



Serat Pawukon mawi Rinengga ing Gambar (composed n.p., n.d.; inscribed by R. Atmarujita, Surakarta, 1863-64). MS. Rekso Pustoko Cat.No. 11; Cornell University Surakarta Manuscript Project Cat.No. MN 594B, p. 26. Illuminated manuscript concerning Javanese calendrical divination. Quadratic Karaton Surakarta script. Of note is the unusual border motif featuring crystal service for brandy and wine.

## READING THE UNREAD IN TRADITIONAL JAVANESE LITERATURE\*

Nancy K. Florida

For the most part traditional Javanese literature<sup>1</sup> remains something imagined rather than something read. Why this is the case and what might happen if it were not so, will be the issues addressed in this article. No doubt the dominant image among Javanese today, of traditional literature (particularly in manuscript form) is that of an acknowledged "classic"--an untarnished emblem of high culture, a mysteriously inscribed jewel from a vast cultural inheritance. As is probably true of acknowledged classics anywhere, such an exalted status is a testimonial to its not being read. In modern Java, the logic of the "classic" has achieved peculiar perfection in the form of traditional Javanese literature: an image of ideal illegibility, a sort of treasured inaccessibility.

This image has a history in what might be called the "classical" tradition of Dutch philology. This is a Colonial philological tradition preoccupied with the quest for golden ages, those periods of alleged literary florescence succeeded by periods of decline or decadence. The philological imagination characteristically situates the epoch of flower in a distant precolonial past, which past is presumed productive of the genuine literary original. For Dutch philology, the closest thing to genuine originals in Javanese literature are the Old Javanese *kakawin*, poetic texts composed mostly in East Java from the ninth to the fifteenth century. According to the philologists, the coming of Islam and that linguistic pollution called Arabic, brought to an end, alas, the classical period of so-called "Hindu-Javanese culture." This means the flower began its long wilt some 500 years ago.

In 1860, A.B. Cohen Stuart published the Surakarta court-poet Yasadipura I's *Serat Bratayuda*, a late eighteenth century Modern Javanese rendition of the *Kakawin Bhāratayuddha* as the first philologically prepared edition of a Javanese literary work.<sup>2</sup> He did so with some embarrassment--and only under orders from his civil service superiors at the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences. His prefatory remarks to this edition abound with apologies to his readers for having to subject them to such decadent, confused, and bastardized material. How much better, he sighs, would have been an edition of its twelfth century

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1. For the purposes of this article, the words "traditional Javanese literature" designate pre-twentieth century written texts in the Modern Javanese language. A majority of those texts were composed in *macapat* poetic meters which were meant for sung performative readings. Many, but by no means all, of these texts were written by persons in some way associated with the courts of Central Java.

2. A. B. Cohen Stuart, *Brātā-Joedā, Indisch Javaansch Heldendicht*, Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, vols. 27-28 (Batavia, 1860).

*kakawin* prototype. Disparaging Yasadipura's comprehension of Old Javanese as well as his literary skills in Modern Javanese, this father of Dutch Colonial philology muses in regret--what a shame the King of Surakarta had not commissioned someone more knowledgeable than Yasadipura to translate this fine *kakawin* classic into Modern Javanese verse. In the same vein, the philologist complains of the ignorance of his own "native informant"--whose services, nevertheless, were doubtlessly indispensable for Cohen Stuart's Dutch translation of the poem. This abused "native informant" was a certain R.Ng. Ronggowarsita of whom we shall speak more below.

After Cohen Stuart, Dutch Colonial philology turned its attention away from Modern Javanese to Old Javanese literature. While non-academic editions of Modern Javanese texts were still published (presumably as reading material for a small class of literate Javanese), they were not considered proper subjects for "serious"--read European--scholarship. Judged hopelessly involuted and derivative by the brokers of intellectual power, these new Javanese texts did not sell on the philological marketplace. With this, the image of nineteenth century Javanese literature as a monument to moribund involution, was fixed.

Recent studies have gone far in countering the Dutch philological "golden-age" image of Javanese literature. For example, on the basis of Javanese texts ranging from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries, Tony Day demonstrates that the very features of nineteenth century Javanese literature which the philologists cite as evidence of its decadence and involution--that is the features of "excessive" embellishment and what Day calls "copiousness"--were already formally constitutive of the Old Javanese literature of the fictive golden-age.<sup>3</sup> Day and others--like Dr. Simuh of Yogyakarta's State Institute of Moslem Religion--have brought to nineteenth century Javanese texts, interpretations diverging from the golden age's logic of decay.<sup>4</sup>

In non-academic modern Java two quite opposite popular images of traditional Javanese literature have developed. Both of these views are reminiscent of the Dutch philological vision and both shut off that literature from the possibility of being read. One view imagines the traditional literature of palace libraries as an embarrassment, the hopelessly conservative self-indulgence of a fatuous elite class. This view sees the literature as a direct reflection, in saccharine verse, of a static and reactionary social order. Called feudal or *feodal*, the literature of eighteenth and nineteenth century Java is dismissed as summarily as it was by the Dutch philologists--thoroughly decadent, period.

The other modern image of traditional Javanese literature--by far the dominant image in contemporary Indonesia--I call "the myth of the *adiluhung*." The word *adiluhung* translates as "the beautiful sublime." It has become in recent years the code word for what many modern Javanese appreciate as the super refined sublime heights and profound depths of Javanese Culture with a capital "C." As *adiluhung*, the traditional literature is imaged as a veritable icon of Javanese High Culture. According to this view, it was in the ultra-rarified world of nineteenth century court-culture that Javanese literature attained the perfection of its literary expression--a perfection which can never again be achieved. The Dutch philological image of a literary golden age thus reappears, but now that golden age is transposed forward in time to the

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3. J. Anthony Day, "Meanings of Change in the Poetry of Nineteenth-Century Java" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1981), esp. pp. 6-77.

4. See Simuh, "Mistik Islam Kejawen Raden Ngabehi Ronggowarsito, Suatu Studi terhadap Wirid Hidayat Jati" (Ph.D. dissertation, IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, 1983).

nineteenth century. The generation of the image is not innocent. It is reactionary politics which establish, and conservative institutions which propagate philology's "golden-age" constructs--both then and now.<sup>5</sup>

The cult of the *adiluhung* idealizes a refined Javanese culture through the lenses of the "traditional" elite--that is the *priyayi* or neo-*priyayi*<sup>6</sup>--who are remarkable for their insistent preoccupation with the deep symbology they want to see underlying Javanese life. This preoccupation tends to linger on the alleged "high" arts, "traditional" rituals, linguistic etiquette, and the like. And it has found substantial support in the work of foreign scholars devoted more to monumentalizing Central Javanese culture than analyzing that culture's history and remarkable diversity. The beginnings of this cult may be found in early twentieth century Indies theosophical circles, where conservative *priyayi* worked together with sympathetic Dutch Javanologists towards a spiritualized codification of elite culture. An early example of this tradition of writing is the theosophical explication of the "true inner meaning" of the *wayang*, published in Dutch by the Javanese prince Mangkunagara VII in 1933.<sup>7</sup> It was this same Dutch-educated prince, incidentally, who matter-of-factly translated into Javanese, Cohen Stuart's introduction to the Modern Javanese *Bratayuda*.<sup>8</sup>

This early twentieth century move towards the construction of tradition has been repeated and intensified under the aegis of Soeharto's self-proclaimed "New Order" government. Following a differently constructed relationship with the past and with "tradition" in the radically populist Revolutionary and Sukarno eras, New Order *adiluhung* rhetoric is eerily reminiscent of the late Colonial voice. Highlighting what is imagined as the super-refined and spiritualized ways of traditional *priyayi* and then contrasting them with those of the so-called coarse and material West, the New Order Javanese elite have invented a vision of their very own *adiluhung* heritage as the somewhat endangered pinnacle of cultural development, the preservation (and reservation) of which they see as a "sacred duty." One is tempted to call this dominant modern image of Javanese culture, based as it is on the *adiluhung* and extremely refined or *halus* vision of life, the "halusination" of Javanese culture.

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5. For a perceptive analysis of these processes at work in the present day (international) Indonesian literary establishment and the resultant dismissal of contemporary Javanese literature, see George Quinn, "The Case of the Invisible Literature: Power, Scholarship, and Contemporary Javanese Writing," *Indonesia* 35 (April 1983): 1-36.

6. The word *priyayi*, originally from *para yayi* ("the younger siblings" [of the king]) came to mean the administrative and/or bureaucratic elite of the realm (kingdom and Colonial state). Much has been written of *priyayi* culture; see especially Heather Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite* (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979). Ben Anderson has suggested a characterization of the neo-*priyayi* as "upwardly mobile Victorians."

7. K.G.P.A.A. Mangkunagara VII of Surakarta, *On the Wayang Kulit (Purwa) and Its Symbolic and Mystical Elements*, trans. C. Holt (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1957). Original text published in *Djâwd* 13 (1933): 79-97.

8. Soeparta [=K.G.P.A.A. Mangkunagara VII], Surakarta, no year, 86 pp. See E. M. Uhlenbeck, *A Critical Survey of Studies on the Languages of Java and Madura* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1964), pp. 139 and 149.

As I noted above, within the myth of the *adiluhung*, the material texts of traditional Javanese literature in manuscript are perhaps the reigning icon of high culture. It is imagined that the language which writes these texts is a kind of super-*krama* or super high-Javanese, Javanese language pushed to the limits of *halus*-ness. Indeed it is assumed that the language is so refined as to be impelled beyond the limits of comprehension. Indeed, a commonplace assertion among modern Javanese is that: "The language of this literature is so sublime that we couldn't possibly understand it." And yet everyone seems eager enough to explain what that same unintelligible writing is about. The literature turns out to promise nothing less than the keys to life's deepest mysteries. And since the literature is assumed to be unintelligible, those mysteries remain under lock. To support their assertions, many Javanese can sing from memory a line or two from one of the more famous nineteenth century traditional poems, the *Wédhatama*. This poem, whose authorship is attributed to Mangkunagara IV (grandfather of the theosophical Mangkunagara VII), is a highly alliterative, often abstruse didactic and speculative poem which does its best to live up to the image of the *adiluhung*. To quote its first stanza:

<p>mingkar mingkur ing angkara  akarana karenan mardi siwi  sinawung resmining kidung  sinuba sinukarta  mrih kretarta pakartining ngèlmu      luhung  kang tumrap nèng tanah Jawi  agama ageming aji<sup>9</sup></p>	<p>Turning away from vain desire  For the delight of teaching the young  Rendered in song beautiful  Embellished wrought elegantly  That perfectly practiced be the      knowledge sublime [<i>Luhung</i>]  Which in the land of Java is  The religion of the rulers</p>
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I should note immediately what is lost in the translation. Apart from the exuberant alliteration and assonance of the original poetry, lost too is its treasured inaccessibility. Try as I may, my translation remains far too understandable to capture the tonality imagined of the *adiluhung*. A few years ago, the Indonesian pop singer Gombloh lifted a few lines from this stanza for a rock song.<sup>10</sup> The kids who heard and repeated those lines had no expectation of ever understanding what they meant, and instead appreciated them as a mantric emblem of "Javaneseness," which is precisely what they are--not just in Gombloh's song, but in everyday popular consciousness as well.

I mentioned above that it is in manuscript form that the texts are most highly esteemed. There are at least two reasons for this phenomenon. First, the manuscripts are usually old and hence wear the patina of age which is among the marks of Javanese objects of power. As material objects, the manuscripts offer the possibility of power by contagion. They are physical sites upon which the extraordinary powers of former writers and readers may have rubbed off. Second, the exalted status of the manuscript is derived from the most common scene of confrontation between present-day Javanese and traditional Javanese script: the

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9. K.G.P.A.A. Mangkunagara IV, *Serat Wédhatama*, in *Serat-serat Anggitan-dalem K.G.P.A.A. Mangkunagara IV*, 4 vols., ed. Th. Pigeaud (Jakarta: Noordhoff-Kolff, 1953), 3:108. For a carefully annotated translation and interesting discussion of the entire poem, see Martin F. Hatch, "Lagu, Laras, Layang: Rethinking Melody in Javanese Music" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1980), esp. pp. 258-355.

10. Gombloh, *Sekar Mayang* (Surabaya: Indra Records Golden Hand Series, 1980?).

public school room. Very few Javanese today are able to read the script, although most studied it briefly in the primary grades. It is precisely this brief study--so quickly stopped, as the curriculum dictates--which endows them with a profound sense of failure (when, many years later they remember what they have forgotten). That they tried and failed attests to what is already implied by the internal logic of the *adiluhung's* ideal of inaccessibility. Knowledge of the script--because this script belongs to *adiluhung* literature and because it alone can really write that literature--apparently can not be attained by study alone.

With this sense of the assumed inaccessibility of traditional writing in mind, I would like to turn now to the nineteenth century Javanese writer who emerges as *the* cult figure about whom the fiction of the *adiluhung* crystallizes. By a curious quirk of history, this figure is none other than Cohen Stuart's maligned "native informant," R. Ng. Ronggawarsita. A truly prolific writer who lived from 1802-1873, Ronggawarsita is accorded popular recognition as the greatest of all Javanese literati. And yet, most of his writings are left unread. Even Ronggawarsita's most avowed admirers have rarely read anything beyond his celebrated *Kalatidha* and a smattering of his short prophetic poems. His longer works are assumed to be too refined for readability, too *adiluhung* to be legible.

Although "recognized" as "the greatest Javanese poet," Ronggawarsita is remembered as the last, or better yet as the seal, of the *pufongga*. Often translated as "court-poet," the word *pufongga* implies something rather different: a master of language with a prophetic pen. The writing of Ronggawarsita is revered not only for its reputed refinement, but even more so for its very material power to effect reality.<sup>11</sup> As a prophetic *pufongga*, Ronggawarsita quite literally *wrote* history, before and after the fact. If then one could really read his writing (which, of course, one cannot since it is situated at an ideal point beyond legibility), then one would really know the world in its past, present, and future. Interior to the logic of the sublime *Adiluhung* and its *pufongga*-ship is the ultimate inaccessibility of both. It is out of the realm of conceivable possibility to learn how to become a *pufongga* or, for that matter, to learn how to read the meanings of the *pufongga's* words. In a 1930s biography of Ronggawarsita, the appointed "Ronggawarsita Committee" reports how the uncanny linguistic mastery of *pufongga*-ship descended in a flash of divine light upon a derelict youth who had been up to that time a veritable juvenile delinquent with a severe "learning disability."<sup>12</sup> Presumably, it would take being hit by a similar flash of light for those who came after him to approach a real reading of Ronggawarsita's writing. Countless failed encounters with Javanese script in schoolrooms routinely bring this point home to young modern Javanese.

And so the text of traditional Javanese writing, when viewed under the aspect of the *adiluhung*, is caught in a multiple bind. In praise of its exalted status are offered a number of reasons not only why *not* to read it--but why reading it is impossible. In the first place, the illegibility of script in which it is inscribed is intractable. It cannot be learned by study. Even should one by kind fate be graced with the gift of scriptural decipherment, then it is the language inscribed by that script that is too exalted to be

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11. That is, to make things happen.

12. Komite Ronggawarsitan, *Babad Cariyos Lelampahanipun Suwargi Radèn Ngabéhi Ronggawarsita*, 3 vols. (Surakarta: Marsch, 1931-1933), 1:98-104.

understood. And were that language to become understandable (through an [en]lightning strike), we know that what it would concern would be something so profound as to be beyond our discursive comprehension. And so in contemporary Java the text of traditional literature remains on the shelf, an unread artifact of high culture, a dusty fetish.

It is in this context of not-reading in contemporary Java that I would like to tell a tale of what happened when, in 1984, one of these books was pulled from the shelf. BJ, a friend and saucy young art student at Solo's university, came up with the idea of putting the melodies of traditional verse to guitar music for performance at a school function. He remembered most of the basic melodies and the words to one or two standard verses he had learned to sing as a child--but needed more lyrics to fill out the performance. Knowing that I was digging around in traditional literature, BJ (who himself never read the stuff for all the good reasons I just mentioned) came to me in search of reading material. What he expected and probably dreaded was something refined like the *Wéddhatama*. What he read, that is sang, was the following:

[131]. . . . .  
luwih énak dadi guru  
ugeré wis bisa klimah

131. . . . .  
Imagine how great a guru to be  
Provided I know one Arabic line

[132] Sun go marah marang murid  
marem sakèh siswaningwang  
nyana ngèlmu kètès-kètès  
satemené saking padha  
bodhoné kang miluta  
marmané mepeng atiku  
ngèlmuku mung sadu'allah

132. I'd use it to teach my pupils  
All satisfied my students would be  
Thinking it knowledge brilliantly new  
In truth this only shows  
How stupid are they who grovel  
That's why I'd go at it with such zeal  
Knowing no more than *asyahdu'allah*<sup>13</sup>

[133] Sun karya ngupaya pokil  
pokalku kang nora pakra  
saéngga ngapusi baé  
bon-abon kabon wus cubak  
nglumpuk salawé pethak  
nganggo mori telung kacu  
séjé rupa ning ruruba

133. I'd use this in a scheme to get rich  
My scheme is so unscrupulous  
That it's really no more than a trick  
In lieu of the goods taking offerings in cash  
I get a full twenty-five in silver  
Wrapped up in white linen napkins three  
It may look different but still it's a bribe

. . . . .

. . . . .

[136] Lamun ingsun dèn-atuiri  
jenengi parluning karya  
pinindha-pindha pupundhèn  
Pindhang-antèp tanpa kendhat  
jibeg juwadah jenang  
cangkemku pijer ngacemut  
ngemil-emil papanganan

136. And whenever I am invited  
To attend a reception  
All reverence is accorded me  
The delicacies are served without cease  
Rice tasties and puddings galore  
My mouth keeps smacking away  
As I munch up all the treats

[137] Lèrèn sawatara sarwi  
umik-umik samudana  
dinaliya yèn matak mèl  
ambak-ambak nora bisa  
bangsaning japa montra

137. Then taking a little break  
I mutter and mumble so sweetly that  
An incantation it's taken for  
Though in truth I haven't a clue  
About incantations and such

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13. The opening words of the Moslem declaration of faith.

mulané kang dadi éwuh  
yèn klebon murid widagda

So one thing kind of worries me  
Should ever I get a student who's smart

[138] Dadi aku rada wedi  
lamun wadiku kawudan  
wedana-ku baya blejèh  
begja lamun pinisuhan  
upama dèn-pokpinga  
nganti komet ijèh ontung  
déné nora ngemprak-emprak<sup>14</sup>

138. Then I'd be in fearful dread  
That my secret be exposed  
My face be stripped stark bare  
I'd be luckiest if just curses fell  
Why! Should I be struck 'longside my head  
'Til reeling--I'd still count it great good luck  
That they hadn't brained me afterall.

The reading almost broke down, not from the text's illegibility, but from BJ's howls of laughter. Where on earth had these outrageously funny, wholly irreverent, and obviously understandable lines come from? None other than the *Serat Jayèngbaya*, an early poem by that last of the *pujangga*, Ronggawarsita himself. This is not what BJ had been taught to expect from the pen of Mr. Adiluhung. Understandable without being simple, it was parodic and biting with a slapstick sense of humor.

Let me take a moment here to say something of what the *Serat Jayèngbaya* is "about." Most likely to be catalogued under the heading of "didactic literature," the poem is (among other things) a portrait of *pamrih* in nineteenth century Java. *Pamrih* means desire, or rather the sinister side of desire--the self-interested ulterior motive. The imaginary ego of the text, a certain Jayèngbaya, trying to decide just what to "be" in this life, moves through a series of fantasized--what we might call--"career" choices. In every imagined case, he falls from the enjoyment of pleasure's pinnacle to catastrophic ruin--often to disfigurement and death. To give a couple of examples of how the poem works through these cases: much in the idiom of a used-car dealer, Jayèngbaya imagines what it would be like to be a horse trader. Really enjoying the "good life" after making a killing off of an unsuspecting high-class customer, Jayèngbaya is wiped out in a traffic accident while taking one of his horses--a real lemon as it turns out--on a trial run. Again, towards the end of the poem, the position of God Almighty looks good to him. Not only does God get everything He wants, but He has angels for domestics. However on second thought--since God's Being is outside time and space, isn't His just like the plight of the homeless? Better then to be struck down by lightning, considers Jayèngbaya. There is a rhythm to Jayèngbaya's fantasized career moves that invites further reading. To cite just a few of the sequences: from horse trader to performing artist to gambler to drug dealer, from lawyer to thief to judge to Dutchman's houseboy, from beggar to soldier to executioner to courtier, and finally from dog to God Almighty to one struck dead by lightning. An exciting opening into nineteenth century Java both sociologically and literarily, this text throws the received images both of Javanese literature and of palace literati into new perspective.

And it was with this new perspective that BJ and his friends went on to read other surprising poems of the traditional literature. Excited by what they read, they wanted to read it (that is sing it) even better. Still within the melodic curves of traditional verse, they created a range of sometimes bluesy,

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14. R.Ng. Ronggawarsita [=Kiyahi Sarataka], *Serat Jayèngbaya* (composed Surakarta, ca. 1830) in [*Klengkapan*] (inscribed Surakarta, 1920). MS. Sasono Pustoko, Karaton Surakarta [henceforth SP] Cat. No. 135 Na; Cornell University Surakarta Manuscript Project [henceforth SMP] Cat. No. KS 415.5, pt. 5, pp. 30-32.



sometimes sweet, guitar melodies for various poetic tonalities and maximum poetic effect--and perhaps too, for cultural revenge.

News spread, and one evening the unsuspecting host of Surabaya's TV talk show titled "Javanese Literature Appreciation" came to hear BJ sing these lines--again from the *Serat Jayèngbaya*:

[178] Lah jaba dadi prajurit  
saben dina mangun suka  
saéngga wus tanpa sedhèh  
lawas-lawas munggah litnan  
kajèn rada karegan  
delèdèran nèng delanggun  
anggepku lir mayor jéndral

178. But if I were a soldier to be  
Every day would be such fun  
As though grief were a thing long gone  
In time to rank of lieutenant I'd rise  
To a station of some esteem  
Then I'd swagger and strut down the road  
With the air of a four-star general

[179] Sapa ana kaya mami  
mendhak pleg singa kapapag  
dinalih bendara gedhé  
senengku ora karuwan  
sasat Bambang Irawan  
kacèk rupaku tan bagus  
sartané tan betah tapa

179. Who is there the likes of me?  
All I meet fall "plunk" to their knees  
As I am taken for high royalty  
Ah! My pleasure knows no bounds  
I'm just like a dashing young wayang hero  
Only I'm not good looking  
And there's no stoic in me

[180] Amung kekesku kepati  
kalamun ana pawarta  
bakal ana perang gedhé  
iya yèn olèh upaya  
ngaturken cathok pedhang  
ga kaslepeg kinèn nglurung  
prasasat kapeksa modar<sup>15</sup>

180. But I'd be trembling in my boots  
If ever there came the news  
That real battle were about to break  
Fine--if I could find a way  
Just to turn in my buckle and sword  
But if sent to the front all 'a sudden  
That would surely be the end of me.

Quite taken by what he heard, the TV host graciously invited BJ to perform on his literature appreciation show, but only on the condition that something else be sung, something a bit more "traditional." Not that he didn't enjoy this "new" poetry, he explained, but it would never pass the state censorship board. The material was simply too hot to handle. With a naughty gleam in his eye, BJ protested that this was real *adiluhung* stuff straight from the pen of the young Ronggawarsita. The talk-show host sat silent, stunned. Youth singing Tradition was fine--but that image of Tradition was shattered if old Ronggawarsita (Tradition incarnate) was a youthful radical. The invitation was not repeated and the TV performance never materialized.

That Ronggawarsita would have entertained such a cynical view of the society around him is not really so surprising after all if one considers his personal history and the grievous conditions obtaining among Surakarta courtiers in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. *Serat Jayèngbaya* was probably written about 1830 towards the end of the Dipanagara War<sup>16</sup>--that is, just at the boundary

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15. Ibid., p. 40.

16. A *sandi-asma* (a literary convention whereby the author and/or copyist inscribes a "hidden" signature into the poetry) in *Jayèngbaya*'s opening stanza reads "Kiyahi Sarataka."

*Kidung kadresaning kapti/yayah nglamong tanpa mongsa/hingan silarja  
jatiné/satata samaptaptinya/raket rakit ing ruksa/tahan tumanem ing  
siku/karasuk sakèh kasrakat* (Ibid., p. 1, emphasis added).

which marks the disappearance of the remnants of any real political power in the Javanese courts. After the war the courts of Central Java were impoverished, and the courtiers lived under straitened circumstances. Ronggowarsita's own poverty is legendary. The last of *pujongga* must also have borne scars from that war. In 1830 he lost his king to exile and saw the kingdom which he served reduced to near total submission. Closer to home--in 1828, the poet's father, the elder Ronggowarsita (reputedly a brilliant literary figure, whose works have been entirely suppressed) was arrested for his anti-Dutch intrigues and exiled to Batavia where he died.<sup>17</sup> The arrest was carried out personally by the Dutch Resident of Surakarta in league with the Resident's Indo-European translator--whose native informant the elder Ronggowarsita had been.<sup>18</sup> This of course calls to mind the son's position later as native informant to Cohen Stuart. The father's arrest and exile may be written into the *Jayèngbaya* in the section on the teacher of invulnerability.

[143] Mung nuju dina sawiji  
lagi kumpul tetebengan  
rerasan kang anèh-anèh  
mak grubug tanpa larapan  
katekan padhang bulan  
samuridku tinalikung  
kinungkung kukum kunjara

143. But then some fateful day  
When gathered together in secrecy  
Discussing strange matters of mystery  
Without warning a thunder of feet  
And the blaze of the Resident's parasol<sup>19</sup>  
All my pupils are put into chains  
Arrested [I'm] thrown into jail

[144] Binuwang liya nagari  
tetepé tinarka ngraman

144. Exiled to some foreign land  
I'm tried and convicted a rebel

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According to the Ronggowarsita Committee's biography, the poet--born Bagus Burham in 1802, to become Mas Rongga Pajanganom in 1819 upon his initial appointment as "Carik Kadipatèn Anom" at the Karaton Surakarta--was granted the name Mas Ngabéhi Sarataka by H.R.H. Pakubuwana V in Jimawal 1749 (1821-1822) at the time of his promotion to the position of "Mantri Carik Kadipatèn Anom." In Jimawal 1757 (1829-1830) his name was changed to Radèn Ngabéhi Ronggowarsita when he was promoted (by Pakubuwana VII?) to the rank of "Panéwu Carik Kadipatèn Anom." *Komite Ronggowarsitan, Babad Cariyos Lelampahanipun Suwargi Radèn Ngabéhi Ronggowarsita*, 2: 7, 84-85 and 102-103. Since there are allusions in *Jayèngbaya* to events occurring in 1828 (see below verses 143-44), the poem must have been written sometime in the years 1828-1830.

17. There is a controversy over the circumstances of the elder Ronggowarsita's death. While some claim that he was murdered by his Dutch jailers, others hold that he died in exile of natural causes some years after his capture. See Anjar Any, *Radèn Ngabéhi Ronggowarsito: Apa yang Terjadi?* (Semarang: Aneka, 1980), p. 42.

18. For Resident Nahuys proud account of the arrest, see Nahuys to the Kommissaris Generaal, Sourakarta den 19 April 1828, missive no. 41 geheim L<sup>a</sup>M, Ministerie van Kolonien (MvK) no. 4133 in the Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague.

19. That is, "The Full Moon," name of the pattern of ceremonial parasol (*song-song*) borne by the Surakarta Resident, by regulations in force as of Dal 1735 (1808). See *Babad Sangkala: kawit Pulo Jawi dipunisèni tiyang nalika taun onka 1 dumugi taun 1854* (composed Surakarta, n.d.) (inscribed Surakarta, 1924). MS. SP 220 Ca-A; SMP KS 1A, p. 71. Intricate law codes ("hormat" rulings) carefully governed the hierarchical distribution of the various patterns of the *song-song* as well as of many other ceremonial markers of respect and rank.

wis moh dadi guru dhughèng  
yèn nora rapet ing tingkah  
tekan liyan nagara  
angur trima dadi dukun<sup>20</sup>

.....

No teacher of invulnerability for me  
Unless secret about my every move  
The end is in some foreign land  
Better to be just a medicine-man

.....

Thus wrote the palace *pujongga*, son of an exiled rebel, and paid native informant to the local Dutch philologist.

Even a cursory reading of Ronggawarsita's *Serat Jayèngbaya* counters both modern images of traditional Javanese literature. Literature imaged as merely *féodal*, as over-refined ooings from the reactionary courts of a decadent ruling class, has no room for a text so cynical, so biting in its satire. And the understandable, humorous language of the poem points to a literature quite different from that imagined as icon of the *adiluhung*. One of the features of this text which invites a vision of nineteenth century Java not quite in accord with the received wisdom, is the striking juxtaposition of images that do not seem to belong together--a literary device employed in this poem with parodic and comic effect. At one point in the poem, the pleasure at being touched by the flick of a prostitute's scarf is likened to the feelings enjoyed when promoted at court.<sup>21</sup> Yet another jarring image is of the moment of glory fantasized for the *kaum*, a professional chanter of Islamic prayers: what luck when hired to pray at a *priyayi*'s funeral, he gets the chance to stuff some cups and saucers under his shirt.<sup>22</sup>

Ronggawarsita's *Jayèngbaya* is not the only alternate textual opening into nineteenth century Javanese literary and sociological worlds. Rather it is part of a larger body of literature that has been for the most part ignored. Another text which comes immediately to mind is the early nineteenth century *Serat Mas Ngantèn*.<sup>23</sup> Composed by a high noble of the Surakarta court, this poem is a comical satire on court etiquette in the hands of the nouveaux riches. Again, the cheeky humor of the later nineteenth century *Suluk Gatholoco*<sup>24</sup> is a product of (among other things) naughty plays on the formal conventions of *adiluhung* poetry and thought. Actually *Suluk Gatholoco* is but one of many spirited *suluk*, the so-called "Islamic mystical songs." Indeed the *suluk* texts comprise a huge chunk of nineteenth century literature characteristically overlooked by the devotees of the *adiluhung*. It is of note here that, aside

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20. Ronggawarsita, *Serat Jayèngbaya*, p. 33.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

23. R.M.H. Jayadiningrat I, *Serat Mas Ngantèn* (composed Surakarta, 1818) in *Serat Wulang* (inscribed Surakarta, 1899). MS. Museum Radyapustaka Cat.No. 104; SMP Rp 106B), pt. I, pp. 1-48. A poorly documented, but useful, transliteration and Indonesian translation of probably this same manuscript was recently published by the Indonesian Department of Education and Culture in Raden Mas Riya Jayadiningrat I, *Serat Wulang* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Proyek Penerbitan Buku Sastra Indonesia dan Daerah, 1981), pp. 131-201.

24. *Suluk Gatholoco* (composed East Java, ca. 1860-80) (inscribed Kalinyamat, 1880). MS. Rekso Pustoko, Istana Mangkunagaran [henceforth RP] Cat.No. A 34; SMP MN 357. See also Ben Anderson's delightful translation of the poem into English verse, "The *Suluk Gatholoco*, Parts One & Two," *Indonesia* 32-33 (October 1981 & April 1982): 109-50 & 31-88.

from historical texts, the *suluk* comprise the single largest grouping of texts in the palace library of the Karaton Surakarta. As it turns out, that supposed bastion of conservatism and original Javanism has but a small smattering of the belletristic Indic classics and their translations.<sup>25</sup> Of the historical texts, the sometimes hilarious descriptions of hollow royal dalliance in the often monotonous court chronicles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are written with a kind of deadpan tonality, which invites critical readings of what was by that time starting to become Tradition with a very capital T.<sup>26</sup> And a whole range of historical poems written in the nineteenth century about much earlier times in Java--close readings of which could tell us much about Javanese imaginings not only of pasts, but of futures as well--remain on the shelf.

It is to one of the more marginal of these historical poems, the *Babad Jaka Tingkir*,<sup>27</sup> that I would like now to turn. Composed at about the same time as *Serat Jayèngbaya*, this *babad* (chronicle or history) highlights a series of characters on the margins of known Javanese history. We do not know who wrote the poem which offers glimpses of Java's past around the turn of the sixteenth century--the period of Java's "conversion" to Islam. The poem is not a typical *babad*; it is no linear dynastic narrative of the doings of kings. Rather, the unknown poet lets his/her gaze light upon the peculiar careers of six heroes of the margin--the episodic telling of whose tales effectively interrupts and contests the dominant dynastic historical tradition. This highlighting of the marginal is resonant with Ronggawarsita's parodic *Jayèngbaya*. By moving back and forth from the worlds of entertainers, prostitutes, thieves, madmen, and beggars to those of courtiers, bureaucrats, businessmen, and educators, *Jayèngbaya* effectively blurs the distinctions between the worlds of margin and center in a biting social critique of contemporary Surakarta. By a different, perhaps more guarded form of social critique, the *Babad Jaka Tingkir*'s window on an

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25. There is a descriptive listing of the Karaton Surakarta manuscripts in Nancy K. Florida, "Javanese Language Manuscripts of Surakarta, Central Java: A Descriptive Catalogue" (draft), 9 vols., John M. Echols Collection, Olin Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

26. See especially, *Babad Langenharja*, 30 vols. (composed Surakarta, 1871-1877) (inscribed Surakarta, 1871-1877). MSs. SP 187 Ra, 390 Ha...; SMP KS 87-99; *Babad Langenharja*, 3 vols. (composed Surakarta, 1872-1873) (inscribed Surakarta, late 19th century). MSs. SP 180 Na & 219 Ca; SMP KS 100-101; *Babad Pémut ing Nagari Surakarta*, 14 vols. (composed Surakarta, 1888-1894) (inscribed Surakarta, 1888-1894). MSs. SP 5 Ca, 30 Ca ...; SMP KS 111-122; R.T. Arungbinang, *Serat Sri Pustaka Madyapada*, 29 vols. (composed Surakarta, 1914-1918) (inscribed Surakarta, 1914-1918). MSs. SP 249 Ca, 250 Ca ...; SMP KS 148-158; R.Ng. Citrasantana, *Babad-dalem K.G.P.A.A. Prabu Prangwadana VII ingkang Lafeng fumeneng K.G.P.A.A. Mangkunagara VII* (composed Surakarta, ca. 1921-1924) (inscribed Surakarta, ca. 1924 & 1982). MSs. RP B 14 & B 14 tik; SMP MN 230 & 230 TT.

27. *Babad Jaka Tingkir* (composed Surakarta, 1829) in [*Klompokan: Sejarah Jawa Tengah*] (inscribed [Surakarta], ca. 1850), MS. SP 214 Ca; SMP KS 78.2, pp. 79b-152a. A faulty transliteration and sometimes misleading Indonesian paraphrase of this manuscript was recently published; unfortunately, the editor of this publication provides no documentation for the text nor any credit to the Karaton Surakarta library from which he obtained his photocopy of the original manuscript. See *Babad Jaka Tingkir: Babad Pajang*, ed. Moelyono Sastronaryatmo (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Proyek Penerbitan Buku Sastra Indonesia dan Daerah, 1981).

alternative historical tradition develops themes of marginality, opposition, and exile in the imagined past into a stage upon which an alternative future just might be played out.

A brief paraphrase<sup>28</sup> of the *babad* demonstrates some of the textual strategies by which this stage--a kind of context for change--is constructed. By means of a series of literary devices in its opening stanzas, the poem proclaims itself at the outset as one of those texts, the writing and reading of which has the power to effect reality. In other words, the poem announces itself as not just ordinary writing, but writing under the aspect of the *pujangga*-ship. The story proper opens with a sketch of the "fall" of the Old Javanese kingdom of Majapahit, the "death" (or more precisely, the vanishing) of its last king, and a prophetic note on the advent of a new era. The poem then folds back to a time when that king was still in power and veritably catalogues his children. The text's lingering on the adventures of two of those children comprises what I distinguish as the first two episodes.

The first of these tells the tale of the painter--and by implication writer--Jaka Prabangkara (the king's unacknowledged son by a butcher-maid). The unfortunate youth is accused of illicit relations with his father's queen. Incriminated by a tell-tale inkdrop on his commissioned drawing of the queen--an inkdrop which perfectly matches an intimately positioned mole--he is exiled to China. He *wrote* too much. Episode two tells of Jaka Karéwèd (another unacknowledged son by yet another butcher-maid) who finds a magic charm of invisibility. With this charm, the destitute boy steals into the homes of the nobility and the palace of the king. Out of sight, he helps himself to food and liquor at the aristocratic table. Finally caught by cunning at a royal drinking fest, the boy is accepted into court, but vanishes from the scene of recorded history. He *saw* too much.

The third episode describes a peculiar problem encountered during the construction of the sacred mosque of Demak. Here it is the mosque which rebels by stubbornly refusing to align itself properly to Mecca's mosque. The solution is a radical one effected by the famous Islamic saint Sunan Kalijaga who miraculously stretches his arms and takes hold of the two mosques, manipulating them into agreement. This "agreement" involves a relative alignment between the two in which neither is the sole authority. In the fourth episode, there is an attempt by the saintly synod to suppress--in the name of Islamic law--the relational mysticism of the most famous of the "heretic" saints, Sèh Sitijenar. Although put to sword by the synod, Sitijenar's corpse lives again to instruct his executioners in matters of esoteric mysticism before he finally vanishes, body and soul, into Perfection.

The final two of the poem's six episodes are "about" knowledge and power. The fifth episode treats the career of the impassioned mystic, Sèh Malang Sumirang. The synod's attempt to execute *this* impudent mystic by fire is a total flop. Malang Sumirang vanishes into exile, leaving behind him the *suluk* he composed on the pyre--a *suluk* which explicitly treats problems of knowledge. The sixth and concluding episode relates the life and death of Ki Ageng Pengging,

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28. The enterprise of paraphrase is certainly never an objective or "innocent" one. Ostensibly an exercise in reduction of text, the paraphrase is always also an interested supplement to the "original." Doubtless, another's paraphrase of the same poem would and should look different from mine. For example, another reader with different or conflicting interests might well disagree with my separation of the text into the six "episodes" characterized below.

a student of Sèh Sitijenar *and* descendant of Majapahit's final king. Actually, the history of this marginal figure does not really stand as a separate episode, but rather comprises the textual thread which sews the seams that both bind and separate all the episodes in the poem. Having set himself up as a notably populist Islamic master (a *kiyahí*) in rural Central Java, Ki Ageng Pengging refuses to submit to the authority of the Sultan of Demak. After a number of intrigues and debates pertaining both to matters of Islamic mysticism and to relations between the state and the religious community, Ki Ageng Pengging is murdered by a member of the synod. Pengging's son, founder of the first Islamic kingdom of inland Central Java is the Jaka Tingkir for whom the poem is named-- *and* of whom the poem says virtually nothing. It says nothing because it cannot say anything without crossing its own purposes. This historical poem is not "about" the dead past, but about futures. To write down the all-too-well-known history of Jaka Tingkir and his kingdom of Pajang would be to inscribe a different kind of future than I think this poem imagines, that is prophesies. It would foreclose the possibility of effecting the birth of a new "Jaka Tingkir"-- a different kind of founding with a different style of power.

Linked to *Babad Jaka Tingkir's* prophetic nature may be the problem of the poem's dating; for indeed, that the poem's date of composition remains philologically undecidable reinforces the inter-penetration of history and prophecy in its writing. Internally the poem dates its own writing to 1829. It does so with uncharacteristic hyperbole and, as it turns out, with a confusion that makes the dating philologically suspect.<sup>29</sup> The sole extant manuscript copy of the poem comprises the second part of a volume whose first part is a compilation of letters and treaties which appear to be copied from documents in the archives of the Karaton Surakarta. Many of these documents (which date from 1812-1848) concern the reign and exile of Pakubuwana VI (the Surakarta king mentioned above who vanished into exile in 1830 at the close of the Dipanagara War). Since these copied documents date up to 1848, the sole copy of the poem which follows them could not have been inscribed earlier than that.<sup>30</sup>

Considering this *Babad Jaka Tingkir's* thematics of marginality, opposition, and exile it makes sense to imagine that it might have been composed around

29. That is, 11:00 A.M. Sunday, 22 Sapar Jimawal 1757 AJ, Windu Sancaya; 16 Mangsa Katiga; 1237 AH; 23 August 1829 AD; *Babad Jaka Tingkir*, canto 1, verses 2-3. However, in actual fact the Javanese year Jimawal 1757 fell in the 8-year *windu* cycle of Sangara, not Sancaya; and in Hijrah 1245 rather than 1237.

30. *Kupiya Iber Warni-warni, Sampéyandalem kaping IV dumugi kaping VII* (composed Surakarta & Ambon, 1812-1848) in [*Klompokan: Sejarah Jawa Tengah*] (inscribed [Surakarta], ca. 1850). MS. SP 214 Ca; SMP KS 78.1, pp. 1a-79a. Remarkably, a close examination of these archival documents shows that the texts of an overwhelming majority of them are identical to the texts of a number of the Javanese script documents published in the Netherlands in 1845 by T. Roorda in his *Javaansche brieven, berigten, verslagen, verzoekschriften, proclamaties, publicaties, contracten, schuldbekentenissen, quitanties, processtukken, pachtbrieven en andere soortgelijke stukken; naar handschriften uitgegeven* (Amsterdam, 1845). This Dutch publication was meant as a textbook for the Javanese language education of Dutch civil servants bound for the Indies. By comparing the two collections, I have determined that, of the identical texts, those in the Karaton manuscript *Kupiya Iber Warni-warni* were copied from the 1845 Dutch publication. In addition to these items, the manuscript collection also includes some copies of the personal correspondence of Pakubuwana VI and his daughter from their exile in Ambon with members of their family who were left behind in Surakarta.

1848 in response to Pakubuwana VI's exile and then predated to 1829 to prophesy-- after the fact--that king's vanishing. Or perhaps the poem's 1829 date is authentic, and some twenty years later a compiler--precisely because s/he recognized the poem as a real prophecy of Pakubuwana VI's hapless career and exile--copied it into this volume of documentary materials pertaining to that king and his court. In either case, the poem stands as a prophecy: for internal to this text--however it may or may not be related to the unhappy lot of Pakubuwana VI--are strategies for rereading the Javanese past which offer openings towards the constructions of Javanese futures.

\* \* \*

*Babad Jaka Tingkir* is the prophetic rereading of a past. *Serat Jayèngbaya* is the parodic reading of a present. Both poems work these readings by a thematics of marginality. In the *Serat Jayèngbaya*, as we have seen, the worlds of margin and center are turned topsy-turvy by Jayèngbaya's mischievous and irreverent ramblings in the interstices where social worlds and classes intersect. Hilarious, while at the same time radically destabilizing of a particular order of things, are Jayèngbaya's fantastic flipflops from the ridiculous to the sublime and back again. I mentioned above a remarkably disorienting series of career moves--from dog to God Almighty to disaster victim--which occurs towards the poem's end.

[241] Angur nékat dadi anjing  
dhasar alus weton sabrang  
lurahku banget as'hé  
paturonku anèng resban  
pakanku sega jançan  
iwak sapi nganggo balung  
tansah ginawa pasiyar

241. Better to dare a dog to be  
For sure a fine foreign pedigree  
Great my master's love for me  
The couch would be my bed  
Rice and vegetables my food  
[With] cuts of beef bones and all  
Always taken for rounds of play

[242] Saya senengku kapati  
turut lurung numpang ngebak  
saulihku ganjing gancèt  
wis nora nganggo kasanga  
singa raré uninga  
sing besur ingsun kapiku  
dakarku pedhot klèngkèngan

242. And beside myself with bliss I'd be  
Riding high on the carriage seat  
Once home for me an easy screw there'd be  
In heat or no, the same to me  
All the kids would see  
[But if there were] a naughty one, he'd  
hoist me on a pole  
My penis broken off, I'd yelp in pain

.....

.....

[246] Kok mung kuwi yèn pinethik  
tujuné durung kalakyan  
sidaa getunku akèh  
jaba dadi Gusti Allah  
duwé batur malékat  
bawahken jagat sawegung  
sakarepé tan kacuwan

246. Could this be all there is to choose?  
By luck it hasn't come to pass  
For many my regrets may be  
Unless God I do become  
With angels then as servants  
O'er all the world to dominate  
My every desire would be fulfilled

[247] Nanging wediku kapati  
ujaring Hyang Mahamulya  
tanpa jaman lan makamé  
dadiné apa klayaban  
bok iya moh kéwala

247. But still I'm in a fearful dread  
It's said that the Lord Almighty  
Is outside time and space  
Is His then but a vagrancy?  
And so I'd really rather not

jumeneng Hang Mahaluhur  
angur disambera gelap<sup>31</sup>

Reign as God All-high  
Better to be by lightning struck

Always a vagrant of the imagination, Jayèngbaya (however high the fantasized position) seems incapable of conjuring an image of himself as anything other than marginal. Seemingly a perpetual loser, this character's name translates as "He-who-conquers-danger." And finally at poem's end (in the wake of the naked exposure of the falseness of his Surakartan society) Jayèngbaya does conquer danger by rejecting all options, including the death option--thereby saving his neck. The momentary pleasure enjoyed at the imagination of a quick and painless exit from the scene (by the good services of a bolt of lightning) is quickly displaced by revulsion at the image of maggots swarming over his unburied corpse. And Jayèngbaya, having rejected his present in poetic joke, chooses to go for life but to be nothing but tatters blowing in the wind.<sup>32</sup>

The issue of choice is also a central issue in the *Babad Jaka Tingkir*. Towards the end of the *babad*, the Sultan of Demak sends his emissary, a member of the synod of saints, to demand that Ki Ageng Pengging choose. The choice demanded of the *kiyahi* is between the outside and the inside (that is political power or spiritual power), the above and below (ruling or being ruled), being or non-being and so on. Here is Pengging's answer:

XXIX.

[15] Yèn miliya jero mapan sisip  
yèn miliya ing jaba pan sasar  
semang-semang pangidhepé  
yèn miliya ing luhur  
pan kemandhang dipun-ulati  
lamun miliya ngarsa  
yekti sasar susur  
sasaré pitung medahab  
ngisor dhuwur kiwa tengen duwèk mami  
orané duwèk ingwang<sup>33</sup>

XXIX.

15. Were [one] to choose the inside he errs  
To choose the outside he's lost  
Wavering then in faith  
Were he to choose the above  
'Twould be upon an echo gazed  
Were he to choose the front  
Truly he'd be most damnably lost  
Lost by seven schools of thought  
Below, above, left and right are mine  
Nothing is mine

This refusal of Ki Ageng Pengging to choose marks him as an enemy of the state, and thereby signs his death warrant. And in the poem his interlocuter directly does execute the sentence. Whereas *Serat Jayèngbaya*'s hero chooses to refuse all options--and hence lives, Ki Ageng Pengging refuses to choose and dies. Going a step further in a refusal of refusal, *Babad Jaka Tingkir* looks forward to a future in which the kind of choices demanded of Ki Ageng Pengging will be no longer relevant.

Actually reading the texts of "tradition" (like *Babad Jaka Tingkir* and *Serat Jayèngbaya*) is one way to refuse compliance with the authority of the codified meanings of the past. Such reading has the potential to transform these texts into contexts for change--for effecting reality. To read the texts would mean to interpret them, that is actively to work through possibilities with them, possibilities which question the *adiluhung*'s politics of suppression. To interpret the texts might mean to "write" (a little like a *pufongga*) a different kind of future for "Javanese history."

31. Ronggawarsita, *Serat Jayèngbaya*, pp. 53-54.

32. That is, "krembyah-krembyah ngur uripa" (ibid., p. 55).

33. *Babad Jaka Tingkir*, p. 148b.