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Wayang as a hypogram in the poetry of Suminto A. Sayuti: A comparative literary study of gender relations and the construction of femininity and masculinity

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Abstract: *This study aims to trace and understand the constructions of femininity and masculinity in wayang characters in the poems of Suminto A. Sayuti from a comparative literature perspective. The background of this study is the discovery of wayang stories and characters in a number of poems by Suminto A. Sayuti, which are collected in, among others, Malam Tamansari (2022), Persinggahan Akhir Tahun (2015), and Di Bawah Blencong, Sebelum dan Setelah Pergelaran (2025). Through a comparative literary analysis grounded in feminist literary criticism, this study aims to identify the constructions of femininity and masculinity in the wayang characters within Suminto A. Sayuti's poems. It is hoped that this comparative literary interpretation will yield new reinterpretations of the wayang characters, with a focus on femininity and masculinity, in the analyzed poems. The research findings indicate that the wayang characters Sembadra, Utari, and Surtikanti represent female characters, while Arjuna, Abimanyu, and Karna represent male characters. Essentially, there are no fundamental changes in the characteristics of femininity and masculinity from the wayang characters to the poems under study. The results of the study indicate that the poet has used wayang characters and plays as hypograms and as a source of inspiration and a medium for the poet's creative process.*

Keywords: *femininity, hypogram, intertextuality, wayang.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading and enjoying the poems by Suminto A. Sayuti featured in his poetry anthologies, *Malam Tamansari* (2000), *Bangsal Srimanganti* (2013), *Persinggahan Akhir Tahun* (2014), *Di Tepi Waktu, Sebelum Puisi, Sebelum Engkau Pergi* (2020), *Syair Linguistika Terapan dan Lain-lainnya* (2022), *Ketika Diri adalah Kepulangan dan Keberangkatan* (2023), *Memeluk Waktu di Ranjang Sunyi* (2025), dan *Di Bawah Blencong, Sebelum dan Setelah Pergelaran* (2025), we can find a number of poems that revisit the stories and characters of *wayang*, particularly *wayang purwa. Wayang purwa* characters such as Arjuna, Sembadra, Krishna, Abimanyu, Karna, and Utari appear in various poems by Sayuti across his poetry collections. The prominence of *wayang* characters and plots in Sayuti's poetry is inseparable from his social background and his deep love for the world of *wayang*. According to what Sayuti told the research team, his love for the world of *wayang* grew through his social interactions during his childhood.

Based on interviews conducted by the researcher, it was revealed that as a child, Sayuti often lived with his grandparents. Mbah Sumardjo, Sayuti's grandfather, was a neighbor of Ki Dalang Minggu Sugiyantoro, a figure Sayuti admired for his storytelling and *wayang* puppetry skills. It was his fascination with *wayang* that led him to follow Ki Minggu Sugiyantoro as he performed *wayang* shows around Purbalingga, starting in the fourth grade of elementary school. As a result, from a young age he had already

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memorized various stories from the *wayang purwa* repertoire. As an adult, Sayuti developed into a person who not only took pleasure in watching *wayang* performances and listening to recordings of them, but also socialized extensively and befriended a number of dalangs, including Ki Purbo Asmoro (Surakarta), Ki Seno Nugroho (the late) (Yogyakarta), and Ki Kasidi Hadiprajitna (Yogyakarta). Although he is not a puppeteer himself, *wayang* is an integral part of Sayuti's life. It is therefore no surprise that *wayang* can be considered one of the sources of inspiration for Sayuti's poetry.

In addition to serving as a source of inspiration, Sayuti can be said to use *wayang* as a medium to reinforce or enrich the meaning of his poetry. In the poem *Nyanyian bagi Wanitaku* the speaker does not directly identify himself as Arjuna. Nevertheless, readers familiar with the *wayang purwa* plays will recognize that the keris Pulanggeni and the panah Pasopati are Arjuna's signature weapons, as seen in the following excerpt: "When the kris ceases to be Pulanggeni and the shaft/ no longer Pasopati, My love, does the reek of blood yet intrude upon/The rose and magnolia in the quiet room of your life...?"

In another poem titled *"Senyummu Istriku"* (Sayuti, 2025:57), the speaker explicitly identifies himself as Arjuna, as seen in the following excerpt: "House of light. House of our love's desire. I, Permadi and/ you, Bratajaya. But now I am alone./ The kris ceases to be/Pulanggeni. The arrow no longer Pasopati./Only your smile/my wife. It is patience alone that bids me endure. Permadi is another name for Arjuna, while Bratajaya is another name for Sembadra. In addition to the pairing of Arjuna and Sembadra, Sayuti's poetry also features the pairing of Abimanyu and Utari in the poem *Genderang Kuruksetra* and that of Karna and Surtikanti in the poem *Malam Tamansari*.

A preliminary reading of these poems suggests that Sayuti does not merely retell the love stories of couples from the early *wayang* tradition. These various poems essentially present a recurring pattern of intertextuality—namely, the relationship between a knight and his wife. Furthermore, Arjuna-Sembadra, Karna-Surtikanti, and Abimanyu-Utari are essentially terms that carry a set of meanings through their characteristics and actions. Therefore, the researcher argues that the use of these couples constitutes an intertextual strategy implying the existence of gender constructions based on male-female relationships—constructions that are grounded not only in *wayang* narratives but also in Sayuti's subjective experiences as a poet.

There has not been much previous research on Sayuti's poems that feature *wayang* plays and characters. The study by Ridlo et al. (2026), which examines Sayuti's creative process in the poetry collection *Ketika Diri adalah Kepulangan dan Keberangkatan*, briefly touches on the presence of *wayang* elements and plays in his poetry. The study by Ridlo et al. (2026) states that the presence of *wayang* characters and terms in these poems represents an effort to demonstrate mastery of the Javanese cultural landscape, including the art of *wayang*. The study by Ilma et al. (2025) on the poetry collection *Ketika Diri adalah Kepulangan dan Keberangkatan* examines the theme of journey but does not discuss the presence of *wayang* characters or plots. Ilma et al. found that the names of cities in these poems represent the journey as a metaphor for the transience of life and evoke a religious dimension. Based on this analysis, it is stated that Sayuti's poems depict experiences of geographical travel that represent the inner dynamics, the self, and the essence of life, expressed in a complex and aesthetically rich manner. Furthermore, Yuki's (2025) study of *Di Bawah Blencong, Sebelum dan Setelah Pergelaran* does not examine *wayang* representations in Sayuti's poems but focuses on

the heroism in the poems, manifested through traditional characters, the value of sacrifice, and the integration of moral and spiritual teachings. In addition, the study states that these poems constitute religious literature that serves as a medium for preserving local heroic values as well as a means of character education rooted in cultural wisdom.

Based on this assessment, this study will trace and reveal the relationships and constructions of femininity and masculinity in Sayuti's poems as viewed through the lens of comparative literature. The comparative literature perspective applied in this study is the American school of comparative literature. The choice of the American school is based on its comparative and interdisciplinary nature. These characteristics align with the research objective of comparing gender relations and constructions across two mediums: *wayang purwa* and modern poetry. Throughout its history of *wayang* development in Indonesia, particularly in Java, *wayang purwa* has been a performing art that adapts stories from the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics—which serve as canonical narratives—as well as original stories independent of these two major epics (Mulyono, 1989; Isma'un & Martono, 1989; Hastini & Sarwanto, 2022).

In conjunction with the comparative literature perspective, this study employs a feminist literary analysis framework. The use of feminist literary criticism is grounded in the observation that Sayuti's poems reveal gender relations and constructions through the interactions of characters in the tradition of *wayang purwa*. To narrow down the focus and scope of the study, this research examines three female *wayang* characters and three male *wayang* characters in Sayuti poems. Sembadra, Utari, and Surtikanti represent female *wayang* characters, while the male characters are represented by Arjuna, Abimanyu, and Karna.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist literary criticism is a form of literary criticism that employs a feminist theoretical perspective. Showalter (in Newton, ed., 1997; 2012) distinguishes two types of feminist literary criticism: woman as reader or feminist criticism and woman as writer or gynocritics. Woman as reader focuses on women as readers—women as consumers of literary works produced by men—and on how the concept of the female reader changes our understanding of a text and makes us aware of the significance of the sexual codes within it. Woman as writer or gynocritics focuses on women as writers—women as creators of textual meaning—as well as the history, themes, genres, and structures of literary works written by women. The scope of this field includes the psychological dynamics of women's creativity; linguistics and issues related to women's language; the literary careers of women, both individually and collectively; literary history; and studies of specific authors and their works (Showalter, in Newton, ed., 1997; Showalter, 1979; 1984).

Femininity and masculinity are gender identities considered to be socially and culturally constructed characteristics of a person attributed to a specific sex. Femininity is attributed to women, while masculinity is attributed to men (Chodorow, 2014; Fakih, 2008). Society constructs femininity based on traits such as gentleness, beauty, emotionality, or motherliness, which are associated with women; whereas traits such as strength, rationality, virility, and power are regarded as defining characteristics of masculinity for men (Fakih, 2008). As a result of society's sociocultural constructions,

the standards of femininity and masculinity are not static but dynamic, varying according to differences in time, class, race, and ethnicity (Mosse, 1993; Fakih, 2006).

In this study, the gender relations and constructions found in Sayuti's poems are examined based on their intertextual connections with the characters and plots in *Wayang purwa*. Therefore, to understand this phenomenon, a comparative literature perspective is employed. Although the original concept of comparative literature refers to the comparison of literature from two or more different nations (Damono, 2009), comparative literature can be expanded to include comparisons of literary works with specific fields of science and the arts (Hutomo, 2019). The first concept represents the French school of comparative literature, while the second concept represents the American school of comparative literature (Hutomo, 2019).

METHOD

This study applied qualitative research methods from the perspectives of feminist literary criticism and comparative literature. Data sources were selected purposefully, in accordance with the research objectives, namely poems that depict the gender relations between husband and wife and the constructions of femininity and masculinity among *wayang* characters—specifically Sembadra and Arjuna, Surtikanti and Karba, and Abimanyu and Utari—as found in the following five poems: (1) *"Nyanyian bagi wanitaku"* [for My Woman], (2) *"Syair Tanda Baca* (3)" [A Poem About Punctuation Mark (3)], (3) *"Senyummu, Istriku*" [Thy Smile, My Wife], dan (4) *"Malam Tamansari*" [Night at the Tamansari] (5) *Genderang Kurusetra*. Story and character data were sourced from the Indonesian *Wayang* Data Center, which documents and catalogs *wayang* types, stories, philosophies, characters, literature, and human resources related to Indonesian *wayang* performers, accessible online at https://pdwi. senawangi.org/, *Encyclopedia of Wayang purwa I* (Compendium)* (Suwandono, Dhanisworo & Mujiyono, 1991), and *History of Wayang purwa* (Hardjowirogo, 1982). Using the read-and-record method, data relevant to the research problem were then compared with a focus on gender relations and the construction of femininity and masculinity in the identified characters, which were interpreted from a feminist literary criticism perspective.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Femininity and Masculinity in Poetry and Wayang

An analysis of five poems, which served as the data sources, revealed gender dynamics among three married couples (Sembadra and Arjuna, Utari and Abimanyu, and Surtikanti and Karna) who loved one another and lived in harmony. From a comparative literary perspective, there are no fundamental differences in the gender relations and constructions (femininity–masculinity) of the *wayang* characters in the poems compared to the characters in *wayang* performances.

Sembadra and Arjuna

In poems *Nyanyian bagi Wanitaku*, (2) *Syair Tanda Baca* (3), (3) *Senyummu, Istriku* the relationship between Sembadra and Arjuna is depicted from the perspective of the first-person narrator, who identifies himself as Arjuna or Permadi, as his other

name in *Wayang purwa* tradition. Thematically, these three poems express the lyrical "I'" love, adoration, and admiration for his wife, who is identified with the character Sembadra. In *wayang* stories, Sembadra (also known as Sumbadra or Subadra) is portrayed as loyal, gracious, kind-hearted, patient, and always maintaining proper decorum. Sembadra embodies the ideal image of a Javanese woman: graceful, gentle, calm, modest, and obedient to her husband (Hardjowirogo, 1982; Suwandono, Dhanisworo & Mujiyono, 1991). In these three poems, Sembadra is portrayed as a woman, a lover, and a wife who was consciously chosen as a partner to build a household, living together in mutual love until the end of them. The lyrical "I" refers to his wife as Sembadra, a woman who is able to strengthen and bring a sense of calm to a weary soul.

Nyanyian bagi Wanitaku
aku pun lelaki dan engkau pun wanita. Kita adalah Sudra
membangun kemah hunian di tepian belantara. Menangkap
gelagat jagat yang tertimbun riwayat purba. Menyiapkan keranda
sembari kembali menyenandungkan ayat-ayat. Sebelum tamat.
....
Kita bangun rumah
peristirahatan. Kemah hunian itu. Buat singgah dan istirah.

aku pun lelaki dan engkau pun wanita. Kita tabur bersama
benih-benih di pesemaian. Semoga tumbuh. Atas nama kemanusiaan.
Semoga terhindar. dari hama kebudayaan. Kita pun setia
bertahan menunggu musim labuh. Sembadraku, diri lelah butuh pangkuan.
(Sayuti, 2025)

[Song for My Woman
You and I—a man, a woman. Shudras, both of us,
Pitching a tented home upon the forest's edge.
Catching the quiet hum of a world buried under ancient lore,
Preparing the bier, humming once more the sacred lines,
Before the end.
....

We build a house of rest—that simple tent—
To linger a while, and rest.
For I am a man, and you a woman. Together we sow
The seeds upon the nursery bed. May they grow,
In the name of humanity.
Spared, if we may hope, from the blight of culture.
Faithfully we abide, awaiting the coming rains.
My Sembadra, a weary heart longs for your lap.]

In that poem, lyrical "I" refer to his wife as Sembadra, the woman chosen to build a home—a place to return to when he is weary. The poem draws from the play *Parta Krama*, which tells the story of the marriage between Arjuna and Sembadra. According

to Wahyudi (2022), the marriage between Arjuna and Sembadra is a mythological reconstruction—the union of two great dynasties from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Sembadra is the daughter of King Basudewa, a descendant of King Ramawijaya, while Arjuna is a descendant of King Pandu Dewanata, the king of Asatina and a descendant of Sage Abiyasa. From this marriage, Abimanyu was born, whom the Javanese people believe will be the progenitor of Javanese kings.

In "Senyummu, Istriku" [Thy Smile, My Wife] I refer to his wife as Bratajaya (another name for Sembadra), while he is likened to Permadi (Arjuna).

> *Rumah cahaya. Rumah cita-cita cinta kita. Aku Permadi dan engkau pun Bratajaya. Tapi kini aku sendiri. Keris pun tak lagi Pulanggeni. Panah pun tak lagi Pasopati. Cuma senyummu, istriku. Adalah kesabaran yang membuatku bertahan. Dalam baris antrean.*
> *....*
> *Ya. Engkaulah kesabaran. Membuatku bertahan. Menunggu panggilan. Pada saatnya kita pun kembali bergandeng tangan. Bersama membuka. Daun-daun pintu dan cahaya terang. (Sayuti, 2025)*
>
> [House of light. House of our love's desire. I, Permadi and you, Bratajaya. But now I am alone. The keris cease to be Pulanggeni. The arrow no longer Pasopati. Only your smile my wife. It is patience alone that bids me endure
> ...
> Ah yes. You are that patience. Holding me fast. Waiting for the call. In due time, we shall join hands once more, Together to swing open the heavy doors and the brilliant light.]

Unlike the poem *Song for My Woman* which was written to depict the beginning of the relationship and marriage between the speaker (Arjuna) and his wife (Sembadra), the poem *Senyummu, Istriku* was written by the poet in 2025, eight years after the poet's wife (SAS) passed away. The line "*House of light. House of our love's desire"* is a depiction of the paradise promised by God, in which the speaker believes. In that house of light, his wife, Bratajaya/Sembadra, waits patiently for him. The Arjuna in the poem "Thy Smile, My Wife" differs from the Arjuna in the *wayang* tales, who married several wives: Srikandi, Larasi, and Dersanala. Arjuna in Sayuti's poem remains faithful to one wife, even though she has passed away.

In the poem "Syair Tanda Baca (3)" [A Poem About Punctuation Marks (3)], although not explicitly mentioned, the figure of Sembadra is present when the lyrical "I" identifies with Sang Senopati—who chose the Pasopati bow and the Pulanggeni keris—namely Arjuna. Sembadra is the one who whispers to the speaker that words and punctuation marks are soldiers and titles of war—a metaphorical expression to convey that the meaning of a word is determined by the punctuation attached to it, which parallels the existence of humans called soldiers, who cannot escape the duty of waging war (whether against themselves or others). In a sentence, a word's existence often

depends on the punctuation attached to it. The meaning of the word "left" in the sentence "You left" (information) differs from that in "You left!" (command).

> *"Kata dan tanda baca adalah prajurit dan gelar perang," bisikmu*
> *suatu waktu. Maka akulah Sang Senopati. Di palagan itu. Tanpa*
> *umpat dan keluh. Aku pun paham. Manggala selalu bertempat di*
> *kesilaman.*
>
> *"Kata dan tanda baca adalah prajurit dan gelar perang," bisikmu*
> *suatu waktu. Aku pun memilih gandewa gading. Panah citra*
> *bulan sabit. Pasopati itu. Aku pun memilih keris. Bercitra kobar*
> *api. Pulanggeni itu. Biar nafsu rubuh.* (Sayuti, 2025)
>
> ["Words and punctuation are soldiers and battle lines," you whispered once.
> And so I am the Commander. Upon that field of war. Without a curse
> without a grievance. I understood, too. The vanguard ever finds
> its place in the quiet past.
> "Words and punctuation are soldiers and battle lines," you whispered
> once. And so I chose the ivory bow. An arrow like the crescent moon—That Pasopati.
> And I chose the kris, alight with flame—That Pulanggeni.
> To bring desire to its fall]

In this poem, Sembadra appears as a figure who constantly inspires the lyrical "I", which is Arjuna as Senapati, who chooses the Pasopati bow and the Pulanggeni keris to wage war against the desires within himself. Sembadra's whisper, which serves as a source of strength for Arjuna in the poem, intertextually makes reference to the *wayang* play "Partadewa," which tells the story of how Sembadra reminded Arjuna of his duties as a knight and a husband, as he had become overwhelmed by the glory and luxury of being king in Kahyangan Barata Indra (Kaindran) (Suwandono, Dhanisworo & Mujiyono, 1991).

Based on analysis on three poems, it is evident that Sembadra is portrayed as a figure who embodies the ideal standards of femininity, a lover, a wife, and a source of inspiration who constantly strengthens the lyrical "I," who identifies as Arjuna. By equating his lover/wife with Sembadra, the lyrical "I," Arjuna, not only praises her but also acknowledges her patience, strength, and greatness. This aligns with information from the *Encyclopedia of Wayang purwa 1* (Suwandono, Dhanisworo, & Mujiyono, 1991: 419–420), which states that Sembadra possesses a character marked by loyalty, generosity, kindness, patience, and propriety, charm (*merakati*), and a tendency to be easily offended. Sembadra represents the Javanese woman whose devotion to her husband and family life is exemplary, making her a worthy role model for the wider community (Dewi, Andayani, and Wardhani, 2017). Dewi Sembadra's role as a mother and wife has a profound influence on those around her. This gives rise to an emotional dependence within her community on the presence of the figure of Dewi Sembadra (Dewi, Andayani, and Wardhani, 2017).

In these three poems, the lyrical "I" identifies as Arjuna, a *wayang* character from the Pandawa family. Arjuna is described as a good-looking warrior, highly educated, and skilled in the use of various weapons of war. In the *Encyclopedia of Wayang purwa I* (Compendium) (Suwandono, Dhanisworo & Mujiyono, 1991), Arjuna is described as a handsome knight, beloved by women, possessing supernatural powers, fond of asceticism, highly learned, clever, skilled, polite, brave, gentle in his actions and words, and loved by the gods. He possesses a variety of weapons, namely the Kyai Kalanadah keris, the Pulanggeni keris, the Pasopati arrow, and the Ardadadali arrow. Unlike the character of Arjuna in *wayang*, who is flawless in every way, Arjuna in Sayuti's three poems is portrayed as Sembadra's more human partner. He loves and adores his wife, yet also acknowledges his own weaknesses: *Sembadraku, diri lelah butuh pangkuan* (*Nyanyian bagi Wanitaku*). Especially after his wife's death, Arjuna admits he has lost the power of his weapons: *Tapi kini aku sendiri. Keris pun tak lagi Pulanggeni. Panah pun tak lagi Pasopati*.

Utari and Abimanyu

The story of Abimanyu and Utari in Sayuti's poetry is found in "*Genderang Kurusetra*". Judging by its content, the poem "Genderang Kurusetra" has an intertextual connection to the play "The Fall of Abimanyu" which is one of the episodes of the Bharatayuda war in the Mahabharata epic. In the *Wayang purwa* tradition, Abimanyu has two wives: Utari and Siti Sundari, who is the daughter of Krishna. In the poem Genderang Kurusetra, there is no account of Siti Sundari performing the ritual of *bela pati* following Abimanyu's death. Instead, the poem focuses on portraying Utari as Abimanyu's wife. Utari is depicted as a steadfast figure who watches her husband, covered in blood from the Kurawa's arrows. Utari actually advises Abimanyu to overcome his anger and resentment before advancing to face the enemy on the battlefield, as seen in the following excerpt.

- Utari-
engkau yang kini tengah berlumur darah
menyandang beban menuju Palagan
berhentilah sejenak dan dengarlah
matahari terengah menyaksikan
korban demi korban berjatuhan
dan perang
senantiasa saja berkepanjangan
:
lelaki yang mencoba bertahan
dari dendam tak berkesudahan
dan janji seorang manusia
tengadahlah, di atasmu matahari dan sayap semesta
sebab mereka juga akan datang menghampiri
usaikan dulu perang dalam sanubari

sementara gendang bertalu-talu
anak-anak panah pun bersintuhan dan melaju

menangkan dulu peperangan yang senantiasa jaga
sepanjang engkau bilang: Aku anak manusia.
(Sayuti, 2025)

[- Utari -
You, who are now steeped in blood,
Bearing the burden toward the field of war,
Pause a moment, and listen—
The sun stands witness
As victim after victim falls,
And the war
Drags endlessly on.
:
A man striving to endure
Against relentless vengeance
And the vow of a mortal man.
Look up: above you, the sun and the wings of the cosmos,
For they, too, shall come to draw near.
Cease first the war within your own heart.
While the drums beat their pulse,
And arrows brush past and speed away,
Win first the battle that keeps continuous watch,
So long as you say: I am a child of man]

In addition to featuring Utari's voice, *Genderang Kurusetra* also presents Abimanyu's perspective. Abimanyu comforts Utari, urging her not to cry, and asks her to accept his departure for the battlefield with grace, as shown in the following excerpt.

- Abimanyu-
sebab setiap langkah pasti tinggalkan jejak
perempuan, berhentilah menangis dan berucap
gerimis yang membadai dalam palaganmu
dan berhenti menjadi isak
tak kuasa lagi mampu meredakan bara
dari harga diri yang teriris.
....
simpan dan kekalkan dalam jaring usia
tetes darah dari ujung panah ini
dan kabarkan pada tetangga dunia
lelaki musti pergi dan tak kenal berhenti
lantaran hidup adalah pasang surut kata
di mimpimu aku bakal jaga
(Sayuti, 2025)

[Abimanyu -
For every step must leave a trace;

Woman, cease your weeping and your spoken words.
The storming drizzle within your battlefield,
Settling down from sobs,
Has no power left to cool the embers
Of a pride so deeply cut.
....
Keep and entangle within the web of age
This single drop of blood upon the arrow's tip,
And declare to the neighboring world
That a man must go on, knowing no halt,
For life is only the ebb and flow of words;
...]

And in your dreams, I shall keep watch.This poem excerpt reveals masculinity in the line *'That a man must go on, knowing no halt".* This line presents the perspective that masculinity entails an obligation to keep acting, to keep moving forward. In other words, masculinity is a progressive construct. The word '*musti*' indicates that there is a social demand. In the context of Abimanyu and Utari, this social demand requires him to go to the battlefield, so a man must prioritize his social obligations even if it means leaving his family. On the other hand, the word "*go*" implies that men occupy the public sphere. This line also eliminates the possibility for men to remain in a state of doubt or to choose to retreat. In *Wayang purwa*, Abimanyu knows that his departure for the battlefield will lead to his death.

Furthermore, the line "because life is the ebb and flow of words" echoes the vow Abimanyu made to Utari. In the *Wayang purwa* tradition, Abimanyu once took an oath when he proposed to Utari. In the *wayang* narrative (Encyclopedia of *Wayang purwa* I (Compendium) (1991)), before marrying Abimanyu, Utari held the Junjungan contest. None of the kings and knights who came to propose to her were strong enough to lift Utari—except for Abimanyu. This marriage signified the union of divine guidance (*wahyu Hidayat*) with the royal lineage (*wahyu cakraningrat*), destined to produce great kings. This was proven by the birth of Parikesit, who later became the great king of Hastinapura after the *Bharatayuda* war ended and went on to sire a continuous line of kings. Abimanyu declared that once he took a wife, he would die with his body pierced by hundreds of arrows. The resonance of this promise is reinforced by the line 'For every step must leave a trace'. Abimanyu made this vow so that Utari would believe he had not yet married Dewi Sundari.

Surtikanti and Karna

The poem "Malam Tamansari" tells the love story between Surtikanti and Karna, who is also known as Basukarta and Suryatmaja. This poem is an adaptation of lakon *Wayang purwa*'s story *Alap-alapan Surtikanti*. *Alap-alap Surtikanti* which tells of a mysterious man who frequently meets with Surtikanti, the daughter of King Salya, in the gardens of the Mandaraka Palace. According to the night watchman, the man bore a striking resemblance to Arjuna. Feeling slandered, Arjuna vowed to capture the mysterious man. Eventually, Arjuna encountered the man, who turned out to be Suryaputra Karna. The two engaged in a fierce battle. In Javanese *wayang* tradition, it is

told that Bathara Narada descended to earth to separate them and inform them that they were still brothers. Narada gave Karna a crown to cover his temples. With Arjuna's help, Karna succeeded in defeating King Karnamandra, who had constantly threatened the kingdom's security and sought to win Surtikanti's hand. In recognition of his service, Karna was eventually married to Surtikanti. Duryudana, who had previously proposed to Surtikanti, ultimately relinquished her because he wished to repay Karna for the many favors, he had done for him (Suwandono, Dhanisworo & Mujiyono, 1991; https://www.*wayang*store.com/surtikanti-cerita*wayang*/).

Malam Tamansari
Penjaga malam itu datang tatkala rembulan
jatuh di pundak tembok temugelang. Aku pun
bergegas masuk ke dalam mata cincin di jari
manismu, nimas. Orang-orang ribut, "Malingsakti,
malingsakti, di mana engkau sembunyi"

Keraguan muncul menyelimuti kalbumu. "lepas
dan berikan buat tumbal-pageblug negeri, Pipi
ini lebih nikmat dielus telanjang jari. "Aku pun
bergegas sembunyi di ikat sanggul rambutmu.
Engkau pun bergegas berbisik, "Malinghati, malinghati,
kepadamu selamanya aku bakalan mengabdi". Lalu sepi.

Penjaga malam itu pergi tatkala rembulan jatuh
di pundak tembok temugelang. Aku pun bergegas
keluar dari persembunyian. "Surtikanti, Surtikanti,
lelaki sejati tak pernah cidra ing janji". lalu sepi.
(Sayuti, 2025)

[Night at Tamansari
The night watchmen came when the moon
rested on the shoulder of the circular wall.
I made haste to slip within the gem upon your ring finger
My lady. The voices rose in clamor: "Sorcerer-thief
Sorcerer-thief, where do you hide?"

Doubt crept in to veil your heart: "Cast it off
Yield it for the pestilence of the realm,
This cheek feels sweeter under the touch of bare fingers."
So I made haste to hide within the tight knot of your hair.
And you whispered in haste: "Thief of hearts, thief of hearts,
to you forever I shall devote my soul."

And then, quiet. The night watchmen departed when the moon rested
on the shoulder of the circular wall. And I made haste

to emerge from hiding. “Surtikanti, Surtikanti
a true man never breaks a vow.” And then, quiet]

The poem tells the story of a secret meeting between Karna and Surtikanti. The two characters appear to be in love with each other. In fact, Surtikanti declares that she will devote herself to Karna, the man who has stolen her heart. Surtikanti’s devotion and loyalty are proven later by her self-immolation when Karna dies in the Bharatayuda while fighting Arjuna (Encyclopedia of *Wayang purwa* I (Compendium) (1991)). The poem depicts Karna as possessing the supernatural ability to vanish and hide within Surtikanti’s ring and hairpin. Furthermore, the poem highlights Karna’s masculinity by declaring, *Surtikanti, Surtikanti, a true man never breaks a vow.*

What is interesting about this poem is the shift in diction from Sorcerer-thief into tihief of heart. In the original version. Sorcerer-thief is malingsakti, described by the people and the words to describes thief of heart is malinghati, as described by Surtikanti. Both terms in the poem refer to the figure of Karna, who secretly meets with Surtikanti. When considered in the context of *Alap-alapan Surtikanti* and *Malam Tamansari*, these two terms grant Surtikanti a degree of agency, albeit limited. Surtikanti’s limited agency lies in her ability to make a choice, as evident in the line ‘to you forever I shall devote my soul’. This statement essentially echoes Surtikanti’s rejection of Duryudana’s proposal by demanding a heavy dowry. On the other hand, the term ‘malingsakti’ can be interpreted as a pejorative term used to refer to Karna. In the *Wayang purwa* narrative itself, Karna defends the Kauravas, who are often regarded as the wronged party in the Bharatayuda war.

Regardless, Surtikanti’s agency does not entirely free itself from the framework of masculinity in Sayuti’s poems. It is more accurate to describe this agency as a form of negotiation regarding gender relations in society, as indicated by the word devoted. In the Indonesian version, the word to represent is *mengabdi*. *Mengabdi* reflects a gender construction that positions women as loyal partners who serve as companions to men.

Wayang as a Hypogram and a Model of Gender Relations and Identity in the Poems of Suminto A. Sayuti

From the five poems analyzed, it appears that the gender relations and constructions (femininity and masculinity) of the *wayang* characters refer to the plays and characters as hypograms: *Parta Krama* (Arjuna and Sembadra), *Abimanyu Gugur* (Utari and Abimanyu), and *Alap-alapan Surtikanti* (Surtikanti and Karna). From these three *wayang* plays, the poet draws on the models of gender relations and identities of the characters Sembadra & Arjuna, Utari & Abimanyu, and Surtikanti & Karna. In the *wayang* narrative, although Arjuna and Abimanyu practice polygamy, Sembadra and Utari hold a higher status than the other wives. Sembadra gave birth to Abimanyu, who married Utari, who in turn gave birth to Parikesit, who inherited the throne of the Kingdom of Hastinapura after the Bharatayuda war. The practice of polygamy in *wayang* can certainly be understood as a patriarchal system inherent in the world of *wayang*.

The portrayal of the wife as Sembadra in three of Sayuti’s poems refers to the character of Sembadra in *wayang*, who is the perfect embodiment of a Javanese woman. This character is gentle, loyal, skilled at maintaining her dignity, and patient in her daily life. This has been culturally adopted by Javanese society. Javanese women who possess

a gentle and patient nature are often associated with the image of the goddess Sembadra (Mulyono, 1978; Dewi, Andayani, Wardhani, 2017). An ideal wife like Sembadra is, in the lyricist's (poet's) view, a worthy partner—someone to build a household with, carry on the family line, and who will accompany him in the afterlife in heaven.

In the poems *Malam Tamansari* and *Genderang Kurukasetra*, the lyrical "I" does not identify as either Abimanyu or Karna. However, in both poems there is a similar expression of masculinity, voiced by both Abimanyu and Karna: that a true man never breaks his promise (Karna) or that a man must go on and never stop (Abimanyu). As men and knights, both Karna and Abimanyu must be characters who steadfastly keep their promises and possess the courage to carry out the duties they have set out to do (or undertaken).

References to gender relations and identities drawn from the plots and characters of *wayang purwa* in Sayuti's poems indicate that *wayang* served not only as a source of inspiration in Sayuti's creative process of writing poetry but also as a model for the poet to understand life's journey and human behavior. This aligns with Magnis-Suseno's (1991) assertion that *wayang* plays provide us with examples of how we should live our lives. For most Javanese people, *wayang* is not merely a mirror of life but also a living encyclopedia (Mulyono, 1978). *Wayang* is not merely a performance or spectacle but also a guide to life, serving as a foundation for responding to and confronting issues regarding life, the purpose of life, and one's view of God (Mulasno, 2013).

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of feminist literary criticism and comparative literature, the presence of *wayang* characters in Sayuti's poems indicates that representations of gender relations and constructions are built by referencing *wayang* characters and plays. Although these poems adopt a masculine first-person lyrical perspective, Sembadra, Utari, and Surtikanti are not merely portrayed as objects of love or spouses. All three are depicted as women who possess strength and autonomy within marital relationships.

Sembadra and Utari are indeed more frequently depicted in the domestic sphere as the wives of Arjuna and Abimanyu. However, this domestic role does not necessarily imply passivity. From the perspective of the lyrical "I" who identifies with Arjuna, Sembadra holds a special position because she embodies both outer and inner beauty. The loss of Sembadra is even interpreted as the loss of Arjuna's power and might, metaphorically represented by the keris that is no longer Pulanggeni and the arrow that is no longer Pasopati. Sembadra and Utari also hold important positions in the genealogical continuity of the Pandava family: Sembadra gave birth to Abimanyu, while Utari gave birth to Parikesit, the heir to the throne of Hastinapura. Nevertheless, the significance of both women lies not solely in these reproductive roles.

Female agency is portrayed more strongly through the choices and actions of Surtikanti and Utari. Although she had been betrothed to Duryodana and was loved by King Karnamandra, Surtikanti chose Karna as her husband. Utari is depicted as an equal partner with moral authority in her relationship with Abimanyu. She advises Abimanyu to overcome the resentment within himself before heading to the battlefield. Utari also reminds Abimanyu of the Oath of Pralaya he had once sworn before their marriage. Thus, Abimanyu's tragic death is portrayed not only as a heroic tragedy but also as a consequence of his deception toward Utari.

The portrayal of these female characters is closely tied to the construction of Karna's and Abimanyu's masculinity. Karna's masculinity is built on his loyalty to his promises, as expressed in the saying, "A true man never breaks his word." Abimanyu's masculinity is portrayed through his courage and determination to press forward, as expressed in the line "a man must go on and never stop." However, Abimanyu's masculinity is ambivalent: he appears heroic on the battlefield, yet must still bear the moral consequences of his false oath. Therefore, gender relations in Sayuti's poems do not position women as mere complements to male heroism. Sembadra, Utari, and Surtikanti, on the contrary, play a role in shaping, evaluating, and testing the meaning of the male characters' masculinity.

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