

## History and Mythology in Javanese Performing Arts

Sumarsam

In one of the scenes of *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) of the film series Star Wars, Luke Skywalker is learning to use the Force (a state of mind that can do anything telepathically, including move things). One day, Luke crashes his X-Wing fighter jet into a swamp. He tries to lift the starfighter by applying the Force but has a hard time. Discouraged, he tells an ancient Jedi master, Yoda, that he is trying his best:

YODA: No! Try not. Do. Or do not. There is no try.

LUKE: I can't. It's too big.

YODA: Size matters not. Look at me. Judge me by my size, do you? Hm? Mmmm. And well you should not. For my ally is the Force. And a powerful ally it is. Life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings are we . . . not this crude matter. You must feel the Force around you. Here, between you . . . me . . . the tree . . . the rock . . . everywhere! Yes, even between this land and that ship!

LUKE: You want the impossible.

Then Yoda turns toward the X-Wing fighter. With his eyes closed and his head bowed, he raises his arm and points at the ship. The fighter rises above the water and moves forward as their faithful droid, Artoo-Detoo, beeps in terror and scoots away. The X-Wing moves majestically, surely, toward the shore.

I preface my essay with this excerpt as a response to comments I have often received (explicitly or implicitly) from my American colleagues that I, as an Indonesian ethnomusicologist with distinctive training, have a special status

as an arbiter between Javanese and Western ideas.<sup>1</sup> My American colleagues sometimes treat me as if I am a Yoda, brimming with Javanese wisdom. Most often, however, I feel more like Luke—I carry too much baggage to fulfill their expectations—“You want the impossible!” Nevertheless, I will try my best to be the middleman.

My essay focuses on the *canthang balung*, a unique ritual specialist with apparent origins in Buddhist Tantrism who appears throughout Javanese history and often inserts a seemingly dissonant element into the refinement of Javanese court ceremonies.<sup>2</sup> The *canthang balung*, I argue, manifests a sacred-profane paradox, expressed by the Javanese term *manunggaling kawula lan gusti* (a perfect union between the commoner and the lord), a Javanese approach to a perfect democratic ideal. I trace the *canthang balung* in a variety of historical and mythological sources and draw upon my observations as both an insider and an outsider to Javanese culture to illuminate its significance.

Regarding insider and outsider voices, I have come to realize that the issue of emic/etic voices (as the “insider/outsider” distinction is sometimes characterized) is not limited to a Westerner looking at Javanese culture versus a Javanese looking at his own culture.<sup>3</sup> It is important to realize that, even within Javanese society, insider and outsider voices exist. I will expand my discussion of this point later; for now, however, suffice it to say that the subject of this essay is cultural tradition in the Javanese royal court. And the perspective of the members of the royal family, or of individuals who embrace the practice of the court tradition (insiders), often, but not always, contrast with the perspectives of non-royal members of society.

On what did George Lucas base Yoda’s cosmological ideas? Apparently, he was familiar with the work of Joseph Campbell, a scholar of mythology/religion. In an interview with TV personality Bill Moyers in 1999, Lucas acknowledged having learned a lot about questions of cosmology from “Joe” (as he calls Campbell).<sup>4</sup> The interview makes it sound as if Lucas personally met Joe before he produced the film. But another source tells us that “George Lucas was an avid admirer of Campbell’s writings, and used them as a direct reference in his creation of Star Wars. The two didn’t meet face to face until after Lucas had already finished his original trilogy of films.”<sup>5</sup>

Beginning with an excerpt from a Star Wars scene is one of my small contributions toward becoming an arbiter between Java and the West. I draw a connection between Yoda’s idea of power and Javanese ideas of power in *wayang* performance by following Benedict Anderson’s (1965) explication of the concept of power; in the West, Anderson contends, power is abstract, based on relationships, but in Java, power is concrete, emanating from nature, odd things, and art objects.<sup>6</sup> Hence, wayang puppets and gamelan might be a source of power. Many great characters in the wayang stories, such as knights (e.g., Arjuna) or gods (e.g., Kresna, an incarnation of Wisnu), are already doing what Yoda was doing. My larger point is to

demonstrate how the creation and performance of myth are infused and inspired by history and that history is infused and inspired by myth.

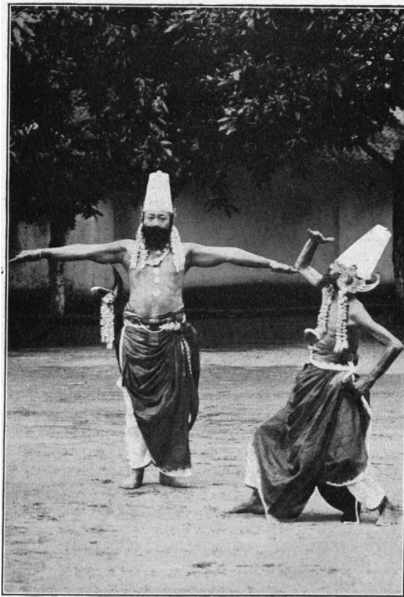
#### ECCENTRIC CANTHANG BALUNG

*Bedhaya* and *serimpi* are two of the most refined dances among Javanese court dance genres in the Kasunanan court of Surakarta. The dancers perform graceful and highly stylized movements, with choreographed shifting positions in orderly, well-designed configurations. A *serimpi* dance is accompanied by refined gamelan pieces, with smooth transitions between sections. Yet in the middle part of the performance, the audience will hear a loud, peculiar, stylized vocal interjection—*Ééééé, yoooooooook, hayu tå, yå tå*—performed by a pair of male singers. This auditorily conspicuous vocal interjection, almost covering the sound of the whole ensemble, is called *senggakan* or *alok*. When I was a student at the conservatory and academy of gamelan in Surakarta (1962–70), I learned to play pieces for this *serimpi* dance, but I did not learn to sing *senggakan*. So when I first heard these vocalizations while performing, I was surprised. I had no idea of the significance of this intense vocal interjection. In retrospect, I question why neither I nor my friends ever asked our teachers, many of whom were court musicians, about these vocalizations and why they did not explain them to us. Perhaps, due to our belief that the *kraton* were the center of Javanese culture, producing *alus* (refined) cultural performances, we just accepted what we were told.

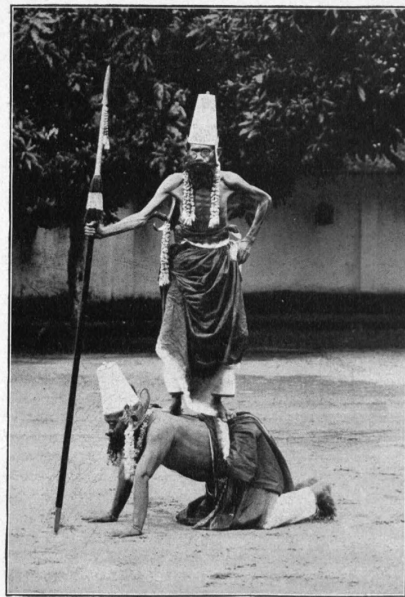
Two decades later, in the late 1980s, while writing my dissertation that eventually became my first book, the source of these vocalizations—individuals known as *canthang balung* (figure 11-1)—was one of the subjects I encountered while researching performances in the context of Javanese court culture during the colonial period.<sup>7</sup> I examined the *canthang balung*'s roles both in court ritual and outside the court, relying on Stutterheim's 1935 description and secondary sources.<sup>8</sup>

According to Stutterheim, "The task of the *canthang balung* included guard duty, performing *senggak* or *alok* (short vocal interjection) and *keblok* (clapping) with the gamelan to accompany *serimpi* dances, and to dance at the *garebeg* festival when the king departs to inner court."<sup>9</sup> In addition, once a year, they had special duty:

to play the clown in a procession of the *garebeg mulud* festival to celebrate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. In the procession, when the *canthang balung* arrived at the outer hall of the court (*pagelaran*), they clown in as funny a way as they could, including imitating dogs mating. This was because if the prime minister laughed at the clowning of the *canthang balung*, he had to pay them. This was no longer done at the time of the writing of Soewandi's report in the late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century (1938). According to Stutterheim, "this custom was abolished probably for the sake of decency because many European of the Resident's (later the Governor's) retinue were present at the *garebeg* ceremony."<sup>10</sup>



„Vliegen”.



Grappenmakerij.



Gadjah ngombé.

FIGURE 11-1. *Canthang balung* performing “Vlegen” (Flying), “Gresservanderij” (Clowning), and “Gadjah Ngombe” (Drinking elephant). Adapted from Brandts Buys, “Uit de pers.”

Outside the court ritual context, I was surprised to learn that historically, *canthang balung* were employed as the supervisors of the dancer/singer/prostitutes called *talèdhèk*; the *canthang balung*’s duties include issuing identification cards (*serat pikekah*) to be purchased by the *talèdhèk* to show their dancers’ legal status. The *canthang balung* would also make sure that *talèdhèk* were always ready whenever

court officials demanded that the dancers to perform in a court celebration. For this reason, the *canthang balung* (also called *lurah badhut*) had their own *talèdhèk* living in their houses, which also served as brothels.

The practice of prostitution had negative impacts on society, such as the exploitation of the *talèdhèk* by *canthang balung*, fighting between the clients of their brothels, and the breakup of marriages. Eventually such negative impacts led the abolishment of the authority of the *lurah badhut* over *talèdhèk* and of the court assuming the direct administration of *talèdhèk*.<sup>11</sup> I was surprised to discover that these sexually promiscuous cultural practices were embedded in this aspect of court cultural production. How, I wondered, could it be that this eccentric behavior existed within the courtly, aesthetically deep, refined performing arts, characterized by *adiluhung* (super beauty, the product of high civilization)? How to explain this paradox?

#### HADIWIDJOJO ON CANTHANG BALUNG

In thinking about this question, I searched for literature containing information about *canthang balung*. In so doing, I stumbled upon a speech delivered by Gusti Pangeran Harjo Hadiwidjojo (a son of King Paku Buwana X), who was educated at Leiden University in the Netherlands. In 1953, in his capacity as the head of Radyapustaka Museum, he delivered a lecture that described in depth the peculiarities of *canthang balung* performances at the court of Surakarta and their unusual lifestyle. At first, he was not sure if talking about *canthang balung* and their lascivious work was necessary, since he and his audience lived in a different era and might not be interested in them and their practices. It was at this juncture that his position as a Dutch-educated intellectual took over his intentionality. With the encouragement of his colleagues, he meticulously listed the definitions of *canthang balung* from dictionaries and oral information from both Dutch and Javanese sources. He concluded that *canthang balung* were extraordinary personnel—not clowns, not musicians, not common beings, but rather a sacred phenomenon whose performances were at times tied to a religious procession. He insisted that although they performed clownish dancing, the context of their performance was religiously significant. For example, they performed in conjunction with the Islamic Muludan religious procession. They danced to the sound of the gamelan composition (*gendhing*) “Rambu,” an opening piece of the performance of the sacred gamelan Sekatèn. Hadiwidjojo describes the task of *canthang balung* at length:

Therefore, if I am not mistaken, originally *canthang balung* was the head of procession whose task was to lead a presentation of the offering to pay homage to our ancestors, forebears, pioneers, etc. In today's context, they [*canthang balung*] are chief religious personnel (*kaum* or *pengulu*). In the context of Buddhist era, they were priests, brahmans. Therefore, the *pengulu* performs ritual in the mosque = [the equivalent of] the temple. [the *pengulu* do not perform ritual] before the king, as commonly how nowadays *wilujengan* ritual is done in the house. The [Islamic]

Mulud Nabi ritual = [the equivalent of] when the ritual was carried out by [*canthang balung*] in the temple. I assume you all know that mulud in Arabic means the celebration of birth (*weton*). Hence the celebration of the “birth of temple” = in the Buddhist tradition in Bali, it is called *odalan*—this [*odalan*] might be an old tradition. Subsequently, the ritual was Islamized by *wali* (Islamic saints). Because the strong influence of the [Islamic] power, it continues to be practiced in the form we see it today. Subsequently, people don’t know the original practices of *canthang balung*. Their status as priests is degraded to clowns.<sup>12</sup>

Hadiwidjojo’s speech enriches our discussion of *canthang balung* by including in our discourse an “insider” perspective (from a court intellectual), layered on my “outsider” work (as a non-court intellectual studying court culture). Hadiwidjojo positioned himself as an unbiased learned member of the aristocracy. Had he presented his speech as a member of the royal family from an insider’s *adiluhung* perspective, he would have most likely skipped discussion of this especially peculiar court cultural practice. He claimed to have received much of his information from insider informants, including his father, King Paku Buwana X, and the leader of the court musicians, R. T. Warsadiningrat. Apparently, Hadiwidjojo had observed *canthang balung* for roughly two decades before he gave this speech at the Radyapustaka Museum in 1953.

W. F. Stutterheim was clearly an outsider. His article, titled “A Thousand Years Old Profession in the Princely Courts on Java,” however, relies on insiders’ notes.<sup>13</sup> “As early as 1932,” Stutterheim writes, “through the kindness of prince Kusumayuda and Hadiwidjojo, I obtained a few accurate notes concerning the nature of the activities of these *canthang balung*; these notes I reproduce here in extension.”<sup>14</sup>

One of Stutterheim’s main theses is the connection between the image carved on the wall of the ninth-century Central Javanese Mahayana Buddhist monument, Borobudur—which depicts a dancer or dancers dancing with man or men in brahman dress—and its possible link to contemporary *canthang balung* and their practice at the court of Surakarta (figure 11-2). In this regard, he concludes that the official relationship of *canthang balung* “to the dancing-girls, their function at the serimpi-dance and finally the wearing of beard, which usage is preserved in Surakarta, are sufficient indication that we are dealing with the present holders of the same profession or a profession most closely related to that which the Borobudur-reliefs represent.”<sup>15</sup>

To strengthen his argument, Stutterheim references a practice of Buddhism in the twelfth-century East Javanese kingdom of Singhasari among a particular sect that practiced a ritual called *pancamakara*, which involved the enjoyment of the “Five Ms” (*mada*, drinking liquor; *maithusa*, sexual intercourse; *mudra*, meditation; *matsya*, eating fish; and *mamsa*, eating meat), which according to Stutterheim’s source can still be found in the so-called *chantang balung*, two bearded “buffoons” with the upper part of their body naked and with yellow strips, whose duty is it to become fuddled in public with gin or *arak* and to dance in an intoxicated state. These court functionaries not so very long ago received their





FIGURE 11-2. An image of a man or two in brahman dress facing a dancing girl, depicted at the wall of the ninth-century Buddhist monument Borobudur.

official income by keeping dancing girls and prostitutes. Their name, probably a nick-name, is probably due to the fact that originally they performed their “dance” on the *kṣétra* [cemetery], “rattling with bones” (*nyantang balung*).<sup>16</sup>

#### DUL BIRAHİ, SERAT TJENṬINI, ZOETMULDER

The fascinating descriptions of *canthang balung* by Hadiwidjojo and Stutterheim and their possible historical links to Buddhist Tantrism and the *pancamakara* ritual inspired me to want to know more about any other traditions like the practice of *canthang balung*. What came to my mind was a description of an Islamic tradition called Dul Birahi, as described by the authors of the nineteenth-century literary work *Serat Tjenṭini*, namely Ranggalasutrasna, Sastranagara, and Sastradipura. The authors describe the opening of a mass whirling *dhikir*, in which participants, with eyes covered by batik cloth or paper, formed a circle, held their breath intermittently, and cried unconscious with shaking heads, the male and female devotees acting out various behaviors:

They were everywhere, one on the top of the other,  
Like banana trees that had been cut down  
Men and women mixed together  
Those who were on the top of the other did not mind.  
The ones who were naked were not concerned  
There was no punishment.  
That was the way of the people of Dul Birahi,  
Whoever achieved superiority, no questions were asked  
About their behavior.

Those santri whose *èlmu* was inferior  
 Surrendered their wives' bodies and soul,  
 Presenting them [to the superior ones] for whatever purposes.<sup>17</sup>

At this juncture, I begin to wonder if by presenting behavior that exposes sexual relationships, I will be labelled as someone looking to sensationalize discussion based on controversial topics. The answer is yes and no. In the first place, my point of view does not represent the view of the *kraton* insider. I base my writing on other scholars' writing and description from literary work such as *Serat Tjengjini*. For the latter, the issue is whether what's said in literary work or religious language is literal in its intentionality.<sup>18</sup> However, speaking about Tantric practice, White asserts that the tendency to literalize symbolic statements or practice is a hallmark of these "hard core" Tantric movements. As I am quoting White, a scholar studying Indian Tantrism, it reminds me of Zoetmulder's discussion of Dul Birahi.<sup>19</sup> He suggests that Dul Birahi's practices are similar to Pasupata, Kapalikas, and other Buddhist Tantric sects in India. In both traditions, sexual intercourse and promiscuity are integral parts of their rituals. Furthermore, Zoetmulder asserts that the term *birai* is "a bastardisation of bhirawa, birawa, or birawi," which is a word that implies getting oneself into a state of ecstasy, hence pointing to the primary sexualized meaning of *bhairawa*.<sup>20</sup> To strengthen his point, Zoetmulder quotes passages from *Suluk Lonthang*, which explicitly describes *ambirawa*, the act of *bhirawa*.

Here again, by investigating *Serat Tjengjini* and *Suluk Lonthang*, we rely on the language of literary work. But there is a nineteenth-century Dutch report on Islamic ritual in Madiun called *dulguyer*, which is somewhat similar to the *bhairawa* practice. And dancing and music were integral parts of the ritual:

Their ritual consisted of beating on the drum and singing continuously "Ha-Illa-Lah, Ha-Illah-Lah" while moving their bodies back and forth or sideways, until they got into a trance and became unconscious. Men and women and old invalid people who could not even walk ordinarily then began to dance [*tandakken*]. The unconscious followers were believed to be in the happiest of states since they were in communion with God. Yellow water [*boreh?*] would be smeared on them and they then became conscious again while everybody was offered yellow water to drink.<sup>21</sup>

The mention of *boreh* (yellow unguent or lotion) reminds us of *canthang balung*, whose naked bodies were stained by stripes of yellow unguent or lotion.

#### RAMAYANA KAKAWIN

The mention of *boreh*, dancing, music in the context of *canthang balung*, and Dulguyer or Dulbirahi Islamic tradition has reminded me of passages from the ninth-century *Ramayana Kakawin*. The passage in question was written in a form of allegory, in which birds were used to satirically represent ascetic and political characters:<sup>22</sup>



Once upon a time, the *kuvon-bird* and starling (*jalak-bird*) had a lively conversation. They were despising each other. Kuvon-bird accused starling encamping near the weaver-bird. Starling enraged, comparing kuvon to an unworthy *vidu* (wayang-player). Ironically, kuvon was also an official.

[Starling:] You are *tanḍa* [official]! You have a very mean “palace,” living in holes in the ground. You are stained, *kuvon!* Homeless, unattached, while leading the life of a vagabond performer, a *vidu* (wayang-player), but you are endowed with manifold abilities, having magical powers!<sup>23</sup>

According to the starling, the *kuvon-bird* and the *vidu*, which the bird represents, are enigmatic figures. Why was the *vidu* (wayang performer), who was endowed with many abilities and magical power, was also homeless and unattached to his community? This description of *vidu* reminds me of the practice of *canthang balung*, and to a certain extent, the Dulguyer or Dul Birahi tradition, of being someone with questionable status but religiously potent and which, as Becker mentioned above, can be linked to the Tantric sect called Pasupata. Agreeing with Becker, Acri suggests that *canthang balung* was the remnant of an even more extreme Tantric tradition, Kapalika.<sup>24</sup> Acri details the descriptive practice of Kapalika, which is similar to the practice of *canthang balung*:

Those practitioners were scornfully depicted as supernaturally endowed, yet evil, sorcerers who often posed as false Brahmins or ascetics; they sang, danced and played in theatrical performances; they encouraged the practice of drinking alcohol and engaging in sex with female attendants, whom they admitted into their order; and their attire included ornaments and musical instruments made of [allegedly human] bones, as well as human skulls or parts thereof. The etymology of the [nick]name *canthang balungs* would perfectly make sense in a Kāpālīka milieu, for the “rattling bones” may be nothing else than a local variant of the rattle-drums [*ḍamaru*] made of bones that constituted one of the most characteristic marks of the Śaiva Kāpālīkas. Also indicative of a Kāpālīka origin may be the strings of flowers adorning their naked bodies, which is reminiscent of the garland of flowers offered to the gods [*nirmālya*] worn by Atimārga ascetics, and the emphasis on laughter, which is reminiscent of the observance of *aṭṭahāsa* or vehement laughter prescribed by the Pāśupata observance [*pāśupatavrata*].<sup>25</sup>

Acri also finds that the practice of smearing a yellow ointment over the body or hairs and beard of *canthang balung* can be found in certain Sanskrit texts of the practitioners of the Bhairavamarga. The characters they play and the tall cap (*fez*) they wore are strongly reminiscent of the Pāśupata and Kāpālīka and other Indian ascetic practices.<sup>26</sup>

#### LIVED RELIGION VERSUS FORMAL RELIGION

What has emerged from the preceding discussion is the practice of searching for spiritual experiences. Our common conventional understanding of achieving spiritual enlightenment of oneself and/or collectively is through formally institutionalized

process, such as the Friday gathering of Muslims for prayer or Sunday services for Christians. However, the discussion above reveals another means of achieving spiritual experience, namely through events in the public sphere that involve theatrical acts, processions, and music performances associated with community activities. This is what some scholars called “lived religion,” that is, those practices and rituals carried out by religious laity in their everyday lives, which consist of a range of activities that may have religious significance or contain spiritual potency.<sup>27</sup>

For example, music and theatrical performances can be presented in the activity of a preacher and in religious festival. It is not uncommon in this preaching context to see gamelan and wayang presented side by side with religious songs, displays of magic, and religious prayer. Another example of the practice of lived religion is a court festival to commemorate the birth of Prophet Muhammad, the Sekatèn week, which Hadiwidjojo mentions in connection with the presence of *canthang balung* in the processional event and dancing in the accompaniment of *gendhing* “Rambu” performed by a sacred gamelan Sekatèn. It is not only that the Sekatèn festival is an important religious event, but all kinds of court *pusaka* (magically charged heirloom relics), including the performance of gamelan Sekatèn and the parade of sacred court weapon, bring about spiritual potency to those Javanese who believe in courtly traditional culture. It should be mentioned, however, that the Sekatèn festival is held in the context of a worldly mundane occasion, an event no different from a market fair. There, during the Sekatèn week, one finds in the courtyard in front of the mosque all sorts of vendors selling food, souvenirs, and clothes. Aside from gamelan Sekatèn performed in the immediate compound in front of the mosque, all types of performances are also presented in temporary stages or an improvised circular stage on the ground of the courtyard.

The point I would like to make is that obtaining spiritual enlightenment can be achieved not only through a formally institutionalized religious gathering but also through informal community gatherings such as in community festivals. An event such as Sekatèn festival is no different from what Meredith McGuire describes regarding a ritual by Latinos in the United States in blurring the boundary between the sacred the profane. They engage in concrete religious practice that can enable them to experience a sense of the sacred, but they do so in the domestic sphere and in their neighborhood communities. She goes on to say,

Today, as in medieval times, much popular religious practice is devoted to getting in touch with sacred power and somehow tapping it for one’s needs. Pilgrimages, processions, and performances are among the most important popular religious tradition by which U.S. Latinos gain access to sacred space and divine powers. Because such public practices blur the boundaries between sacred and profane, they also challenge the boundaries between religious and political ritual.<sup>28</sup>

#### SEMAR

Despite the above elucidation, a question lingers regarding religious potency one can obtain by the presence of jokester *canthang balung* in the court dance performance



FIGURE 11-3. Semar, a contradictory character represented in a paradoxical iconography, juxtaposing sacred and profane, power and powerless.

and the procession during the Sekatèn festival. Does humor or levity have any place in religious ritual? Certainly, from the perspective of formal theology, religion is a most serious business, not a laughing matter. In other words, humor is incongruent with religion. However, if we define religion as a lived popular religion or community-oriented system of belief, humor tends to always appear as part of the practices and rituals designed to facilitate closeness to God.<sup>29</sup> Humor in this popular religious event evokes playfulness or lightheartedness, but it can be serious or even subversive. The point is that humor facilitates people's obtaining spiritual experience. In connection to this point, I cannot resist mentioning the clown figure named Semar in wayang performances, since he signifies the same figure as *canthang balung* in terms of representing sacred-profane trajectory (figure 11-3).

Semar represents a contradictory character and paradoxical iconography (an interpretation of the meaning of the content of images). The Semar puppet looks

like he is sitting down, yet he is standing up. Standing up, he looks like he is sitting down. "He is ornamented like a woman, his clothes are those of man, yet his face is that of neither man nor woman. About his character, Semar 'though a humble and comical retainer,' is yet the most powerful of Gods. . . . He is the repository of the highest wisdom, yet this flashes from in between his gentle jokes, his clowning, and even his persistent uncontrollable farting."<sup>30</sup> The esteemed wayang expert and author, Mulyono says more about Semar:

What manner of creation is this, who stands leaning on his belly? or is it,  
who sits rocking on his buttocks?

The mid-day sun is sallow beside the radiance of his face.  
How can such brilliance emanate from one as pallorous as a corpse?

No parent, no children has he. His smile misted in tears.  
Bleak perils of humanity, softened in the gentle rain of his compassion.

Goodness itself, this god made man, who  
Dominates the *satria* with servitude.

Kings grovel before him; gods honour him;  
Even the Most-High does his bidding.

Invincible through non-deeds, omnipotence in inertia.  
Here lies the source of his *sakti* [divine might].

Dawn at dusk, sunset at daybreak.  
The perfect being: Ismaya.<sup>31</sup>

The paradoxical nature of Semar epitomizes a perfect democratic ideal, namely that the highest status is in perfect unity with the lowest status; *manunggaling kawula lan gusti* (a perfect union between the commoner and the lord) is a philosophical expression in Javanese that captures well the meaning of this concept. But for the purpose of our discussion, clearly Semar, as in the case of *canthang balung*, also captures the sacred-profane paradox.

## CONCLUSION

In 1965, there was a mass crackdown against followers of the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia [PKI]) during which more than one million people were killed, and Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, was deposed. In her 2019 novel *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa* (Manjali and Cakrabirawa), Ayu Utami, who lived through the political upheavals and violence of 1965, writes:

Jati had finished observing all he could with his fingers. People are waiting for news from his mouth. "There is a dog, a skull. And a trident." He describes what his fingers see. "He is a Shiva Bhairawa statue" he said. "Such a statue is also called Chakra Chakras." Marja felt a strange thing flowing in her body. . . . The subtle tension that rose from inside his stomach, strengthened, then spread to the direction of her neck. . . .

She felt as if it is coming from contact with an invisible presence. The unknown. Now the vibration became acute on the back of her neck, before disappearing, evaporating out of romantic love. . . . Now Marja is back to normal. She swallowed saliva and shook her head a bit, convincing herself that she was conscious. "Shiva Bhairawa? Chakra, Chakra? What has it got to do with Cakrabirawa, Jati?" [ask Marja].<sup>32</sup>

The novel goes on to describe a related massacre of the residents of the village where the Shiva Bhairawa statue was found, whose citizens were accused of hiding an officer of Cakrabirawa (President Sukarno's bodyguards) who was believed to have been involved in the killing of the six army generals as a part of the coup d'état against Sukarno. Founded in 1962, Cakrabirawa was a military regiment whose special duty was guarding President Sukarno. Most likely, the name Cakrabirawa was chosen by Sukarno himself, who was very keen in his allegorical use of wayang stories in his political discourse. By combining the name of Kresna's powerful weapon (Cakra) and *birawa* (i.e., a fierce manifestation of god Shiva, an image of horrible power), Sukarno mobilized age-old mythological concepts to create a code name—Cakrabirawa—that endowed his powerful bodyguard with almost mystical powers. Given the suffering that ensued from the 1965 coup in Indonesia, juxtaposing Sukarno's recycling of myth and history to George Lucas's exploitation of Joseph Campbell's universal "monomyth" may seem facile.<sup>33</sup> However, my essay demonstrates how the *canthang balung*, along with wayang stories, sociopolitical protocols, Indian religion, and Indonesian history, are interconnected and inextricably intertwined. For the Javanese, whose tradition emphasizes oral transmission but also acknowledges the greatness of written materiality, their lives and beliefs are shaped by two most powerful cultural sources and forces: history and mythology. The figure of the *canthang balung* hearkens back to multiple historical and mythological sources, and *canthang balung* characteristics continue to resonate in different forms in the present as well. On the one hand, the creation and performance of myth are not only the product of imagined world but are also infused and inspired by history. On the other hand, history might be infused and inspired by myth.

## NOTES

1. My ethnomusicological training is unlike most ethnomusicologists. In the first place, the ethnomusicology program at Cornell University, my alma mater, is under the umbrella of musicology. Under the supervision of my advisor, Professor Martin Hatch, the program allowed me to design my course of study, such as what classes I should take. I took only three classes in the Music Department: Seminar in Ethnomusicology, Bibliography, and a rudimentary class on Western music. The rest of my classes were in Southeast Asian studies: the history of Southeast Asia, an anthropology course on the mainland of Southeast Asia, and a course on political science and culture of Indonesia.

2. Hadiwidjojo, "Sesorahipun Pangarsa Paheman Radyapustaka 'G.P.H. Hadiwidjojo' wonten ing Walidiyasana" [A speech by the head of Radyapustaka Museum 'G.P.H. Hadiwidjojo' in the Walidiyasana Hall]. Typed manuscript, 1953; W. F. Stutterheim, "A Thousand Years Old Profession in the Princely Courts of Java," in *Studies in Indonesian Archaeology* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1956 [1935]).

3. See K. L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structures of Human Behavior*, 2nd ed. (The Hague: Mouton, 1967); M. Harris, "History and Significance of the Emic/Etic Distinction,"

*Annual Review of Anthropology* 5 (1976): 329–50, [www.jstor.org/stable/2949316](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2949316).

4. See Moyers & Company, “George Lucas Tells Bill Moyers About the Mentors in His Career,” YouTube, May 4, 2017, video, 2:39, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNs7c41JbTI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNs7c41JbTI), 1999.

5. Lucas Seastrom, “Mythic Discovery within the Inner reaches of Outer Space: Joseph Campbell meets George Lucas, Part 1,” Starwars.com, October 22, 2015, [www.starwars.com](http://www.starwars.com).

6. Benedict Anderson, *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Cornell University, 1996 [1965]).

7. Sumarsam, *Gamelan: Cultural Interaction and Musical Development in Central Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Brandts Buys, “Uit de pers. De tjanṅang baloeng’s.—Javaansche en Balische kleppers.—Bedâjâ ketawang.—Édan-édanan,” *Djâwâ* 13 (1933): 258–62; Andrea Acri, “Birds, Bards, Buffoons and Brahman: (Re-)Tracing the Indic Roots of Some Ancient and Modern Performing Characters from Java and Bali,” *Archipel* 88 (2014).

8. W. F. Stutterheim, “A Thousand Years Old Profession in the Princely Courts of Java,” in *Studies in Indonesian Archaeology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956 [1935]), 91–103; Soewandi, R. M. *Djedjèrèngan bab: Beksa Tajoeb, Bondhan, Tuwin Wirèng* [The description of Tayuban, Bondhan, and Wiring dance] (Yogyakarta, 1938, typed manuscript).

9. Stutterheim, “A Thousand Years Old Profession,” 95.

10. Stutterheim, “A Thousand Years Old Profession,” 96; Sumarsam, *Gamelan*, 121.

11. Sumarsam, *Gamelan*, 121–22.

12. Hadiwidjojo, “Sesorahipun Pangarsa Paheman Radyapustaka,” 4. My translation.

13. Stutterheim, “A Thousand Years Old Profession.”

14. Stutterheim, “A Thousand Years Old Profession,” 94.

15. Stutterheim, “A Thousand Years Old Profession,” 98.

16. Stutterheim, “A Thousand Years Old Profession,” 99.

17. Ki Ngabehi Ranggasutrasna et al., *Serat Tjenṭini* (Betawi: Firma Ruysgrok, 1915), 5–6, 92.

18. David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini: “Tantric Sex” in Its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

19. P. J. Zoetmulder, *Pantheism and Monism in Javanese Suluk Literature: Islamic and Indian Mysticism in an Indonesian Setting* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994). First published in Dutch in 1935.

20. Zoetmulder, *Pantheism and Monism*, 237–38.

21. Onghokham, “The Residency of Madiun Pryayi: Priyayi and Peasant in the Nineteenth Century” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1975), 71.

22. Andrea Acri, “On Birds, Ascetics, and Kings in Central Java: ‘Ramayana’ Kakawin, 24.95–126 and 26,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 166 (2010): 475–506.

23. *Kakawin Ramayana*, translated by Acri in “On Birds, Ascetics, and Kings in Central Java,” 62.

24. Acri, “On Birds, Ascetics, and Kings.”

25. Acri, “Birds, Bards, Buffoons and Brahman,” 37.

26. Acri, “Birds, Bards, Buffoons and Brahman,” 37–38.

27. Rinallo et al., *Consumption and Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Soewandi, *Djedjèrèngan bab*.

28. Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 50.

29. Rinallo et al., *Consumption and Spirituality*, 3.

30. Benedict Anderson, *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, *Studies in Southeast Asia* 37, 1965), 22–23.

31. Mulyono (1975), as translated by E. G. Koentjoro in Paschal Maria Laksono, *Tradition in Javanese Social Structure*, trans. E. G. Koentjoro (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1986), 25.

32. Ayu Utami, *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2019). My translation.

33. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949).