

The Arjuna Myth within Two Indonesian Novels and One Sundanese Novel: A Comparative Literature Analysis

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Abstract: This article is intended to find out the reception of the novel writer towards the *wayang* (Javanese puppet) myth and the *Mahabharata* epic, particularly *Arjuna*. The novels analysed were *Arjuna Mencari Cinta*, *Arjuna Mencari Mati*, and *Mapag Perang Barata*. The analysis was done by applying a comparative literature approach and literary reception theory, while the method employed was comparative analytical descriptive. The findings showed that the *wayang* myth in the story of *Arjuna Mencari Cinta* was utilized by its writer to make readers have a glint towards the *wayang* characters, specifically Arjuna. Seeing the title, the novel *Arjuna Mencari Mati* parodied *Arjuna Mencari Cinta*, but the content was the deconstruction of *wayang* epic itself. While the Sundanese novel *Mapag Perang Barata* described the comeback of *wayang* basic aims as ideal shadows of human life.

1 INTRODUCTION

In Indonesian modern literature, in 1977, a novel entitled *Arjuna Mencari Cinta* by Y.A.N.M. Massardi was published, followed by a novel entitled *Arjuna Mencari Cinta Part II* in 1980 and *Arjuna Wiwahaha...!* in 1984. Then in Panuju (2014) wrote a novel with a similar title, *Arjuna Mencari Mati*, and also in 2004, a novel entitled *Trilogi Komplet: Arjuna Mencari Cinta* wrote by Y.A.N.M. Massardi was published.

Arjuna is the third of Pandawa Lima, the son of Dewi Kunti. He is famous as *Panengah Pandawa*. Pandawa means 'the sons of Pandu', for Pandu Dewanata is their father. The word "Arjuna" in Sanskrit language means 'white or clear and pure' and a popular *wayang* character for his divine power, handsomeness, and his involvement in many *wayang* stories as well (Tim Penulis Sena Wangi, 1999).

We can watch, see, and read Arjuna's image and myth when watching Indian dramas, *wayang* stories, epic of *Mahabharata* and comic. However, Arjuna character in the modern or contemporary Indonesian literature shows a variety of profiles. In the poem entitled "Kayal Arjuna" written by Subagio Sastrowardoyo in 1995, Arjuna was illustrated as a

knight with exceptional power which never be seen, neither in the stories nor *wayang* performance. In the poem, it was mentioned that Arjuna was able to win the battle, either in wars or sexual lives, although all was done by only imagining the enemy to battle or women to marry. In the drama *Semar Gugat* by Riantiaro (1995), Arjuna despised Semar as the reincarnation of Sanghiyang Ismaya, in which he forced Semar to cut off his tuft for Arjuna's pregnant wife. While in the novel of *Arjuna Mencari Mati* by Panuju (2004), Arjuna tried to kill himself for not being able to bear his sufferings from not having a genital organ.

This article aimed at finding out reception or response of novel writers towards *wayang* myth and *Mahabharata* epic, particularly the myth of Arjuna character. Martin dan Ringham (2000, p. 89) explain that myths are symbolic narratives often involving gods or heroes and offering an explanation of some fact or natural phenomenon.

Some previous research focusing on Arjuna have been conducted by a number of scholars, such as by Nurgiyantoro (1998; 2003), Koesoemadinata (2012), Nengsih (2013), Kurniawan (2015), Hartati (2016), and Sumiyadi (2016). Nurgiyantoro (1998; 2003) pointed out, in the novel *Arjuna Mencari Cinta*, there were name and character transformation of the *wayang* characters including Arjuna. He argued that

the transformation seemed to be a superficiality of Arjuna figure. Koesoemadinata (2012) analyzed the complexity of Arjuna's teacher character, Pandita Drona, which was illustrated to have physical disability and craftiness thus his divine power was defeated by Arjuna. Nengsih (2013) examined the spoken tradition of Banjar spell in South Kalimantan. The spell was named *Panah Arjuna*, used by men to conquer women they loved. Kurniawan probed Arjuna figure in *Cempala* magazine in July 1996 and January 1997 edition by applying a deconstruction method and theory. He concluded the legend of Arjuna as a *lelanang jagad* or the man of the world should be criticized, for being an archer knight, a war commander, and a noble knight, does not mean he is an ideal man without any imperfections in his life. Arjuna is less skilled compared to Adipati Karna and Bambang Ekalaya; Hartati (2016) concerned her research on a poem by Subagio Sastrowardoyo entitled "Kayal Arjuna". Hartati (2016) concluded that Arjuna was illustrated as a man who was only good at daydreaming, although he was described responsible for his family. While Sumiyadi (2016) focused on a comparative study between a Sundanese novel and an Indonesian short story with the same title, *Burak Siluman*. In those two stories, it was mentioned that a woman was getting crazy over Arjuna figure that she frequently saw in *wayang* shows, so when the creature resembling Arjuna asked her to marry him, the woman agreed.

2 ANALYSIS APPROACH

The approach used in this article was comparative literature. Damono (2009) says comparative literature is a literature approach which does not result on a theory. Therefore, any theory can be utilized in the comparative literature. In this article, the researcher applied literary reception as the theoretical foundation for the research objective is to find out a writer reception towards the Arjuna myth. The writer, in this case, can be regarded as super reader, such as Riffaterre's statement, which views that Baudelaire is a super reader when reading his poetry (Segers, 2000).

The reception or aesthetic reception are also corresponding with literary response theory, talking how readers give meaning towards literary works they read in order to give responses (Junus, 1985). The responses can be passive realized in readers' understanding or views on literary works aesthetic values, or can be in active action realized in readers'

responses realization, such as by writing a literary work. Reception performance is similar to transformation and intertextuality. Nonetheless, transformation has a relation with changes and shifts from one discourse to another, intertextuality is connected with literary texts bonding to other texts, while literary reception refers to readers' or writers' responses towards the works they receive (Sumiyadi, 2009).

3 ANALYSIS METHODS

The novel used as the source of the present research is a novel entitled *Trilogi Komplet: Arjuna Mencari Cinta* (AMC) published in 2004 by Massardi. The novel was then compared to other Indonesian novels, *Arjuna Mencari Mati* (AMM) written by Panuju published in 2004. Those two novels were compared intentionally as seen from the title, *AMM* novel seemed to response *AMC* novel. Afterwards, for the requirement of literature comparative approach is that the novels compared should be in different languages, so that the comparison was conducted to literary works with two different languages, namely Sundanese novel entitled *Mapag Perang Bharata* (MPB) written by a Sundanese writer Ahmad Bakri published in 2009.

The present article employed an analytical descriptive method and comparative descriptive (Ratna, 2008). Those two methods could be combined in accordance with the work procedure to be comparative analytical descriptive method. In analysing the three novels, the writer used semiotic narrative analysis suggested by Greimas. Although Greimas analysis was first developed for folklore, Perakyla (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) argues that the analysis can be applied into a variety of texts. The analysis procedure of the comparison and reception are presented in figure 1.

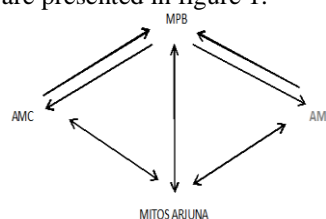


Figure 1: analysis procedure of the comparison and reception in this study.

Note:
 ← → : novel comparison
 → : reception/response of the writers as super readers towards Arjuna myth

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Arjuna Mencari Cinta (AMC) Novel by Yudhistira A.N.M. Massardi

Arjuna in *AMC* was described as a person who had a lot of girlfriends. It was a teenager novel and Arjuna was described as a teen who had just become a twelve grader of senior high school.

The women characters admiring Arjuna in *AMC* were Setyowati, Arimbi, and Anggraeni. Whereas, the one that Arjuna loved was Pergiwati. In the *wayang* story, Setyowati referred to four people, namely Dewi Satyawati or Dewi Pujawati (the wife of Narasoma or Prabu Salya), Dewi Durgandini (the queen of Prabu Sentanu), Dewi Rekatawati (the wife of Prabu Matswati), and Dewi Citrawati, the wife of Prabu Arjuna Sasrabahu (Tim Penulis Sena Wangi, 1999). From those four people, nobody had a relation with Arjuna, such as loving or being loved by Arjuna, moreover getting married to Arjuna.

Further, another character who loved Arjuna was Arimbi. Arimbi was the second wife of Bima or Bratasena and they had a son, Gatotkaca. So, Arimbi was the sister in law of Arjuna. In the story of *wayang* and *Mahabharata* epic, it had never mentioned that Arjuna had a relationship with Arimbi. Still, in *AMC* Arjuna was mentioned to be engaged to Arimbi, although it seemed he did it only for fun (Massardi, 2004).

Anggraeni was mentioned as the other one who loved Arjuna. In the *wayang* story, Dewi Anggraeni was the queen of Bambang Ekalaya or Palgunadi, the king of Nisada country or Paranggelung. In the *wayang* story, she was frequently become the symbol of wife loyalty towards a husband. It was shown when she was tempted by another man, although the man was Arjuna who was famous for his look and divine power. She preferred dying to betraying her love to Palgunadi (Tim Penulis Sena Wangi, 1999). It was found in *AMC* that Arjuna had a relationship with Anggraeni. Nevertheless, their relationship was in the contrary compared to the *wayang* story, for in *AMC*, Anggraeni was described as a woman who easily betrayed her love to other men (Massardi, 2004).

Another woman character of *wayang* emerging in *AMC* was Pergiwati, her full name was Endang Pergiwati. She was Arjuna's daughter and Pancawala's wife, the son of Yudistira. In the novel, she was illustrated as a woman who easily turned her heart to other men, same as Anggraeni. The difference lied on how Arjuna saw them; Anggraeni

was a very young girl and innocent, while Pergiwati was considered more mature. Moreover, Pergiwati was his father's secretary. She was the one who actually thought Arjuna was still a little kid so she liked the father better than him (Massardi, 2004).

Arjuna's relation with other characters seemed to disapprove the family tree. Arimbi was Arjuna's sister in law (Bima's wife) and Gatotkaca's mom, his own nephew. Therefore, it was taboo for Arjuna to date her. So was Pergiwati. She was Arjuna's daughter, who got married to Pancala, Yudistira's son.

Abimanyu was the son of Arjuna from Dewi Wara Subadra. In the novel, Abimanyu was Arjuna's school mate, who invited him when Abimanyu got his birthday. Kresna was Arjuna's brother in law for he is the brother of Dewi Wara Subadra, Arjuna's wife. Howbeit, in *AMC*, Arjuna and Kresna were not in laws, but they made friends. Their relationship was just because they needed each other. Arjuna needed Kresna once he got quarrel with his dad so he was not able to borrow his dad's car anymore. In that kind of situation, Kresna would usually appear as Arjuna's saviour. Kresna would need Arjuna for Arjuna was considered intelligent at the school, so he leant on Arjuna for tests (Massardi, 2004). Another character emerged in *AMC* was Burisrawa. Burisrawa was Dewi Banowati's big brother and the son of Prabu Salya. Burisrawa loved Dewi Wara Subadra a lot, although she had got married to Arjuna. However, in *AMC*, Burisrawa and Arjuna were presented at a different age. He played a role as Arimbi's father (Massardi, 2004).

4.2 The Arjuna Mencari Mati (AMM) Novel by Redi Panuju

The novel *Arjuna Mencari Mati (AMM)* presented a *wayang* world in the dream of Tegar character. In his dream, Tegar came into a Goddess' country called Junggring Salaka. There, he and his spouse, Ratna, was welcome by Bathara Guru, for his reason that Tegar was a "saviour" sent to Junggring Saloka to overcome *pagebluk* 'epidemic' occurred there. According to him, Tegar was the promised one, as mentioned in *jitabsara*. *Jitabsara* or *Jitapsara* was a book written by Batara Panyarikan based on the instruction of Batara Guru (Tim Penulis Sena Wangi, 1999). Afterwards, Tegar was ordered to do a mission impossible, changing *wayang* texts by observing the real wayang life.

Another element which explicitly came into the *wayang* world was Holy Qur'an texts as the diseases healer charm, such as when Tegar was asked to cure

Bathari Guru or Permaisuri Retno Dewi Utami (Panuju, 2004) The women who also had a very close relation to Arjuna in *AMM* were Srikandi and Banowati. Those two characters were presented as Arjuna's wives. In the *wayang* world, these two women were indeed Arjuna's wives. Dewi Srikandi was described as a beautiful woman, good at military knowledge. Moreover, some puppeteers mention, Srikandi wore a complete military costume when she was delivered to this world. She was good at archery for Arjuna taught her (Tim Penulis Sena Wangi, 1999).

In *AMM*, Srikandi's skill at archery was not visible. The dominant thing about her was that her jealousy. She was jealous for Arjuna loved Banowati so much (Panuju, 2004, p. 127). In the *wayang* story, Dewi Banowati was a beautiful and spoiled princess of Prabu Salya from Mandukara Kingdom. She was the wife of Duryodana, although she was badly in love with Arjuna. All puppeteers agreed that Dewi Banowati was a kind of disloyal wife. After getting married to Duryodana, she kept on loving Arjuna (Tim Penulis Sena Wangi, 1999). In *AMM*, it was told that Banowati married Arjuna although her husband was still alive, and it was shown as if Arjuna was the one who admired her, not Banowati. Whereas, Banowati herself still felt affection to her husband, that was why she was determined to do emasculation to Arjuna (Panuju, 2004).

In *AMM*, the story fact element, particularly the setting and characters, were not slightly different. Even so, the sequences and characters' behaviour got reversed and diverged. For instance, Cakil or Buta Cakil was a giant character in the *wayang* world, but he had small body. He appeared in many stories with various names, such as Ditya Kala Gendir Penjalin, Ditya Kala Carang Aking, Kala Klantang Mimis. He was the one and only giant weapon called keris, not one but two, but sometimes three. But he always died being stabbed by his own *keris*. Because of this, in Javanese society he was frequently used as a model of bad behaviour. When somebody got trouble because of his/her behaviour, he/she was considered resembling Buta Cakil (Tim Penulis Sena Wangi, 1999) Nonetheless, in *AMM* Cakil was a protagonist character for his help to Tegar when he was robbed by mask burglars (Panuju, 2004).

In the *wayang* and Mahabharata epic, Dursasana was Duryodana's young brother. In *wayang* shows, especially living actors, he was easily recognized for his big tall body and hands and legs movement. He was the symbol of less educated, unethical, and uncivilized person (Tim Penulis Sena Wangi, 1999).

In the contrary, in *AMM*, he was a kindly-hearted, polite and tried to help others (Panuju, 2004).

The characters who also showed different characteristics are punakawan or servants, namely Semar and his sons. Semar or Ki Lurah Semar, was the main servant in the *wayang* world. Like other servants, he was the original *wayang* figure from Indonesia. In Mahabharata epic, nothing mentioned about these unique characters. Semar and his sons were narrated to always follow Pandawa clan. It pointed out that they went along with the right people. In the opposite, in *AMM*, Pandawa clan was the center of corruption, collusion and nepotism, and Semar was supposed to resuscitate them. Unfortunately, Semar, who was mentioned as Goddess offspring, even conspired with the clan and tried to betray Duryodana, Sengkuni, dan Tegar (Panuju, 2014).

In the *wayang* story, Arjuna finally married to Dewi Banowati. Yet he did it after Banowati became a widow, as her husband died in Kurusetra battle field. In *AMM* Arjuna arrogated Banowati from Duryodana after Yudistira shoving aside Duryodana from Astina Kingdom. Here Arjuna seemed to love Banowati so much, while Banowati still admired her husband so that she was determined to emasculate Arjuna.

Manliness and Pasopati were Arjuna's pride. From that moment, Arjuna did not live his life any longer so he went for adventure to look for death. Loosing those two weapons led him to give up his life. He thought everything came to the end (Panuju, 2004).

4.3 The Mapag Perang Barata (MPB) Sundanese Novel by Ahmad Bakri

The *MPB* were generally same as the *wayang* story, particularly Mahabharata and Bharatayuda. Even so, there were some differences emerged. There was no punakawan or servant appeared, such as Lurah Semar and his sons, whereas they were the special characteristics of *wayang* characters, especially in Indonesia, which has never found in Mahabharata epic.

Relating to Mahabharata epic, there were a number of similar facts discovered. However, in terms of plot, it seemed that the novel removed the event of dice match between Pandawa (Yudhistira) and Kurawa (Sakuni). In fact, this was slightly crucial event that led to the Barata or Bharatayuda war. In *MPB*, the event considered crucial was Pandawa adventure after the incident in Waranawata, or in the *wayang* story, it was well-

known as the incident of “Bale Sigala-gala” (Bakri, 2009).

Another different thing was the absence of Kresna figure. He was Arjuna’s brother in law. In Mahabharata epic, it was mentioned that he was God Wisnu’s realization therefore Wisnu’s behavior as a god in him was much more dominant than human side. Kresna had a very close relation with Pandawa, specifically Arjuna. He was the one who tried to restrain the Bharatayuda war to happen. In Mahabharata it was told that Kresna or Narayan fulfils Pandawa request, saying, “Demi kau, aku akan mengunjungi Kurawa di kerajaan mereka. Jika aku bisa mendapatkan perdamaian tanpa berkompromi, tanpa mengurangi hak-hak kalian, aku akan berbuat begitu” (Narayan, 2009).

In the *MPB*, it was also told that Drona figure loved Arjuna more than anybody else. He admired and was rightfully proud of Arjuna so all of his divine power was transferred to Arjuna completely. His amazement to Arjuna was vividly seen when he tested Pandawa’s and Kurawa’s archery ability (Bakri, 2009).

4.4 The Comparison between AMC and MPB

In *AMC*, the setting and sequences are not connected to the *wayang* world. In *AMC* Arjuna is a teenager who tries to find out his identity in the centre of metropolitan town and in the modernization era. Meanwhile, the women characters who love and be loved by Arjuna are not parallel with the *wayang* world. In Anggraeni’s role, there is a little connection. However, in the story it is mentioned that Arjuna is the one who loved Anggraeni, not vice versa.

Both in *AMC* and the *wayang* story, Arjuna is a fine man and admired by women. Besides, he has an authoritative bearing. In the *wayang* story or Mahabharata epic, Arjuna relies on Pasopati arrow, in *AMC* Arjuna leans on Toyota jeep, his dad’s office car.

In *MPB*, the story facts (plot, characters, and setting) have a relation with the *wayang* myth. Yet, the cause of Bharata war is narrated different here. It is identified that Pandawa strives for their rights after a long odyssey for the combustion planned by Kurawa. In the *wayang* story, Pandawa strives for their rights after they finish their punishment of thirteen years exile as they lose to Kuwara in a gambling game.

In short, although *AMC* and *MPB* link to the *wayang* myth, both of them possess differences in

utilizing the story facts. *AMC* tries to free the myth by combining it with teenagers’ daily life in metropolitan in their era, while *MPB* puts up a sturdy attempt of the myth, but by trying to filter sequences which regarded as not suitable with commendable attitude, either by noble knights or us as readers, namely gambling games.

4.5 The Comparison between AMM and MPB

When it relates to the *wayang* myth, *MPB* the Sundanese novel seems to affirm or strengthen the *wayang* myth as a life shadow to emulate by men, so the bad side of *wayang* characters, such as the gambling game, is intentionally hidden by the writer. Meanwhile, in *AMM*, it is found an inclusion of the new elements and divergence, also inversion of the *wayang* characters’ behaviour. The facts consisting of setting, character and plot in *AMM*, possess a close relation with the *wayang* myth. The text or story of *wayang* within *AMM* is framed in a character’s dream named Tegar for around nine months. Nevertheless, at the end it is shown an “estuary” or confluence between the world and the hereafter, where Tegar lives with the *wayang* world, when Ratna delivers his baby named Gendir Penjalin. The baby absurdly emerges in the same shape as found in the *wayang* world:

“Gendir Penjalin!” sapa Tegar sekali lagi.
“Papa...!” Suara si Bayi membalas, membuat Tegar sangat terkejut. “Papa...!” kata bayinya lagi membuat Tegar nyaris lemas. “ha...ha...ha...!” disusul tawa bayi. Mulutnya terbuka. Tegar melihat dari mulut bayinya mencuat dua gigi yang besar. Kemudian di bagian bawahnya juga mencuat dua gigi taring yang mencuat ke bawah. Tegar teringat pada gigi yang dimiliki Vampir dalam film-film horror. (Panuju, 2004).

The inclusion of Gendir Penjalin into the real world seems to be equal to Tegar’s entrance into the *wayang* world. The difference is Gendir character stops at the end of the story and does not play further roles as he is still a baby, while Tegar colours the *wayang* world by healing the diseases through the Holy Qur’an verses. Even, the divine power of the *wayang* world does not work by the prayer that Tegar says while healing the *wayang* characters.

The dominant difference between *AMM* and the *wayang* myth lies on the event sequences and characters showing divergence and inversion of characters’ behaviour. The divergence and inversion of characters occur, for example Srikandi’s archery

skill, is not visible, and the dominant behaviour emerged is that she is full of wife jealousy, Banowati is married to Arjuna (although Duryodana is still alive) and Arjuna is the one who loves Banowati and not vice versa, Cakil is the protagonist that helps Tegar once he is robbed by masked robbers, Dursasana is a kindly-hearted man and tries to help others, Duryodana hands the throne to Yudistira and Dursasana informs that there is no Bharatayuda war in fighting the Astina Kingdom power, Duryodana is presented as a very wise ascetic, the Pandawa sons are appeared as bad boys just because the father has power, Sengkuni pleads Pandawa, Semar does not take side of truth (he conducts a betrayal), Bisma does not accept the reality that his death destiny is on a woman's hand, Drona prefers Pandawa and dies hit by Arjuna's arrow, Arjuna arrogates Banowati from Duryodana, Yudistira succeeds in getting rid of Duryodana from Astina Kingdom, Yudistira dies by Banowati's arrow, Kresna passes away because of Sikandi's arrow.

5 CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis result, it comes to the conclusion about the reception of the three novels towards Arjuna in the *wayang* story and Mahabharata epic. The *AMC* novel presents the myth and epic by using similar character names. A number of characters emerged within the novel, but they never refer to the three dimensions of the characters (physiological, psychological, sociological dimension). The one and only character possessed allusions with the *wayang* character is Arjuna, though the relation is only on physical appearance, brawny, good looking and admired by women.

In the contrary, the *AMM* novel does not only have allusions towards the *wayang* setting, but also deconstruct it by inverting the characteristics of the characters so that Kurawa seems depicting propriety and Pandawa represents depravity. While the Sundanese novel, *MPB* perceives the *wayang* world and Mahabharata epic as a story to emulate and to have a perfect emulation, bad behaviour and attitude should be avoided, such as Arjuna's perfect emergence and the dice match or the gambling game, although the trigger of Bharata war is diminished by the writer.

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