

Rice Cultivation Spells and Their Relevance to Literary Learning:

A riffaterre semiotic analysis

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Abstract—Rice cultivation spells are spoken by community or traditional leaders, and can also be read by farmers when sowing seeds in the rice field. In sowing seeds, the spells are spoken as a repellent of disasters, and as an educational tool. The presence of spells in the implementation of education is an effort to introduce and preserve culture to the younger generation. This study aims to describe the semiotic features of the rice cultivation spells in Sundanese regions and their relevance to literary learning based upon local wisdom. The method deployed in this study was a descriptive qualitative involving a content analysis technique. The analysis shows that the rice-cultivation spells form as the request for permission from God as the holder of the universe, the gratitude to God for the gifts he has granted, the presence of rice cultivation as a legacy of the ancestors, and the function of rice component for human life. This study is relevant to literary learning in a way that rice cultivation spells can be integrated into literary appreciation learning in high schools.

Keywords—spells; riffaterre semiotics; hermeneutics; literary appreciation learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Rice is the most important part of Sundanese people's life. It becomes a staple food for them. The existence of rice is believed to affect the survival of the society itself. Rice also shows a person's social quality in the Sundanese society. This assumption can be shown by a statement that someone who lives with lots of rice is considered financially stable, and vice versa. This is also shows the reason why rice gets a central position in Sundanese society.

Thus, the position of rice is exalted by its existence. In Sundanese culture, there are a lot of manners, philosophies, terms, traditions, arts, etc. that is related to rice. This reinforces the notion that rice is considered a sacred object. To that extent,

there is a statement that when people do not respect rice, it is like they are just doing harm to themselves. The myth sounds like it is merely a saying or *pamali*, but if we really think about it, it is impossible for us to disrespect something that "keeps us alive". Myth according to Christensen in Angeline, is folklore which characters are gods or demigods that occurred in another world or in the past and considered to be true by the adherents of the story [1]. It means that when we behave disrespectfully, such as squandering rice and leaving rice on the plate after we finished eating, it is such a behaviour of not thanking God through rice.

In order to take care of Sundanese people's manners towards rice, our ancestors used to create some symbolic methods. That is, the meaning and the purpose of the creation of the method was "wrapped up" in such a way that it will not be *togmol* or directly imperative and instructive. The methods in question include: *pamali*, manners, spells, rites, artistic activities, and others.

In this study, the researcher attempts to describe the meaning of a spell related to rice. This spell is biased in the form of *jangjawokan*, *jampe*, *asih*, and *singlar*. The purpose of this interpretation is to find out the meaning of both the text and context in terms of semiotics and hermeneutics.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Spells

According to Wojowasito, the word *mantra* comes from Sanskrit which means "prayer" or request [2]. Whereas according to Soedjijono *mantra* or spells contained many figurative or symbolic elements of belief which are considered to contain magical power [2]. In other words, a spell is a

variety of oral poetry in the form of free poetry and has the potential to have supernatural powers or a kind of tribal prayer that utilizes local language based on beliefs inherited by the ancestors [3]. In order that powers to be utilized, spells are not enough to be memorized, but it must be complemented by mystical behaviour.

B. Semiotics

Semiotics is a study that examines signs. Language as a medium of literary work is a semiotic or signification system, namely a signification system that has meaning [4]. Other literature explains that semiotics comes from the word *semeion*, which means sign. Semiotics is the study of systems, rules, and conventions that allow a sign to have meaning. Semiotic analysis serves to analyze literary works in this case poetry, as a sign system and determine what conventions that make a literary work have meaning. Signs have two aspects, namely signifier and signified [5]. A signifier is a form of sign that signs something called a signified, while a signified itself is the meaning of a sign. For example: a picture of a person signs the person in the picture, a picture of horses signs the real horses [4].

Pierce classified sign into icon (*icône*), index (*indice*), and symbol (*symbole*) which are explained as follows:

1) *Icon (icône)*: Icon refers to *Une icône est un signe qui posséderait le caractère qui le rend significatif, même si son objet n'existait pas* [6]. The icon is a sign based on "resemblance" between the representation and the object; whether the object really exists or not. For example: A line drawn with a pencil represents a geometry line.

2) *Index (indice)*: Index refers to *Un indice est un signe qui perdrait immédiatement le caractère qui en fait un signe si son objet était supprimé, mais ne perdrait pas ce caractère s'il n'y avait pas d'interprétation* [6]. Index is a sign that has a physical, existential or causal link between the representation and its object so that it will lose a character that makes it a sign if the object is removed. For example: Humid air indicates rain falls. In addition, the sun clock indicates time.

3) *Symbol (symbole)*: Symbol refers to *Un symbole est un signe qui perdrait le caractère qui en fait un signe s'il n'y avait pas d'interprétation* [6]. A symbol is a sign that loses its character if the sign cannot represent the representation. These signs are arbitrary and conventional. Symbols are formed through conventions or rules. For example: The word 'rumah' in Indonesian language, house in English and 'maison' in French.

In addition, Pierce divides icons into three sub-types namely typological icons, diagrammatic icons, and metaphorical icons [7].

a) *Typological icon*: Which is an icon based on similarity concerning the spatial (profile or shape) of the reference sign. For example in the poem entitled *La Mort de socrate* by Alphonse de Lamartine, the title of the poem represents the whole story contained in the poem; the last meeting of Socrates with his followers before he died.

b) *Diagrammatic icons*: Are icons that display relationships, especially diadik relations or less so, among their own parts. This type of icon is schematic, graphical, floor plan, even a mathematical or physical formula. For example: In Indonesian language, there diagrammatic words orders, such as the slogan *vini, vidi, vici*.

c) *Metaphorical icon (metaphore)*: Is a metasign that is based on similarity between objects of two symbolic signs. For example: in one of Chairil Anwar's poems entitled "Aku", *Aku ini binatang jalang*. The metaphor that occurs is the poet of "Aku" which is likened to an animal. Literary studies that are semiotic aim to analyze literary work as a system of signs and determine the conventions that allow a literary work to have meaning.

C. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics in general can be defined as a theory or philosophy about the interpretation of meaning. The word hermeneutics itself comes from the Greek verb *hermeneuiein*, which means interpreting or translating [8]. This term has an etymological association with Hermes in Greek mythology, which has the task of conveying and explaining God's messages to humans. Hermes is associated with the transmitting function behind human understanding into a form where the level of human intelligence can capture it. It appears, that from this etymological association the task of hermeneutics is to transmit a message so that it can be understood well by the audience [8].

As a method of interpretation, hermeneutics is very meaningful to science and can be adopted by all circles until the end of the 2nd century [9]. Originally hermeneutics was developed in the church and was known as the exegesis movement and later is developed into an interpretation philosophy. As an interpretation method, hermeneutics takes into account three things as the main component of the interpretive activities, namely text, context, and contextualization.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The approach used in this study is a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach according to Moleong is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from people and observable behavior [10]. The research method used is descriptive method. Descriptive method is a method that aims to explain and analyze phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes of beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of individuals whether individually or in groups. Meanwhile, the technique used is content analysis techniques. So, the spell texts on rice will be analyzed. After that, the points found with semiotic analysis will be interpreted hermeneutically.

According Sugiyono that in descriptive qualitative research is a symptom of objects that are holistic (overall, cannot be separated) [11]. The object in question is all the results of spell analysis on rice using content analysis techniques.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following spell is the spell that is spoken while sprinkling the seeds (*mitembeyan tandur*); it is spoken while planting seeds that are already in the form of small rice.

Mula-mulana badan (1)
Wiwitan ti ibu jeung rama (2)
Tip saur ti ibu (3)
Tap rasa ti rama (4)
Lekasan kana salira (5)
Salira Nyimas Kentring Manik (6)
timbangan asih (7)
adegan timbangan nagara (8)
huma pikeun hanteu timu (9)
daging jadi wuwuh batu (10)
akar kami jadi naon? (11)
Jadi akal ing manusa (12)
Jangkar kami jadi naon? (13)
Jadi ukur akal ing manusa (14)
Tangkal kami jadi naon? (15)
Jadi adegan manusa (16)
Dangdu kami jadi naon? (17)
Jadi dada ing manusa (18)
Siki kami jadi naon? (19)
Jadi cahaya ing manusa (20)
Aci kami jadi naon? (21)
Jadi rasa pangawasa ing manusa (22)
Sateka-teka kayu, batu, bumi (23)
Bleg bleg langit pageuh (24)
Nyi Sri Pohaci (25)
Dèning repoh Allah (26)

The spell in the text above has symbols meaning that is related to the speaker's expectations of the spell. Besides expectation, the speaker also shows his helplessness as a weaker creature than "something" bigger and stronger.

The researcher will mention some symbols found in the text above, and then the symbols will be interpreted to identify the meaning enclosed within. It is also intended to describe the meaning connection with various life aspects of the society including social, belief, ethics, etc.

A. Symbol of *Badan (body)*, *Ibu (mother)* and *Rama (father)*

This symbol appeared in the first and the second lines. *Mula-mulana badan* / *wiwitan ti ibu jeung rama*. Actually, the meaning already exists explicitly that the body that came from a mother and a father. This illustrates the concept of binary opposition, which all things in the world come from two opposites (paradox).

B. Symbol of *Timbangan (scale)*

Symbol of *timbangan* was mentioned in the seventh and eighth lines. The word "*timbangan*" was juxtaposed with the word *asih* and *nagara* became *timbangan asih* and *timbangan nagara*. This *timbangan* symbol refers to the concept of justice. *Timbangan asih* can be interpreted as a person who is fair in both moral and social. Thus, he provides the same affection for everyone. Furthermore, *timbangan nagara* can be interpreted as maintaining the stability of a nation. The word *nagara* refers

to the meaning of "welfare", so it can be concluded that rice is the guardian of the welfare for the people of a country.

C. Symbol of *Akar (root)*

This symbol can be found on the 11th line and linked with the word *akal* on the 12th line. The word *akar* was associated with the word *akal* which means a gift from God for human being. It means that reasoning must be the root of our lives. Reasoning is what distinguishes humans from animals. Therefore, reasoning must be the root of all human actions.

D. Symbol of *Jangkar (anchor)*

In the Sundanese dictionary, *jangkar* is defined as roots coming out of the ground, so that they are visible on the surface of the ground. *Jangkar* is a *tarahal* depiction, or a difficult situation to live on. The word *jangkar* was related to the word *ukur akal*. So, a problem is a stimulus to make our mind works. The thoughts produced by reasoning must be measured by its good and bad.

E. Symbol of *Tangkal (tree)*

The word *tangkal* in Indonesian language means "tree". The tree in the spell above was described as scenes. It has the meaning that humans will continue to grow and develop. In the Arabic proverb, the tree is described as a historical parable. That way, it can also be interpreted that humans are like trees that have history, and their history will continue to branch out until the trees experience extinction.

F. Symbol of *Siki (seed)*

The word *siki* was compared to the word *cahaya*. It can be interpreted that the word *cahaya* is like spirit. Human spirits are *siki* or seeds. The seed is the base symbol of all plants. So, all humans have *siki* or spirit as the base of their lives.

G. Symbol of *Aci (flour)*

The word *aci* in the 21st line lexically means "flour" or "core". Furthermore, the word *aci* was connected to the phrase *rasa pangawasa ing manusa*. The word *aci* was depicted as 'rasa' or taste. Taste is something that appears after the tasting process. Taste is the core.

H. Symbol of *Kayu (wood)*, *Batu (stone)* and *Bumi (earth)*

The symbol of *kayu*, *batu*, and *bumi* showed the meaning of the earth strengthener. It was shown in the 24th line, *bleg bleg langit pageuh*. In Islam, the mountain is the pile that makes this earth in its stability. Those three objects: *kayu* or woods, *batu* or stones, and *bumi* or earth are some objects that will be found on the mountain. Wood, stone and earth (soil) can describe the word mountain.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that the rice cultivation spell is not only related to rice, but also related to a broader aspect, that is life. The symbols shown within the spell should reflect a broader meaning of life. Those symbols are not merely a tribute to Dewi Sri as the goddess of rice, but

also a reflection and a motivation to the spell speakers about the strength within themselves.

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