chosen to set down their version of events. This again makes the autobiography a memoir or chronicle of ‘*resgestae*’ rather than a confession’.

Accordingly, Watson (1989:7) identified two types of self-representations in autobiographies, namely, ethnographic autobiographies (*Hikayat Abdullah* by Abdullah Munsyi) and historical autobiographies (*Pulang Si Tenggang* by Muhammad Hj. Salleh). He (1989:9) added that “the autobiographical project is fundamentally ethnographic but with the autographical self-implicated very closely with the ethnography. The image of that ‘self’, which is therefore represented in the text, is one of a detached observer whose personality merges entirely into that of the reader for whom he becomes the seeing eyes. It is an account which sets out essentially to confirm the reader’s view of the world rather than reveal to the reader an understanding of the autobiographical personality. Even though the observed phenomena may be new to the reader, the construction put upon them does not in any way question the reader’s view of the world”. Meanwhile, a historical autobiography is composed to illustrate the unique life of the writer, his life history, and his self-exposure, as expressed in a desire to share his experiences, such as the poem, *Pulang Si Tenggang*, by Muhammad Hj. Salleh (Watson 1989:16).

For Watson (1989:17), studies on autobiographies are not based on the content of the work but the strategy employed by the author to communicate with his readers. Thus, according to Watson (1989:9) the scale of the autobiographical writing based on *Tarikh Dato’ Bentara Luar* is:

1. The fact that the writer experienced three periods which have a meaning and special character all by themselves, influencing his life, and indeed the life of our whole nation.
2. The belief that his descendants want to know about his life.
3. There is surely within (the story of my life) something to interest them; also in the hope there is something by way of example (*teladan*) as well as perhaps material for reflection in the steering of each one’s ship of life.
4. That everything is true and can be documented.
5. That now he is retired he has time to read and write.

This is because in modern Indonesian literature, there is an autobiographical form that is known as a ‘fictional autobiography’. The facts are misleading in the context of the actual content of the autobiography, but the style of self-representation in the form of a poem makes it comparable to other autobiographical works such as Rendra’s poems, and ‘*Perjalanan Si Tenggang*’ by Muhammad Hj. Salleh, which are ‘highly visible autobiographical literature’ (Watson, 1989:4). For that reason, Watson (1989) rejected Sweeney’s call to recognise *Tarikh Dato’ Bentara Luar* by Muhamad Salleh Perang because, according to him (1989:4) “There is, it seems to me, a certain circularity in the argument here, a willingness to look at only one sort of evidence’.

In reality, the *weltanschauung* of the Malay society is very different from that of the West. Unlike Westerners, the Malays do not see themselves as ‘individuals’. They feel that it is inappropriate to make themselves the focus of public attention, thus emphasizing the concept of ‘shyness’ to describe their psychological and physical dimensions in their reluctance to expose themselves (Sweeney and Phillips (1975), as well as Sweeney (1980)). Furthermore, according to Sweeney (1980), the Malay autobiographers who were hailed by the West were “*unrepresentative, inauthentic and not truly Malay*’. According to Sweeney (1990:21-22), the idea of sharing one’s life story with an audience is ‘alien’ to the Malay community. Malay authors, who resort to oral means of communication, will use the ‘third person pronoun’ even though the storyteller intends to include his life story, but they make no reference to “I”. Instead, the storyteller will make himself the main character in his narrative to the Malay

audience. Sweeney (1990:22) stated that the absence or lack of response to the recounting of life stories in the Malay community is because:

“[...] it would have seemed pointless to preserve in writing that material which had not been considered worth preserving in the pre-writing era that is speech not processed for storage in a stylized form. For this reason alone, therefore, it is not surprising perhaps, the life stories written by protagonists are not found in the manuscript tradition’.

One question that lingers in the mind is why there were no autobiographical works in the palace? Who wrote the life story of the king? According to Sweeney (1990:22), an author’s writings during the traditional period were under the auspices of a king. Thus, an author had to compose something that could promote the legitimacy of the reigning monarch. To compose something concerning the life story of a king was considered to be foreign to Malay writing conventions, unless it was indirectly available in ‘biographies’ regarding the ‘two Iskandars’ in *Hikayat Aceh* and *Misa Melayu*. Furthermore, if a ‘king’ referred to himself as ‘beta’, the author could not insert his values and views as the writer of that piece. The task of a palace author was a very important and difficult one, even more so when it was necessary to maintain the ‘servant and master’ relationship, which was bound by the concepts of sovereignty, plague and rebellion. In order to fulfil his duties as court composer, often the title ‘**Owner of the Story**’ (*Yang Empunya Cerita*) or ‘**Sahibul Saga**’ (*Sahibul Hikayat*) **was used, where the author felt he was there with the audience listening to the tale of the ‘owner of the story’**. Sweeney (1990:22) added that the authors not only represented the voices of their patrons but the patrons were also the main audience as they were referred to as “the lords who heard this story”. So, in an effort to deliver the ‘truth’ to the audience, the author had to produce works that were meaningful and valuable to the storyteller (Sweeney, 1987:231-235).

Furthermore, in response to the view of Watson (1989:5) that the primary purpose of an autobiographical writer is to become the main character in his work by referring to himself in the third person, Sweeney (1990:28) stated that the tradition of using the third person had long existed in conventional Malay compositions. According to Sweeney (1990:28), this style of writing had long existed in Malay literature since the 17th century. For example, Enci’ Amin as the author of *Syair Perang Mengkasar*, Raja Chulan in *Misa Melayu* and Raja Ahmad as well as Raja Ali through *Tuhfat al-Nafis* emerged as characters in their own works. Sweeney (1990:23) also criticized the opinion of Liaw Yock Fang (1985:167) that *Tarikh Dato’ Bentara Luar* is qualified to be categorized as a biography. For Sweeney (1990:23), parts one and two of that work are autobiographies, while part three, which describes the visit of Muhamad Salleh to Japan and China, is a record of the activities of the Maharaja of Johor. As an aide-de-camp to Maharaja Abu Bakar, Muhamad Salleh saw his notes not only as a reference for the future regarding Johor but the execution of his responsibilities as the king’s right-hand man. In addition, the current events inserted by Muhammad Salleh in *Tarikh Dato’ Bentara Luar* were part of the events in his life. Thus, the opening of Johor was very appropriately included in this autobiography, which was the greatest achievement of Muhammad Salleh in his career and life. In connection with the above opinion, Sweeney (1990:24) came up with the true definition of ‘autobiography’ as, “[...] a self-portrait or a retrospective account in prose that a real person makes of his own existence, stressing his individual life and especially the history of his personality”.

The recognition of *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah Munsyi* (1838) and *Hikayat Abdullah* (1843) by Abdullah Munsyi as the starting points of early Malay autobiographies was also rejected by Sweeney (1990:25), who argued that the works are more appropriate as memoirs. This is because *Tarikh Dato’ Bentara Luar*, which is filled with Malay cultural values, was composed for a Malay audience. Therefore, Sweeney (1990:26) accurately outlined the characteristics of autobiographical works and authors for Malay audiences as follows:

1. In autobiography, the implied author and the 'I' are one and the same.
2. The autobiographer must employ special care in deciding what version of himself he will make public and project to his reader.
3. The aspiring autobiographer - subject of course, to the limits of his own moral universe - has [...] a vast array of possibilities to choose from. He must decide not only what aspects of himself as protagonist he must highlight, but also what image of himself as writer he must project. His decision will depend upon what effect he wishes to create - or more precisely what reaction he desires from his audience.

Finally, through the above discussion on the multiple perspectives of scholars concerning the figures and works that meet the criteria to be recognised as the earliest autobiography, it was determined that Liaw Yock Fang (1985) gave a narrow definition of autobiography, while C. W. Watson (1989) was too liberal in his definition of that genre. For example, in the opinion of Watson (1989:4), '*Memoirs of a Malayan Family*' or '*Hikayat Nakhoda Muda*' qualify as autobiographies. Sweeney (1990:27) refuted this argument and questioned how the work could be classified as an autobiography as it was written by Lauddin about the life story of his father (Nakhoda Muda), at the request of the resident, Butter Hunnings. Clearly, Watson was confused by the definitions of autobiography and biography. Only Sweeney's (1990) perspective indicated his rationale and arbitrariness with regard to the *welstanschauung* and milieu that undergird Malay literary conventions. In addition, the prominence given to *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar* as the earliest Malay autobiography is very timely because compared to other works such as *Syair Dagang*, *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* and so on, only this work by Muhammad Salleh Perang can obviously be made a model and has a following after him, for example, the emergence of several autobiographers in Johor such as Mohd. Said Sulaiman with *Hikayat Sultan Abu Bakar* and several others.

4. Conclusion

Western colonialism has had a great impact on the world of Malay literature. The introduction of Western realism has given rise to a new genre in Malay literature through autobiographies and biographies. The recognition accorded to Abdullah Munsi as the earliest autobiographer, which was a factor for him being given the title 'Father of Malay Literature', had a great influence on the literary conventions that were handed down. However, developments in the scholarly world of Malay Literature have resulted in the recognition accorded to Abdullah Munsi being reviewed. Clearly, based on the perspectives of several literary scholars regarding the earliest Malay autobiography, which brought about changes to the literary works of the country, A. Sweeney emerged as a scholar who outlined a more rational view that took into consideration the *weltanschauung* and milieu of the Malay society. In that regard, *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar* should be highlighted and its merits reviewed as the earliest Malay autobiography.

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