

The Symbolism of Love in the Story of Panji Asmarabangun and Galuh Candrakirana as a Cultural Identity of Kediri: A Textual Study and Interpretation

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal the symbolism of love in the story of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* as a cultural identity of Kediri and its contribution to understanding local cultural values. Using a descriptive qualitative research method with a textual study and semiotic interpretation approach, this study analyzes *Panji* manuscripts from the Javanese classical period, collected over a three-month period. The results show that the symbolism of love in the *Panji* story represents values of loyalty, sacrifice, and harmony, reflecting the life philosophy of the Kediri community. The interpretation of these symbols strengthens the position of the *Panji* story as a cultural heritage that plays an essential role in shaping the cultural identity and moral values of Javanese society.

INTRODUCTION

The story of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* is a classical Javanese literary work that holds significant importance in the cultural identity of the Kediri community. This story is not merely a romantic narrative but also contains the symbolism of love that represents core values of life, such as loyalty, sacrifice, and harmony. Amid the development of modernization and globalization, local cultural identities are often neglected, necessitating academic efforts to rediscover the cultural values embedded in traditional literary works (Pradopo, 2016). This phenomenon is essential to understand as a cultural reflection that remains relevant to the social life of contemporary Javanese society.

Research on the symbolism of love in the *Panji* story is significant because this work not only serves as a literary heritage but also as a source of moral and philosophical values. This study contributes to the enrichment of knowledge through semiotic interpretations of love symbolism, which have not been extensively explored, particularly in the context of Kediri's culture. Furthermore, the recognition of the *Panji* story by UNESCO as a *Memory of the World* highlights its unique value and the importance of further exploration (Damono, 2018). By focusing on *Panji* texts through textual study and interpretation approaches, this research uncovers the meanings of love symbolism, which can enhance public understanding of local cultural identity.

Based on this background, this study aims to identify and analyze the symbolism of love in the story of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* and to understand its role in shaping Kediri's cultural identity. This research is expected to provide new perspectives in the study of traditional literature and enrich the body of knowledge concerning Javanese local culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of the symbolism of love in the story of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* is rooted in traditional literary studies, semiotics, and cultural identity. In literary studies, the semiotic approach serves as an essential method for understanding the meaning of symbols in literary works. Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory emphasizes the relationship between the *signifiant* (signifier) and *signifié* (signified) as the foundation for interpreting symbols within literary texts (Saussure, 2011). Furthermore, Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, through the concepts of denotation and connotation, aids in interpreting the symbolism of love in the *Panji* text, where love symbols are viewed not only literally but also as bearing deeper cultural meanings (Barthes, 1977).

In the context of cultural identity, Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity (1996) states that cultural identity is not static but a dynamic process formed through cultural representations in literary works and local traditions. The *Panji* story, as part of Javanese oral and written traditions, reflects the cultural identity of the Kediri community through love symbols associated with values of loyalty, sacrifice, and harmony. Additionally, Claude Lévi-Strauss' structuralism theory (1963) is relevant for analyzing the narrative structure of the *Panji* story, where

myths and traditional tales are viewed as part of a societal thought system representing social and cultural relationships.

Previous research conducted by Setiawan (2020) in the *Humaniora* journal shows that the *Panji* story possesses profound philosophical values that need to be explored through a semiotic approach. Another study by Rahmawati (2019) in the *Lensa Budaya* journal highlights that symbols in traditional literary works play a crucial role in preserving local identity amidst globalization. However, this study offers novelty by focusing on the symbolism of love in the *Panji* text, particularly *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana*, as the cultural identity of Kediri.

Based on the theoretical mapping, this research lies at the intersection of semiotic theory, cultural identity, and narrative structuralism. Therefore, the research framework encompasses an analysis of the symbolism of love using a semiotic approach to uncover the meaning of symbols and their relationship with cultural values in shaping Kediri's cultural identity as reflected in the *Panji* text.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a textual study and semiotic interpretation approach to analyze the symbolism of love in the story of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana*. The qualitative approach was chosen as it allows researchers to deeply understand the cultural meanings of symbols through the interpretation of Javanese classical literary texts (Creswell, 2014), beginning with the stages of description, analysis, and comparison (Alkari et al., 2021). The qualitative approach in this research is used to thoroughly identify the existing components to produce conclusions (Sasmita et al., 2024). The textual study focuses on analyzing the *Panji* manuscripts collected from various sources over three months. Data collection techniques include literature review, manuscript examination, and an in-depth interpretation of narrative structures and symbols found within the texts (Budianto et al., 2023).

To explore the meaning of symbols, this research applies Ferdinand de Saussure's and Roland Barthes' semiotic theories. Saussure examines symbols based on the relationship between the *signifier* and *signified*, while Barthes introduces the connotative dimension to reveal the deeper cultural meanings of love symbols (Barthes, 1977; Saussure, 2011). The data analysis process includes identifying symbols, classifying meanings, and interpreting the symbolism of love within the context of Kediri's cultural values. Data validation in this research is conducted using source and theory triangulation methods to ensure the accuracy of the interpretations (Moleong, 2018).

This study seeks to uncover the relationship between the symbolism of love and the cultural identity of the Kediri community through an in-depth interpretation of the *Panji* story. The results of this analysis are expected to make a significant contribution to traditional literary studies, particularly in understanding the symbolism and cultural values embedded within them.

RESEARCH RESULT

This study reveals that the symbolism of love in the story of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* not only represents romantic relationships but also reflects profound philosophical values. Through a semiotic approach, the symbols of love in this story are interpreted as representations of loyalty, sacrifice, harmony, and struggles in life. The characters of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* serve as ideal symbols of a couple who not only uphold personal love but also convey a moral message about harmony in the social and cultural life of the Kediri community. This aligns with Barthes' (1977) view that symbols in literary texts carry layers of connotative meanings that reflect the cultural realities of society.

The symbol of loyalty is evident in *Panji Asmarabangun*'s quest to find *Galuh Candrakirana*, who had gone missing. His journey symbolizes sacrifice and strong determination. The meaning of this symbol aligns with the social values in Javanese culture, which place love and loyalty as the foundation of a harmonious life (Rahmawati, 2019). Furthermore, the symbolism of love also appears in the harmony between humans and nature, as illustrated by the beautiful setting during the protagonists' meeting. This harmony indicates balance, which is at the core of Kediri's cultural values.

Further interpretation shows that the symbolism of love in the *Panji* story plays a significant role in shaping the cultural identity of the Kediri community. This story does not merely present a romantic tale but also implies a concept of love integrated with social responsibility, local wisdom, and spirituality. This supports Stuart Hall's (1996) theory, which states that cultural identity is formed through representational practices that reflect local values and traditions. Thus, the *Panji* story is not just a literary work but also a reflection of the Kediri community's thought system, rich with cultural symbols.

In addition, this study finds a connection between the narrative structure of the *Panji* story and myths in Javanese cultural traditions. Using Levi-Strauss' (1963) structuralist approach, the symbolism in this story reveals a pattern of dualism between good and evil, loyalty and betrayal, as well as love and sacrifice. These symbols illustrate humanity's effort to achieve balance in life, which is a fundamental principle in Javanese culture (Lestari & Wiratama, 2018).

The story of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* is vividly depicted in one of the *Panji* relief panels in the Airlangga Museum in Kediri. This relief portrays an episode from the *Panji Semirang* story, which narrates the journey of *Galuh Candra Kirana* (Sekartaji), the princess of Mapanji Garasakan from the Jenggala Kingdom, and *Inu Kertapati* (*Panji Asmarabangun*), the son of Sri Samarawijaya from the Panjalu (Kadiri) Kingdom. In this story, *Galuh Candra Kirana* disguises herself as *Panji Semirang* during her quest to find her betrothed. The relief depicts a scene in the Jenggala Kingdom's garden, adorned with neatly arranged trees. In this panel, *Panji Asmarabangun* is surrounded by *Pangeran Anom*, *Panji Brajanata*, *Punta*, *Kertala*, *Sabdopalon*, and *Noyogenggong*. The story unfolds after the failed marriage between *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Dewi Ajeng*, which was caused by the witchcraft of *Dewi Liku*, *Galuh Candra Kirana*'s stepmother. This event causes *Panji Asmarabangun* to awaken from the spell, and

he recalls meeting *Panji Semirang*, who bears a striking resemblance to his fiancée, *Galuh Candra Kirana*. The relief depicts the scene following this realization, with thin clouds overhead and *Panji Asmarabangun* appearing stunned, symbolizing his moment of awareness after the event (Widiatmoko, 2022).



Figure 1. *Panji* Relief Panel, Airlangga Museum Collection, Kediri

In this relief, *Prabu Anom* (the third figure) is seen explaining the situation to *Panji Asmarabangun* and devising a strategy to escape the palace to search for *Panji Semirang*, who is actually *Galuh Candra Kirana* in disguise. *Pangeran Anom* is depicted speaking toward *Panji Asmarabangun* (the fourth figure), while *Brajanata* (the fifth figure), *Panji Asmarabangun's* half-brother, appears vigilant in protecting him. *Punta* and *Kertala* (the sixth and seventh figures) are shown conversing, supporting *Pangeran Anom's* narrative, while *Sabdopalon* and *Noyogenggong* (the attendants, figures one and two) are seen listening intently to the explanation (Widiatmoko, 2022).

The findings of this study strengthen the understanding that the story of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* is not merely a traditional literary work but also a cultural heritage with enduring relevance today. These discoveries contribute to the study of classical literature and cultural identity, particularly in preserving local cultural values amidst the forces of globalization.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the symbolism of love in the story of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* carries profound meanings that go beyond the romantic relationship between the main characters. It also represents cultural values that shape the cultural identity of Kediri. In a semiotic context, the symbols of love—expressed through loyalty, sacrifice, and harmony—illustrate the interconnectedness between humans, nature, and the moral values upheld by Javanese society. This interpretation aligns with Barthes' theory (1977), which states that literary texts possess layers of connotative meaning that reflect the ideology and thought systems of the society from which the work originates.

The symbol of loyalty in *Panji Asmarabangun's* struggle to find *Galuh Candrakirana* contains values of sacrifice and strong determination. This

symbolizes a broader concept of love, not only in individual relationships but also as a reflection of loyalty to culture, tradition, and social balance. In Javanese culture, such loyalty symbolizes honor and stability in life (Rahmawati, 2019). Furthermore, the harmony between humans and nature depicted in the story's setting illustrates the alignment of Javanese cultural values with local spirituality, where human life constantly strives to achieve balance with its environment. This reflects Levi-Strauss' (1963) structuralist thought, which emphasizes the dualistic patterns that must be balanced, such as love and sacrifice or happiness and suffering.

The symbolism of love in the *Panji* story also demonstrates philosophical and sociological relevance that endures over time. Love in this context is understood not merely as a romantic feeling but as humanity's struggle to achieve harmony and perfection in life. The symbols present in the *Panji* narrative – such as long journeys, obstacles, and the eventual reunion of the main characters – are reflections of the life cycle of Javanese society, which is rich in the meanings of struggle and sincerity (Setiawan, 2020). This reaffirms that the *Panji* story is not merely entertainment but also serves as a medium for transmitting moral and ethical values to future generations.

In the context of Kediri's cultural identity, the symbolism of love in the *Panji* story plays a crucial role in building and preserving local identity. Stuart Hall (1996) states that cultural identity is a dynamic process formed through cultural representation, including literary works. Thus, the *Panji* story serves as a reflection of the noble values of Kediri society, which prioritizes harmony, loyalty, and sacrifice as integral aspects of daily life. The relevance of this story amidst globalization highlights that the symbols within the *Panji* narrative still hold vitality as a local identity that must be preserved and maintained.

This discussion reinforces that research on the symbolism of love in *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* provides significant contributions to the study of classical literature and cultural identity. In addition to enriching semiotic and structuralist theories, the findings of this study also support the understanding that traditional literary works possess deep philosophical and cultural values capable of addressing the challenges of the modern era.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that the symbolism of love in the story of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* represents the noble values that shape the cultural identity of the Kediri community. The symbols of love are not merely romantic narratives between the main characters but also reflect loyalty, sacrifice, harmony, and balance, which are central to Javanese culture. Through a semiotic approach, these symbolic meanings are revealed as part of a broader life structure, where the struggles of *Panji* and *Galuh Candrakirana* symbolize the search for the meaning of life, moral resilience, and the harmony between humans, nature, and spiritual values.

This study also emphasizes that the *Panji* story plays a significant role as a medium for representing dynamic cultural values. The symbols within the story not only depict the traditional order of life but also serve as a means for the Kediri community to maintain their cultural identity amidst modernization and

globalization. The interpretation of love in the *Panji* story enriches perspectives on love as a universal concept, while still being deeply rooted in local traditions. Thus, this study contributes to the development of traditional literary studies and provides a deeper understanding of symbolism in the context of local culture.

As a recommendation, efforts to preserve and revitalize the *Panji* story as a cultural heritage with high philosophical and cultural values are necessary. Local governments, academics, and cultural practitioners can collaborate to reintroduce the *Panji* story through formal education, artistic performances, and digital media, so that younger generations can better understand the values it contains. Additionally, further research using multidisciplinary approaches can be conducted to explore other aspects of the *Panji* story, such as its social, political, and religious symbolism, which may not yet be fully revealed.

By preserving the *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* story, the cultural identity of Kediri can be continuously maintained as a heritage that not only enriches local culture but also contributes to the understanding of global culture.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study has limitations in its scope of analysis, which focuses solely on the symbolism of love in the *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Galuh Candrakirana* stories using a semiotic approach. Other aspects, such as social, political, religious, or gender symbols within this literary text, have not been thoroughly explored. Furthermore, the manuscript sources utilized are limited to texts available in literature studies, so variations in interpretation from different manuscripts or perspectives of local narrators have not been fully utilized. Therefore, future research is expected to explore broader aspects of symbolism through a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating field studies, as well as delving into oral traditions and performing arts related to the *Panji* stories. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural identity and local values of the Kediri community.

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