Epic of Ramayana in Kuntowijoyo's Novels
Aesthetic Response Analysis

Inung Setyami[1,2,*], Faruk[1], Fadlil Munawwar Manshur[1]

[1] Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
[2] Universitas Borneo Tarakan, Kalimantan Utara, Indonesia
[*] Corresponding author. Email: inung,setyami@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This article aims to describe and reveal the meaning of the Ramayana Epic in Kuntowijoyo's novel in terms of Wolfgang Iser's Aesthetic Response theory. The data under examination are the novel *Wasripin dan Satinah/WdS* (2003) and *Mantra Pejinak Ular/MPU* (2013). Under a qualitative descriptive study, the data were analyzed through reading, identification, classification, interpretation, and inference. The results showed that Kuntowijoyo's novel (*WdS* and *MPU*) contained the Ramayana epic as a previous reference; the Ramayana epic which is the background in the creation of the novel, namely the Javanese puppet (*wayang*) story, especially the Rama Tambak; and the Ramayana epic that appears in Kuntowijoyo's novel has an intention, which is to describe the New Order era in utilizing puppets as a tool to convey political vision and mission.

Keywords: Epic, Ramayana, Rama Tambak, Repertoire.

1. INTRODUCTION

Epic is a kind of traditional literary work that tells of heroism. The word epic comes from Ancient Greek which means song or praise. Epos has poetic and dramatic lyrics. Epos tells of the heroism of the Gods or certain figures. The meaning of Epos is also similar to the notion of *Wiracarita* (*Dewanagari*) which comes from Sanskrit. *Wiracarita* is a combination of words from '*Wira*' which means Hero, and '*Carita*' which means a story. The world-famous epic, namely Gilgamesh, Illiyad, Odyssey, Beowulf, Ramayana, and Mahabharata.

Ramayana and Mahabharata are two epics known to the world. In Indonesian literature, the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata have inspired authors to create fiction (prose, poetry, drama scripts). The epics Ramayana and Mahabharata contain messages about life, customs, and human culture from the past (Pendit, 2003). The epics are known in India or even in the world. These stories are also known in Indonesia, especially in Java. The story of Ramayana in India has indeed been adapted to the Ramayana in Java. This story has several different stories in certain parts, including differences in the names of the characters and the fate of the characters.

The story of Mahabharata and Ramayana is told in various versions and languages, from Telugu to Thai, Cham, and Viet. In Indonesia, there are many versions of this story (from Javanese, Malay to Sundanese, from Java to Bali) (Salleh, 2018).

Ramayana is an epic originating from the South Asian region (Ancient India) and tells many stories and Ancient Hindu mythology. The name Ramayana comes from Sanskrit, which is a combination of the words Rama and Ayana which means the story of "Rama's Journey". *Ramayana* is a legend from India. Apart from India, the *Ramayana* story is also found in Javanese (Indonesian) literature, namely the *Kakawin Ramayana*, while in Malay the *Ramayana* story is titled *Hikayat Seri Rama*. According to Abimanyu (2014), *Hikayat Seri Rama* (Malay) is different in content from *Kakawin Ramayana* (Old Javanese language).

The authors use puppet elements in their works to bring back the culture, i.e., that of those who were born and raised in a regional culture. This is an artistic longing that has significantly contributed to the development of Indonesian culture (Darma, 1995).

In the form of prose, the stories of *Ramayana* are presented in short stories and novels. Several modern Indonesian novels that contain *Ramayana*'s stories in novels by Kuntowijoyo include *Wasripin dan Satinah* (*WdS*) and *Mantra Pejinak Ular (MPU)*. The novels *WdS* and *MPU* by Kuntowijoyo focus on the phenomena of community life and social issues. However, this novel

also inserts the Ramayana *wayang* story as a reflection of life. The insertion of the Ramayana *wayang* story is in the form of events and names of characters who have the author's intentions. The Ramayana puppet story that appears in the text of the novel is a manifestation of Kuntowijoyo's knowledge as an author who is familiar with Javanese culture.

Kuntowijoyo was born in Sanden, Bantul, Yogyakarta (1943). Kuntowijoyo completed his formal religious education at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* in Ngawonggo, Klaten. Kuntowijoyo is the son of a puppeteer. While Kunto's grandpa was a writer of Quranic manuscripts. For this reason, Kuntowijoyo has knowledge and interest in literature. His works are thick with Islamic culture and Javanese which is a deficit of experience and knowledge in him (Hadi, 2004).

Regarding the references that precede or background the *MPU* novel by Kuntowijoyo, there are previous references in the form of the *Ramayana* stories told through the puppet. The previous reference in Kuntowijoyo's *WdS* novel is presented in the *Ramayana* story through Kumbakarno's character. What is realized in the novels *WdS* and *MPU* is related to the stories of Ramayana as previous references, which are a form of "resources of knowledge" (Munawar, 2007) owned by Kuntowijoyo.

Repertoire

Resources of knowledge, when equated with Iser's concepts, are called a repertoire. The repertoire consists of all areas that can be recognized in the text, namely social norms, history, culture, and previous references that are used as the basis for expressing ideas in writing.

Iser states the theory of aesthetic response and the theory of repertoire. The repertoire can be identified through references to previously created works or a set of norms (social, cultural, and historical), which appear in the text, and form the basis of creation (Iser, 1987). Aesthetic response theory must be understood in terms of the interaction between the reader and the text. Called an aesthetic response because it stimulates the imagination of the reader, by giving the desired effect. (Iser, 2000). Texts in literary works have an artistic pole (text related to the author) and an aesthetic pole (text related to the reader/reader's action in realizing the meaning of the text).

Iser revealed that no story can be told in its entirety, part of the text will be left as a reading process. A text is like space or has a gap. Empty spaces or gaps to be filled or have meaning, empty spaces/gaps must be negotiated in the act of reading. Readers bridge the text gap. Readers do the reading process, and that is when communication begins (Iser, 2000). Blank/gap in the text is a text relationship that is not visible. This open space occurs because of the asymmetrical nature of literary works, there is no balance between the text and the reader, if the

reader succeeds in bridging the gap, then various possibilities of communication have been initiated. Reading activity in the process of bridging the gap or filling the gap is directed by the text itself (Iser, 2006).

This article discusses the story of Ramayana as the embodiment of repertoire in the novels *Wasripin dan Satinah/WdS* and *Pejinak Mantra Ular/MPU* which is used as the background of creation so that the foreground that Kuntowijoyo aspires to through the novel he created can be revealed.

The novels *Wasripin dan Satinah/WdS*, and *Mantra Pejinak Ular/MPU* by Kuntowijoyo cannot be separated from his experiences related to the reality of humanity as a reality in the real world. It also reveals how far Kuntowijoyo has revealed his repertoire or sources of knowledge related to the Ramayana story as a reference that precedes the creation of the novels *Wasripin dan Satinah/WdS* and *Mantra Pejinak Ular/MPU*.

The texts in *WdS* and *MPU* novels have gaps/blanks so that these gaps/blanks can be concretized through the reading process (text communication) carried out by the reader. In the text gap, readers can find the meaning of the Ramayana story in the texts of the novels *WdS* and *MPU* by Kuntowijoyo. Thus, the formulation of the problem in this study is how the repertoire of the Ramayana story as a 'previous reference' becomes the basis for the creation of Kuntowijoyo's (2003, 2013) novels, namely *WdS* and *MPU*.

2. METHOD

This study uses Iser's Aesthetic Response theory, especially repertoire. This research is a qualitative descriptive study as it does not calculate numbers (Moleong, 1989).

This study's data sources are novels by Kuntowijoyo, namely *Wasripin and Satinah (WdS)*, and *Mantra Pejinak Ular (MPU)*. The process of reading the text of all novels related to the repertoire of the Ramayana story, namely the *WdS* and *MPU* novels, is carried out repeatedly, carefully, and thoroughly.

This research is based on the data analysis method of Wolfgang Iser's Aesthetic Response theory, especially the repertoire related to 'previous references'. Iser's theory of repertoire used in this study focuses on the process of interaction between the text and its readers to produce a response. Iser's theory is appropriate for analyzing data sources, namely *MPU* and *WdS* novels because this theory has the concept of "previous references" as the basis for creating works. The "previous reference" referred to in the text of the *MPU* and *WDS* novels is the epic story of the Ramayana.

Considering that a text will only give meaning when it is read (Iser, 1987), it is necessary to read the text in the novels *WdS* and *MPU* by Kuntowijoyo to reveal the

repertoire in it. Therefore, the method used is the reading method. The appropriate text reading method is the text criticism method. Iser's reading theory is similar to Riffaterre's retroactive reading.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Previous references contained in Kuntowijoyo's novels (*WdS and MPU*) are the stories of *Ramayana* that appear in the texts contained in the novel. Previous references in the form of the *Ramayana* stories appear in the text as a form of a repertoire of the creation of Kuntowijoyo's works. The emergence of the story of *Ramayana* in the novels *Wasripin dan Satinah* and *Mantra Pejinak Ular* is described as follows.

3.1. Rama Tambak Story in Mantra Pejinak Ular's Novel

The epic Ramayana tells the journey of a prince from the country of Ayodya named Sri Rama. Sri Rama is the son/descendant of King Dasarata who ruled the kingdom of Kosala with the center of government in Ayodya. Rama succeeded in marrying Dewi Sita in a competition made by Dewi Sita's father, namely Prabu Janaka. Dewi Kekayi (King Darasata's third wife) pleaded with King Dasarata for Prince Rama and Dewi Sita to be exiled to the forest. Hearing Kekayi's request, King Desarata was sad. However, King Dasarata could not refuse his wife's request because he was bound by a promise. When Rama and Dewi Sita were exiled to the forest, Dewi Sita was kidnapped by the King of Alengka named Ravana. In this part of the story, there is the story of 'Rama Tambak'. It is called "Rama Tambak" because in this story there is an event to stem the ocean (*tambak*) by Rama and the monkeys as a form of his efforts to save Dewi Sita.

The *MPU* novel by Kuntowijoyo contains text excerpts that tell the story of *Rama Tambak*. The text excerpt is shown below.

> *"Rama Tambak" menceritakan bagaimana kera kera membantu Rama dengan membuat jalan laut yang menghubungkan daratan dengan Alengka. Raja Rahwana sudah keterlaluan angkara murkanya. Setelah jalan laut selesai, maka dengan mudah prajurit-prajurit Rama menyerang, mereka pun mengalahkan Alengka* (Kuntowijoyo, 2013, p. 233).

> "*Rama Tambak*" tells how the monkeys helped Rama by making a sea road connecting the mainland with Alengka. King Ravana had gone too far with his anger. After the sea route was completed, Rama's soldiers easily attacked, they also defeated Alengka. (Kuntowijoyo, 2013, p. 233).

The Ramayana book consists of 7 *kanda* called *saptakandha*, namely *Bala kanda (Kanda 1), Ayodya kanda (Kanda II), Aranya kanda (Kanda III), Khiskindha kanda (Kanda IV), Sundara kanda (Kanda V), Yudha* kanda (Kanda VI), and Utarra kanda (Kanda VII). Each kanda has a story that is interconnected. The story of Rama Tambak in the Ramayana story is part of *Kandha VI (Yuda kanda)*.

Kandha VI or *Yudha Kanda* tells of Rama in grief because his wife was kidnapped by Ravana. Before the war started, there was an incident to build a bridge over the sea to Alengka. The bridge was used by Rama and his troops to Alengka. The war began, and one by one the soldiers and princes of Alengka fell. Witnessing the war and the fall of the Alengka warriors, Ravana was very sad and angry, then Ravana went to war and died. After Rama won the battle, Rama managed to meet Sita. Kanda VI is a story that tells the story of Rama and the Monkey King Sugriwa deploying an army of monkeys to prepare an attack Alengkapura.

The text excerpt in the *Mantra Pejinak Ular* novel above is Kuntowijoyo's knowledge as a writer of *wayang*. His knowledge of *wayang* can be seen in Kuntowijoyo's skill in inserting *wayang* stories (*Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*). The story of *Rama Tambak* is a piece of the story in the epic story *Ramayana*.

The story of *Rama Tambak* describes the life of *gotong royong* (cooperation), the story of *Rama Tambak* is presented in people's lives to give suggestions so that people can live side by side, work together, and peacefully. This story also represents the leader (Rama Wijaya) in leading his people. So that the existence of this story during the New Order era was Suharto's attempt to give the image of a nation's leader in leading his people.

During the New Order era, the discourse of power was reflected in *wayang* performances. The staging of the play Rama Tambak is inseparable from the discourse of Suharto's power. In February 1998 the play was staged in various cities in Java to stem the hardships that befell the Indonesian people (Darmoko, 2018).

The story of Rama Tambak is an episode of the epic Ramayana which tells the story of Rama Wijaya's struggle to reclaim his wife (Dewi Sita) who was kidnapped by Ravana. To reach the kingdom of Alengka (Ravana's Kingdom), Rama Wijaya had to build a pond (dam) connecting the mainland to the Alengka Kingdom. The creation of the pond was successful because it received help from the monkey army which numbered in the thousands.

During the New Order era, puppetry (*wayang*) had political power. Puppets serve as public entertainment but also as a tool to convey the leader's political vision and mission through a performance. During the New Order era, the story of the Ramayana, especially Rama Tambak, was performed by many puppeteers at *wayang* kulit shows. The Rama Tambak puppet show is intensively staged especially in August or the commemoration of Independence Day.

During the Sukarno leadership period as well as Suharto, *wayang kulit* has become an effective medium for communicating send messages from certain parties as well as the government. Delivery forms this kind of thing is synonymous with a process of communication that takes place between the two parties, namely the puppeteer and the audience or listener (Adi, 2017).

Puppet show at the time New Order government is more inclined to communication tools to convey messages of development that includes political, economic, social, cultural development, national defense, and administration (Adi, 2017).

Reading the entire *Mantra Pejinak Ular* text, it can be understood that in the text there is the author's intention. Kuntowijoyo, as the author, criticizes politics in Indonesia, which uses art not for aesthetic purposes, but only as a political tool.

3.2. Ramayana Story in Wasripin dan Satinah Novel

The novel *WdS* by Kuntowijoyo is more dominant in telling the characters Wasripin and Satinah as the central characters. Wasripin lives in Jakarta with his adoptive mother. While living with his adoptive mother, Wasripin was empowered by his adoptive mother to fulfill his adoptive mother's sexual desires. Initially, Wasripin obeyed his mother's wishes, but gradually Wasripin got bored and decided to leave Jakarta. Wasripin decided to go to his mother's hometown in a fishing village on the North Coast of Central Java. Wasripin arrived at the *surau* or small mosque and fell asleep. Wasripin was asleep for three days. While Wasripin was sleeping, he did not know that he was the talk of many people during his arrival in the village. When Wasripin woke up, he was surprised because many people surrounded him. It can be seen in the text excerpt below.

> *"Ini mati atau tidur. Kalau mati kok masih bernafas. Kalau tidur kok tidak bangun-bangun." Kata mereka yang berkerumun. "Ini pasti cucu Kumbakarna." Kumbakarna adalah adik Rahwana yang sepanjang hidupnya lebih suka tertidur* (Kuntowijoyo, 2003, p. 7).

"It's dead or sleeping. If you die, why are you still breathing? If you sleep, why don't you wake up?" Said the crowd. "This must be Kumbakarna's grandson." Kumbakarna is Ravana's younger brother who throughout his life prefers to sleep (Kuntowijoyo, 2003, p. 7)

In the text of the *WdS* novel, it appears that the character Wasripin is said to be in a *surau* and fast asleep. People surrounded him. Kuntowijojo, with his knowledge of puppetry, described the character Wasripin sleeping like Kumbakarna's grandson in puppet.

The character Kumbakarna in the *Ramayana* epic comes from the Sanskrit language. "*Kumba*" means long, and "*Karna*" means ear. Kumbakarna is described as a giant as tall as a mountain with a terrible face and long ears. In the story of the *Ramayana*. Kumbakarna is the second son of Resi Wisrawa and Dewisukesi. He has an older brother named Ravana and a younger sister named Sarpakenaka. They are the fruit of the forbidden love of their parents.

In the puppet story of Ramayana, Kumbakarna is known as a giant who lives his whole life only by sleeping. Kumbakarna is Ravana's brother, from the Alengka kingdom. Kumbakarna is a giant figure with a big body and a terrible face, but he is an officer who often reminds his brother not to do bad things.

Kuntowijoyo has expertise in representing the character Wasripin as Kumbakarna. Kuntowijoyo has extensive knowledge of *wayang*, one of which is Kumbakarna. Thus, Kuntowijoyo was able to tell Wasripin who had similarities with the character Kumbakarna. The similarities of the Wasripin character in the novel Pasar with the Kumbakarna character in the Ramayana puppet story, namely 1) Wasripin and Kumbakarna are children resulting from an illicit relationship with their parents, 2) Wasripin and Kumbakarna are described as sleeping for a long time and are difficult to wake up, 3) Physically, Wasripin and Kumbakarna are depicted as male figures, 4) at the end of the story, Wasripin's character dies. Likewise, the character of Kumbakarna in the *wayang*, and 4) the character of Wasripin in the novel WDS and the character of Kumbakarna in the Ramayana are depicted as a character who has a wise character.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the discussion can be concluded that the novel by Kuntowijoyo entitled *Wasripin dan Satinah* and *Mantra Pejinak Ular* contains the *Ramayana* epic story as a previous reference or a story that becomes the background for the creation of the novel. The *Ramayana* epic is the background in the creation of the novel, namely the Javanese *wayang* story. This is indicated by the puppet (*wayang*) story of the *Wiracarita Rama Tambak*, Ramayana epic that appears in Kuntowijoyo's novel has an intention, which is to describe the New Order era by utilizing puppet (*wayang*) as a media to convey political visions and missions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Abimanyu, P. (2014). *Ajaran-ajaran emas Ramayana-Mahabharata* (1st ed.) [Golden teachings of Ramayana-Mahabhrata]. Laksana.

Adi, F. N. (2017). Peranan dalang *wayang* kulit dalam propaganda pembangunan di bawah orde baru [The role of the puppeteer in development propaganda under the new order]. *Jahtra*, *12*(2).

Darma, B. (1995). *Harmonium*. Pustaka Pelajar.

Darmoko. (2018). Sanggit and Soeharto power discourse in purwa leather puppets Rama Tambak play. *International Seminar on Recent Language, Literature, And Local Culture Studies (BASA)*, 47–54.

Hadi, A. (2004). *Hermeneutika, estetika, dan religiusitas: Esai-esai sufistik dan seni rupa* [Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, and Religion: Sufistic Essays and Fine Arts]. Sadra Press.

Iser, W. (1987). *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Iser, W. (2000). *The range of interpretation*. Columbia University Press.

Iser, W. (2006). *How to do theory*. Blacwell Publishing.

Kuntowijoyo. (2003). *Wasripin dan Satinah* [Wasripin and Satinah]. Kompas.

Kuntowijoyo. (2013). *Mantra pejinak ular* (2nd ed.) [Snake taming spells]. Kompas Media Nusantara.

Moleong, L. J. (1989). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif* [Qualitative research methodologies]. Remadja Karya.

Munawar, M. F. (2007). *Khasidah Burdah Al-Bushiry dan popularitasnya dalam berbagai tradisi : Suntingan teks, terjemahan dan telaah resepsi* [Khasidah Burdah Al-Bushiry and its popularity in various traditions: Editing of reception reviews, translations and texts]. Universitas Gadjah Mada.

Pendit, N. S. (2003). *Mahabharata*. Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

Salleh, M. H. (2018). Comparing Literature and the World. *International Conference on Language, Literature, and Education (ICLLE 2018)*, 42–49.