
The perils of hybridity in 19th-century Java: Ronggawarsita's reputation, animated debates in *Bramartani*, and the probable origins of Javanese acrostics; with a postscript on Purwalələana

*Les périls de l'hybridité au XIX^e siècle à Java : la réputation de Ronggawarsita,
les débats animés de Bramartani et l'authenticité des origines des acrostiches
javanaï ; avec un post-scriptum sur Purwalələana*

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The perils of hybridity in 19th-century Java: Ronggowarsita's reputation, animated debates in *Bramartani*, and the probable origins of Javanese acrostics; with a postscript on Purwalĕlana²

In mid-1866 a sequence of events led to an extraordinary exchange of correspondence in the Javanese weekly newspaper *Bramartani*. The death of his son left the paper's editor, the Indo-European F.W. Winter, in such despair that he evidently lost interest in, and gave up personal control of his paper. A friend contributed material to fill its pages, from which flowed a heated controversy that occupied much of the space in the publication for many weeks. Only in early February 1867 did Winter reassert control and bring the controversy to an end. In the meantime, it had revealed not only divisions about what, in the new colonial age in Java, constituted good literature, but also about what, in the pages of the new medium of a newspaper, constituted proper manners. The Surakarta poet Ronggowarsita (1802-73), now commonly regarded as the last of the great Javanese poets (*pujongga*), was not so regarded in 1866-7 and became a target of withering criticisms in *Bramartani*. Reading this correspondence probably also suggests, *en passant*, how the Javanese use of acrostics may have found its origins in a popular Dutch song.

In 19th-century Java, the elite, literate *priyayis* – a tiny proportion of the whole Javanese population – faced a rapidly changing cultural environment³.

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2. An earlier version of this paper was presented at an international symposium "On Hybrid Times" in Jakarta, 9-10 June 2012, sponsored by the Goethe Institute.

3. The general context of this period is discussed in my book *Polarising Javanese society: Islamic and other visions, c. 1830-1930* (Singapore: Singapore University Press; Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press; Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007).

From the religious realm came reforming Islamic movements. These caused major changes in Javanese society but seem to have had little attraction for the *priyayis*. Indeed, by deepening the Islamisation of a part of Javanese society, these reform movements may have enhanced the social and cultural gulf between the *priyayis* and other social sectors. Of greater direct impact upon the *priyayis* were the new cultural experiences and horizons that accompanied Dutch colonial rule. We should remember that very many *priyayis* were employees of the colonial regime and that all had to accommodate themselves to the reality of its presence – unlike some religious leaders who sought to isolate themselves from or indeed resist that regime, often at the cost of their own freedom or lives.

Crucial insights into the changing cultural environment at the level of the literate elite may be had from the Javanese newspaper *Bramartani*. This began to be published in Surakarta in 1855, the first indigenous-language newspaper in what was one day to become the Republic of Indonesia. Its editorship remained for many years in the hands of the Winter family, who were of mixed European and Javanese descent and had worked as translators and cultural mediators in Surakarta since the late 18th century. Not until 1873 was there a Javanese editor of the paper, when F.L. Winter handed over to a local school teacher named Surana.⁴ The newspaper failed in 1856 but was revived in 1864, for several years thereafter using the title *Jurumartani*,⁵ but we will stick with *Bramartani* in this discussion to avoid confusion. The paper was published weekly, and sometimes biweekly, until 1932, one of the longest success stories in the history of early Indonesian journalism.

Other changes were also taking place in the world of literature. The very use of printing was a significant innovation. The Dutch missionary Carel Poensen, who lived for some 30 years in Kediri, noted in 1869 that those Javanese who could read classical Javanese verse (*macapat*) preferred to read it in hand-written manuscripts rather than in printed versions,⁶ but elsewhere the new world of print was embraced more enthusiastically, as we shall

4. *Bramartani* (hereafter *BM*) 1 May 1873, 3 July 1873. Surana was a teacher at the teacher-training school in Surakarta and was sent to the Netherlands for further education in 1874; *BM* 12 Mar. 1874.

5. Ahmat B. Adam, *The vernacular press and the emergence of modern Indonesian consciousness (1855-1913)* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Southeast Asian Program, 1995), pp. 16-19. Adam is wrong to treat *Bramartani* and *Jurumartani* as if they were different publications when he says (p. 19) that “the paper did not reappear until 1871.” Except for the change of masthead – which actually took place in 1870, not 1871 – they were the same newspaper, as will be seen in the discussion about its title below.

6. C. Poensen, “Bijdragen tot de kennis van den godsdienstigen en zedelijken toestand der Javanen: Eene beschouwing van den inhoud der Javaansche litteratuur,” *Archief Raad voor de Zending* (held in the Utrecht city archives, het Utrechts Archief) no. 261; also in *Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsche Zendinggenootschap* (with slightly different title), vol. 13 (1869), pp. 153-236 (esp. p. 154), 313-56; vol. 14 (1870), pp. 259-90.

see in the account of the correspondence in *Bramartani* below. *Bramartani* frequently serialised works in *macapat* verse – often from publications that were available for purchase at the printer’s shop – but most of the newspaper was in prose. Writing in prose may have been a challenging new literary task for some *priyayis*.

It was not only the printed newspaper and its prose format that represented change: equally revolutionary were new forms of *belles-lettres* and the ideas encapsulated in them. Behrend has written about the Yogyakarta Pangeran (prince) Suryanagara (b. 1822, d. c. 1886), whose writings, done mainly in the period 1845-76, reflect “the accommodation of Dutch science, or perhaps better, the incorporation of certain European ways of thinking, within the larger world of Javanese thought.”⁷ Suryanagara’s works included “studies of language and literature and the associated arts of manuscript decoration, encyclopedic compendia of facts, *belles-lettres*, history and didactic/moralistic *piwulang*” and often included the innovation of glossaries of obscure vocabulary items, “in a sense desacralising the language of priest-poets and their fellow purveyors of secret meanings, the puppet masters.”⁸

Among the most famous of the purveyors of new forms of Javanese literature in which a certain European influence could be seen was Raden Ngabei Ronggawarsita (1802-73) of Surakarta, now remembered as the last of the great classical poets (*pujangga*). His works indeed include some that are regarded as classics of Javanese verse, above all his *Sĕrat Kalatidha*, to which we will return below. He collaborated with prince Mangkunagara IV (r. 1853-81), himself a major *littérateur*.⁹ But Ronggawarsita also wrote and published works in prose, and that challenged older Javanese perceptions of what good literature was. His most ambitious, innovative and contentious work was a pair of made-up historical chronicles which he entitled *Paramayoga* (The exalted age[?]) and *Pustakaraja Purwa* (Book of the kings of ancient times). These take the difference, which by then was recognised, between the Javanese lunar calendar and the Western solar calendar – with years that differed by 10-12 days from each other in length, and thus centuries that differed by three years – to concoct a fake double chronology beginning with a hypothetical year 1. Thus,

7. T.E. Behrend, “The writings of K.P.H. Suryanagara: Shifting paradigms in nineteenth-century Javanese thought and letters,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van de Koninklijk Instituut*, vol. 155/3, 1999, p. 404.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 390, 393, 406, 410.

9. See the four-volume collection of his works in Mangkunagara IV, *Sĕrat-Sĕrat anggitan-dalĕm Kangjĕng Gusti Pangeran Adipati Ariya Mangkunagara IV* (Jakarta: Kolĕp [Kolff], 1953). There is also a three-volume collection, also entitled *Sĕrat-Sĕrat anggitan-dalĕm Kangjĕng Gusti Pangeran Adipati Ariya Mangkunagara IV*, edited by Th.G.Th. Pigeaud and published in Soerakarta by the Java Instituut in 1928.

something innovatively “scientific” – dating events and using two calendars to do so – was coupled to a vast collection of distinctly unscientific legends about Java’s past, to produce a voluminous new pseudo-historical work.

The earliest version we now know of *Pustakaraja Purwa* is in fact ascribed to Mangkunagara IV. This appears to have been written in the period 1853–8.¹⁰ When the version ascribed to Ronggawarsita was written is not known, and so far no detailed comparison has been made of the Mangkunagara IV and Ronggawarsita versions. Day thinks that Ronggawarsita did his version also in the 1850s, because the first reference to it is from 1855, when “a lady courtier recomposed or copied an unpublished section of the *Pustaka Raja* in verse.”¹¹ This could, however, have been taken from the Mangkunagara IV version. Ronggawarsita’s versions of *Paramayoga* and *Pustakaraja Purwa* were only published in full in 1884, both in Yogyakarta.

In 1866, Ronggawarsita’s work suddenly became a topic of discussion in *Bramartani*. Newspapers were an entirely new innovation and thus this new medium in itself offended no established literary norms in Javanese. But Javanese *belles-lettres* was a very different matter. There were long-standing traditions of writing literature in Java reaching back to Hindu-Javanese times and aesthetic standards were well developed and widely accepted. Since the time when Modern Javanese supplanted Old Javanese as the literary language, many thousands of manuscripts had been written – histories, romances, mystical speculations, and so on – and anything considered serious literature was written in verse.¹² Now Javanese *literati* began to experiment with writing prose and with new sorts of subject matter, which sparked debates about whether this was serious literature at all. *Bramartani* provided an innovative new platform for those debates. We will paraphrase this debate below and allow it to unfold in sequence, as readers of *Bramartani* followed it at the time.

In several issues of *Bramartani* in 1866, a writer named Raden Panji Puspawilaga filled the newspaper’s pages with serialised stories, written in prose, concerning one Raden Jaka Panirat in Kadilangu in the time of the 16th-century kingdom of Dēmak, plus episodes from a work called *Cariyosipun Candhi Maling ing rēdi Kēthu* (the story of the thief’s temple

10. See Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese society*, p. 147. This MS is Mangkunagara IV, *Sērat Pustakaraja*, written at the wish of Pakubuwana VII, containing several texts, including (pp. 1–73), *Sērat Pustakaraja* covering the years *surya sangkala* 1 to 800/ *candra sangkala* 1–824 and *Sērat Pustakaraja Puwara* for years 801–1400/825–1442; ending with the succession of Pakualam II, the exile of Pakubuwana VI and accession of Pakubuwana VII in *surya sangkala* 1705/ *candra sangkala* 1757 [AJ 1757/AD 1829–30]; the whole MS is [iv] + [589] pp. 31.5 x 19.5 cm; KITLV MS D Or.661, now held in Leiden University Library.

11. John Anthony Day, *Meanings of change in the poetry of nineteenth-century Java* (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1981) pp. 221–2.

12. Prose was used for translations from Arabic originals written in prose, for some other religious works, sometimes for date-lists (*babad sēngkala*), for mundane documents such as population lists, etc.

at Mount Kēthu) in the time of the pre-Mataram kingdom of Pēngging¹³. We will soon discover – as did the readers of *Bramartani* – that this writer was an adopted brother of Ronggawarsita whose work became a topic of discussion along with Ronggawarsita's.

Puspawilaga was already known, at least to some aficionados of Javanese literature. When A.B. Cohen Stuart published a text of the *Bratayuda* in 1860, he said that he was “inclined to ascribe” his MS “B” to “the invention of Radèn Panji Puspawilaga.”¹⁴

Puspawilaga's link with Ronggawarsita was also evident; Cohen Stuart also had a MS ‘G’ consisting of “a few loose pages containing a part of the *Bratajudå Kawi* with explanation in Javanese prose, undertaken for me by the above-mentioned Radèn Panji Puspawilaga, assisted by Radèn Ngabèi Rånggå Warsitå, the same who assisted Dr. Van der Vlis in interpreting the inscriptions of Soekoeh and Tjetå.” The first part of “G” was, he wrote, “mostly based on the information of Rånggå Warsitå.” Cohen Stuart was not impressed with this material. He described the second part as “no more than a draft. [...] The reliability of the translation certainly leaves much to be desired. Generally it seems to be little more than a weak attempt to guess the meaning from a few known words or sounds, often even taken from a corrupted text, and supplemented or altered according to traditional conceptions. Not infrequently the interpretation itself seems to be devoid of all sound sense.”¹⁵ Cohen Stuart also found fault in the understandings of the late C.W. Winter, Sr. (d. 1859, the father of F.W. Winter), “the usual information-bank for anyone who wants to contribute something to Javanese language studies.” Again, Ronggawarsita was fingered as the ultimate source of the problem. Cohen Stuart said that Winter “often had to restrict himself to passing on the explanation of natives – particularly of Rånggå Warsitå, his teacher in *kawi* – for the accuracy of which he himself could not vouch, and which all too often were subject to the suspicion of having been made up or distorted to meet the needs of the local context.”¹⁶

Such doubts about Ronggawarsita's competence were also held by Javanese literati and soon erupted with considerable brio in the pages of *Bramartani*. Within a few weeks, someone named Wignya Panitisastra of Kudus had a letter published in *Bramartani* which opened an exchange over several months concerning both Puspawilaga's works and those of Ronggawarsita. Several of those who contributed to this controversy used *noms de plume*. Wignya

13. Beginning, respectively, in *BM* 2 Aug. 1866 and 4 Oct. 1866, and continued in subsequent issues. I am unable to locate Mount Kēthu; it will be seen below that it was said to be in the Mangkunagaran domains.

14. A.B. Cohen Stuart (ed.), *Bråtå-Joedå, Indisch-Javaansch heldendicht* (Batavia: Lange & Co., 1860), vol. I, p. 24. I am grateful to an anonymous reader of an earlier version of this article for alerting me to Cohen Stuart's comments.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Panitisastra may have been such a pseudonym, for it means “wise, skilled in the study of literature” or “[...] in the (the book) *Panitisastra*.”¹⁷

Wignya Panitisastra wrote¹⁸ that he had long heard of a *priyayi* in Surakarta named Ronggawarsita, who was famed for his command of *kawi* (i.e., Javanese literary language) and of many tales. But he professed amazement that there was not yet any confirmation that this fame was deserved. By contrast, Puspawilaga was clearly a master of literature, as one could see from the stories of Jaka Panirat and *Candhi Maling ing rēdi Kěthu* that he had contributed to *Bramartani*. Of Ronggawarsita, however, there was not yet clear evidence that he was competent in or enjoyed the study of literature. If that were true, there should have been evidence in *Bramartani* long before. Wignya Panitisastra declared that he himself much loved literature.

Wignya Panitisastra’s preference for the work of Puspawilaga over that of Ronggawarsita was, however, perhaps rather equivocal at this stage and would soon be abandoned, as we will see. In the same edition of *Bramartani*, his first letter was followed by a second also by him which expressed surprise about Puspawilaga’s *Cariyosipun Candhi Maling ing rēdi Kěthu*. He had never heard of such a work in his whole life, said Wignya Panitisastra, being now 58 years old and having read almost all of Javanese literature – a remarkably immodest claim. So he had asked an older person where this story came from, for it was not to be found in *Babad Tanah Jawi* (Chronicle of the land of Java).¹⁹ He got the reply that probably Puspawilaga had taken it from a work by the Alfuru²⁰ or the Bugis, or had drawn upon his own memory, for many

17. Nancy Florida (email of 16 June 2018) has wondered whether this might be a pseudonym of Cakraningrat V/Purwalēlana, who was *bupati* of Kudus and had just published his own *Lampah-lampahipun*, discussed below. Against this is Wignya Panitisastra’s claim to be 58 years old in 1866. But the suggestion remains intriguing.

18. BM 8 Nov. 1866. Two sets of transcriptions from *Bramartani* are available online that contain all or much of the correspondence discussed in this article. One was done from printed copies of the newspaper held in the National Library of Indonesia (PNRI). These transcriptions are available at <http://lampje.leidenuniv.nl/KITLV-docs/open/TS/Bramartani/bramartani.html>. The URL for this database has, however, changed from time to time; if this URL is non-functional, readers should search for the database by turning to <http://catalogue.leidenuniv.nl> and searching for “Bramartanie Javaansch dagblad.” Users are advised to consult the Introduction/Prakata to these materials before using them, for these translations contain errors of transcription and typing. They are ideally used as finding aids, guiding one to the original passages in the printed version. Most (but not all) of the exchange of correspondence discussed here is also available, in higher-quality transcriptions, at <http://www.sastra.org/arsip-dan-sejarah/61-umum/237-candhi-maling-jurumartani-1866-67-297>. The two versions are clearly based on differing sets of the newspaper, the *sastra.org* set perhaps being preserved in Surakarta, and some parts missing in one are found in the other; they have been used here to supplement each other.

19. This is a generic term for works generally beginning with Java’s mythical past and extending into historic times, such works having a variety of individual titles.

20. In this period, this term was generally used for animist interior- or mountain-dwelling peoples of eastern Indonesian islands, sometimes including the indigenous people of West Papua. The implication here was that these were backward heathen. See J. Paulus *et al.* (eds.), *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* (2nd ed., 8 vols; ’s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff;

people dreamed of strange things and, upon waking, thought them to have been real. So Wignya Panitisastra asked Puspawilaga directly (a) how old he was and (b) what work he did, for he wanted to know the source of the story *Cariyosipun Candhi Maling ing rēdi Kēthu*. If he was an older person like Wignya Panitisastra himself, then – since older persons were obliged in all that they did to give good instruction to those who were younger – what was the instructional value of the story? He also asked whether Puspawilaga was the person who, it was said, had once travelled to the Netherlands, but he didn't think that was possible.

In November 1866 this initial correspondence was enlivened by the intervention of one Abdulatip of Sēmarang.²¹ I know nothing about this person except that he was prominent among those whose letters were published in *Bramartani* and his opinions were firmly held and bluntly expressed.²² He wrote that he had read Wignya Panitisastra's disdain for Ronggawarsita's abilities, to which he had to respond. Ronggawarsita's abilities were famed throughout the world, he insisted. Wignya Panitisastra's disdain rested on the fact that Ronggawarsita had never published anything in *Bramartani*, unlike Puspawilaga, whose writings often appeared there. But, wrote Abdulatip, Puspawilaga's writings that appeared in the newspaper did not demonstrate that he had full command of Javanese literary skills. As for Ronggawarsita, the fact that he did not publish in *Bramartani* did not show that he lacked those skills. He may have published there without using his true name. Abdulatip advised Wignya Panitisastra to read the *Pustakaraja* which was published in the 1866 *Javaansche Almanak (sērat pananggalan taun 1866)*.²³ There he would find the name Ronggawarsita, but it was hidden within the Javanese characters of the text. This was the work of a true *pujongga*, concealing his name from the masses. Abdulatip was surprised, he said, that Wignya Panitisastra did not correct his ignorance and, with regard to his discussion of Puspawilaga, how little he knew of Javanese literary matters was again displayed, for Puspawilaga's writings were clearly identified as his own creations. Clearly the *Candhi Maling* story did not come from Puspawilaga's dreams, for Abdulatip claimed to have once encountered this story, but never so clearly told as in Puspawilaga's version.

This is the first reference in this correspondence to an innovation in Javanese letters, the use of an acrostic to reveal while simultaneously concealing the author's name. To the best of my knowledge acrostics are unknown in Javanese literature before this time. But where might the idea have originated

Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1917-39), vol. 1, p. 30.

21. *BM* 15 Nov. 1866.

22. See Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese society*, pp. 158, 159, 170, 173-4.

23. I have not been able to consult a copy of this publication. It is safe to presume that what was published there was just an extract from *Pustakaraja Purwa*, which is a very large work.

of using an acrostic to conceal an author's name in the words of a work of literature? The answer almost surely lies in Ronggawarsita's interactions with Dutchmen and his interest in the modern innovations they might offer, of which the dual dating system of *Paramayoga* and *Pustakaraja Purwa* was an example. While acrostics are known in other cultures, the one most likely to have been known in colonial Java was to be found in the Dutch song *Het Wilhelmus*, popular then and later adopted as the Netherlands national anthem in 1932. This was in praise of William of Nassau, Prince of Orange. The first letter of each stanza spelled out his name in the form 'Willem van Nassov'. In colonial Java, we may assume, members of the Javanese elite were aware of such Dutch songs from their interaction with local Europeans. *Bramartani* of 10 January 1867, for example, welcomed the arrival of the new Governor-General (1866-72), Pieter Mijer, by invoking the then-Netherlands national anthem, in Javanese dubbed *Win Nerlanse Blut* (*Wien Neêrlands Bloed*). In the absence of any other obvious source of inspiration, we may reasonably conclude that knowledge of the *Wilhelmus* probably inspired Ronggawarsita to adopt the use of an acrostic for his own name.

Abdulatip claimed to have more information about Puspawilaga. He had indeed once been to Europe²⁴ and was now, Abdulatip estimated, around 60 years old. He was therefore older than Wignya Panitisastra as well as more expert in literary matters. Abdulatip believed that Puspawilaga had also been to England, France and Germany, and on his trip home was hit by a storm in which most on board died. Puspawilaga survived and reached land at Novaya Zemlya, but some of this adventure was unclear to Abdulatip himself (and, we might add, this tale implied a distinctly strange itinerary on the way home). He had not met Puspawilaga often but had encountered him twice in the Puspanagaran (in Surakarta), and it was clear that he was a great *pujongga*. He spoke Javanese interspersed with Dutch, French, English and German words, but that was just based on Abdulatip's guesswork, for he himself did not understand those words.

Wignya Panitisastra fired back a week later with a long letter in *Bramartani*.²⁵ He had read that Abdulatip disagreed with his questioning both the abilities of Ronggawarsita and the source of the *Candhi Maling* story. He now asked Abdulatip if he was not aware that one could judge someone's abilities only when the latter made his or her work available to others in *Bramartani* or elsewhere: how could one judge the abilities of someone who concealed his work? Abdulatip wished to defend the abilities of others

24. Puspawilaga went to the Netherlands in the company of the missionary J.A. Palm in 1835, where he oversaw the production of typefaces for Javanese script; Harry A. Poeze, with contributions from Cees van Dijk and Inge van der Meulen, *In het land van de overheerser I: Indonesiërs in Nederland 1600-1950* (Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal- en Volkenkunde vol. 100; Dordrecht and Cinnaminson: Foris Publications, 1986), p. 15.

25. *BM* 22 Nov. 1866.

although his own abilities were not yet in evidence, Wignya Panitisastra rudely added. Abdulatip was evidently amazed that Ronggawarsita could conceal his name in a stanza of verse as an acrostic; did Abdulatip not think that other persons knew where this name could be found? In Kudus there were many people who knew about Ronggawarsita's name being given there. Ronggawarsita's *Pustakaraja* as printed in the 1866 *Javaansche Almanak* was good, but not terribly impressive, for someone of minor capacity could write that. Abdulatip had asked how people in Kudus knew of Ronggawarsita's reputation, which Wignya Panitisastra said was easy to explain. In Kudus, it was the *ulama* (implicitly, not the *priyayi*) who regarded Ronggawarsita as a man with comprehensive knowledge of *kawi* and of Javanese tales. There were several *hajis* who went to Surakarta in the month of Mulud to join in *dhikir Maulud* (group performance of Sufi litanies to commemorate the birth of the Prophet) in the Great Mosque there. While in Surakarta, one of them met Ronggawarsita, who received him hospitably and told and explicated the story of *Ande-ande lumut* (a folk tale set in the pre-Islamic age of Raden Panji), mixing his presentation with *kawi* words. The *haji* returned home to Kudus greatly impressed. But Wignya Panitisastra dismissed this as being like a dog barking without biting, for the *haji* was praising Ronggawarsita's use of words of which the *haji* himself had no knowledge. How could *hajis* know *kawi* words, for this was not their task? This was like a dog barking. As for Abdulatip's arguments, where was there a person who wore clothes that fit someone else (i.e., why was Abdulatip responding on behalf of Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga)? Wignya Panitisastra had only queried the capacities of a person regarded as able when there was not yet any supporting evidence and had asked where the *Candhi Maling* story was from. Neither people in Kudus nor his acquaintances in the Mangkunagaran knew of this story, yet Mount Kēthu was in the Mangkunagaran domains: how was it possible that even the local people did not know of this tale? As for Abdulatip's tale of Puspawilaga ending up on Novaya Zemlya, off Russia's north coast, whereas the Netherlands faced the Atlantic, this Wignya Panitisastra regarded as unbelievable. There was no point, he thought, in responding further to Abdulatip's letter, for readers would recognise that Abdulatip's mind was not entirely in order. Thus did Wignya Panitisastra reach new heights of rudeness.

In the same issue of *Bramartani*,²⁶ Puspawilaga himself responded briefly to Wignya Panitisastra. He said that an answer would take up much space over three issues of *Bramartani*; would not the *priyayi* from Kudus become bored? He asked what part of Kudus Wignya Panitisastra was from, for at the age of 17, he had frequently gone on pilgrimage to the grave of Sunan Kudus, and he knew many of the *kyais*, *hajis* and senior *priyayis* there. He also knew many of the ancient stories of Kudus, some of which agreed with his own stories and

26. BM 22 Nov. 1866.

some of which did not. He went on to explain that in June 1866 the 17-year-old son of the editor of *Bramartani*, F.W. Winter, named Ehrens (*Erĕns*), had died. His father was so greatly distressed that he lost his will to carry on with the newspaper. He asked Puspawilaga to provide a story that would take up pages in the paper, and he did so, merely as a way of helping a friend who had lost his child. So the story was true, not made up, but the date given there for the death of the *pandung sakti*²⁷ was wrong; it should have been (Śaka) 1201 (=AD 1279-80). As for its didactic value, it was about being true until death and intending only the good. He attached his own name to all his stories, he said, not liking to use an alias. There were no further details of his work or life and no tales of shipwreck and rescue on Novaya Zemlya.

Abdulatip returned to this increasingly testy exchange in *Bramartani* of 29 November 1866.²⁸ He was, he said, obliged to reply to Wignya Panitisastra, whose own reply had not dealt with all the matters at issue. He did not deny that a person's abilities could only be judged from his writings. He had merely meant that Puspawilaga's writings in the pages of *Bramartani* did not constitute proof that he fully mastered Javanese literary skills, for these writings were not so amazing. Ronggawarsita's concealing of his name (as an acrostic) in a verse of his work merely showed that he had a character that was *andhapasor* (self-affacing, a desirable style for elite gentlemen). But he suspected that, before he mentioned the presence of Ronggawarsita's name in the verse, Wignya Panitisastra had not recognised that it was there. That was like the story of Columbus, who challenged his friends to make an egg stand upright upon a table. They all confessed that they could not. So Columbus tapped on the egg to flatten one end slightly and stood it upright. His friends all said that they could do that, too. Abdulatip said that he was reminded of this story upon observing Wignya Panitisastra's clearly inadequate knowledge. Other feisty responses to the latter's letter flowed from Abdulatip's fluent pen. If Wignya Panitisastra sought to judge the works of Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga, he should ask himself whether he was able to make creations like the works of those two *priyayis*. In asking whether the *Candhi Maling* story came from Alfuru or Bugis sources or from his dreams, he was being rude, offending rules of proper conduct. And so on.

Puspawilaga had another letter published in the same issue of the newspaper, continuing his own response to Wignya Panitisastra. He said that when the Susuhunan's court was still great (*agĕng*, evidently meaning reaching back to pre-Islamic times or perhaps implying the time of Sultan Agung, r. 1613-1646), it had received reports about its lands, monuments, and such-like from across the length and breadth of its domains, which were written down and preserved by court officials. There was a vast number of such books of stories,

27. The thief with supernatural powers, but perhaps to be taken as a proper name: Pandung Sakti.

28. *BM* 29 Nov. 1866.

which were kept by the *pujonggas*. If the monarch wanted a book written, the *pujonggas* would do that and such books were called *babads* (chronicles) or didactic works (*sěrat wěwulang*). The story of *Candhi Maling* had been left out of *babads* because it was a small and insignificant tale. Such stories that were left out of these other works, including those concerning royal or court secrets, were kept by the *pujonggas* in books called *Buk Nitik* or *Buk Nukil* (books of scrutiny or books of extracts).²⁹ Puspawilaga wrote that he knew a little of these stories because his mother was the daughter of a *pujongga*, so he was the grandson of a *pujongga*, but (expressing the self-deprecation appropriate to his cultural context) a most ignorant one, for there was another grandson of a *pujongga* in Surakarta more able than he, in the direct line of male descent who had inherited the supernatural inspiration of a poet (*wahyuning kapujanggan*). Puspawilaga said that he was a mere companion (*panakawan*) to such a person. This was Ronggawarsita, *abdi-dalěm ěmpujongga* (royal servant and master poet) of Surakarta.

Wignya Panitisastra was back in the pages of *Bramartani* a week later³⁰, contributing to the increasing length of these letters. Now he and Abdulatip were both bristling at any question or choice of expression by the other. One can't help wondering how many readers of the newspaper found the exchange edifying or entertaining, despite its increasing similarity to a cock-fight. It is not clear to me whether Wignya Panitisastra was now trying to reduce the heat or had decided that irony was a powerful debating ploy. In any case, he now added a new element to the combustible mix: the question of Dutch influence, which he brought up in order to deny it. Wignya Panitisastra wrote that whether his own writing in *Bramartani* was equal to that of Puspawilaga or Ronggawarsita was for others to judge. In his view, he said, the latter two had no "Dutch ideas" (expressed in Dutch: *Hollandsě idhe*), that is to say, they did not think like Dutchmen but still thought like Javanese, even though – according to Abdulatip – Puspawilaga had been to Europe. On the basis of Puspawilaga's response, he now regarded Ronggawarsita as a *pujongga*. The reason he had asked where the *Candhi Maling* story came from was based on comments by elderly people in Kudus: after all, many able people commanded foreign languages, so probably Puspawilaga knew the Alfuru and Bugis languages. The reason he had dared to doubt Ronggawarsita's abilities was because he was disturbed by what he had been told by the *haji* who visited Ronggawarsita; Puspawilaga's explanation had now put him at ease. So he

29. On these "inside stories," see Theodore G.Th. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java: Catalogue raisonné of Javanese manuscripts in the library of the University of Leiden and other public collections in the Netherland* (4 vols; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff; Leiden: Bibliotheca Universitatis Lugduni Batavorum; Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1967-80), vol. I, pp. 160-1.

30. *BM* 6 Dec. 1866.

asked of Puspawilaga and Ronggawarsita that they should continue to publish stories in *Bramartani* about villages, forests, mountains, waterways and so on which were not to be found in the *babads*.

A fourth correspondent now entered the fray: one Raden Laraitēm (evidently a female name) of Yogyakarta.³¹ She was increasingly amazed that Wignya Panitisastra dared to question the abilities of Ronggawarsita and to challenge the writings of Puspawilaga. She would not be disturbed, however, if Wignya Panitisastra's abilities exceeded those of Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga. So she asked to be instructed by Wignya Panitisastra about those Alfuru and Bugis works that might be the source of the *Candhi Maling* story. Was Wignya Panitisastra a Bugis *priyayi* himself and could he report what was in those Bugis works? What was the work of Bugis *pujonggas* like? Laraitēm herself already knew that the story of *Candhi Maling* of Mount Kēthu was taken from *Pustakaraja* and chronogram chronicles (*sērat babad sēngkala*). Where did the Alfuru and Bugis stories come from? She would like a clear answer which she would then compare with what she had learned from Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga.

Puspawilaga contributed to the same issue of the paper, explaining to Wignya Panitisastra about his own ancestry and the origin of his stories. He shared a grandfather with Ronggawarsita, he explained, who was a tenth-generation descendant of the Sultan of Pajang,³² this being the great Surakarta poet Raden Ngabei Yasadipura II, also known as Raden Tumēnggung Sastranagara. Puspawilaga was a cousin of Ronggawarsita, his mother being the younger sister of the latter's father. His own father died when he was young, so he was raised in the household of his grandfather Yasadipura II as the youngest son. As for those books of stories, very many were lost at the fall of Mataram (in 1677 to Trunajaya, when the court was plundered)³³ and of Kartasura (in 1742 – a time of terrible plundering twice over of court treasures).³⁴ When young, Puspawilaga had enjoyed reading the old stories, but Yasadipura II's own residence had burned down three times, taking books of stories and other works with it and leaving only fragments behind. He wrote that Wignya Panitisastra seemed surprised that a thief should be buried (at *Candhi Maling*) but Puspawilaga then told of *Candhi*

31. *Ibid.*

32. On the ancestry of the Yasadipura line, as depicted by his descendants, see also Sasrasumarta, Sastrawaluya and Yasapuraya, *Tus Pajang: Pengētan lalampahanipun swargi Raden Ngabehi Yasadipura I, abdi-dalēm Kaliwon Pujongga ing Surakarta Adiningrat* (Surakarta: Pangēcapan Budi Utama, 1939).

33. See M.C. Ricklefs, *War, culture and economy in Java: Asian and European imperialism in the early Kartasura period* (Sydney: Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with Allen & Unwin, 1993), pp. 40-1. When Trunajaya's capital at Kediri was taken in 1678, whatever remained there of captured court treasures was looted by the victors; *ibid.*, pp. 53-4.

34. See M.C. Ricklefs, *The seen and unseen worlds in Java, 1726-1749: History, literature and Islam in the court of Pakubuwana II* (St. Leonards NSW: Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with Allen & Unwin; Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), esp. pp. 268-273, 289-291, 336.

Asu at Mount Ijo, south of the Ratu Baka ruins, where a dog was buried, and other curious temple ruins.

A week later another new contestant entered the lists, one Raden Ngabei Sumanggengkarsa (evidently a pseudonym, meaning “whatever you wish”), who described himself as a *mantri kadipaten* (i.e. official in the crown prince’s service), but it is not clear of which court.³⁵ His contribution was from a different angle and probably meant to be ironic and witty. He expressed surprise that Wignya Panitisastra still had his wits and fiery energy at his age. As for Ronggawarsita, he was clearly much superior to Wignya Panitisastra (who might have been feeling a bit friendless by now).

Abdulatip – never, it seems, a man of great patience towards opponents – by now had even less. He wrote³⁶ that he would only reply briefly (something already established as highly improbable). The endless back-and-forth answers, he said, were like a dog barking at its own echo (about as rude a simile as one could use in Java). Wignya Panitisastra argued like children who just ridicule each other, a sign of someone who was without character (*budi*).³⁷ Abdulatip reviewed their exchange at some length and then told Wignya Panitisastra that his intelligence extended no further than the length of his nose.

Wignya Panitisastra replied to this affront in the 20 December 1866 issue.³⁸ In response to the accusation that he was like a dog barking at its own echo, he said that Abdulatip was like thunder without rain. And perhaps he was infected by *Hollandsē idhe*, but Wignya Panitisastra wasn’t yet sure of this. What argument did they have? It was Abdulatip who wanted to have an argument about things that were not his affair, not Wignya Panitisastra. Abdulatip was just eager to have arguments (which, it must be said, his multiple letters to *Bramartani* on this and other subjects suggest was true). At the end of a longish letter, Wignya Panitisastra said that he would respond to Abdulatip no further, for if he carried on he would be unable to reply to Sumanggengkarsa, who would be exasperated if his letter was not replied to.

Puspawilaga contributed a response to Wignya Panitisastra in the same issue of the paper. He referred to Ronggawarsita as his relative (*sadherek kula*). As for the question of whether he had *Hollandsē idhe*, he replied that he was a pure Javanese who lived under the government of the Netherlands, but he worked in the court of Surakarta. If he wrote in Javanese of course he

35. *BM* 13 Dec. 1866.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Budi* is a difficult term to translate, with a wide range of possible translations (all with positive connotations) in English such as “mind, intellect, reason, genius, wit, discretion, judgment, wisdom, aptitude, character, disposition, sense,” and also “desire, longing,” and so on. See J.F.C. Gericke and T. Roorda, *Javaansch-Nederlandsch handwoordenboek* (Revised ed.; ed. A.C. Vreede and J.G.H. Gunning; 2 vols; Amsterdam: Johannes Müller; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1901), vol. II, p. 694.

38. *BM* 20 Dec. 1866.

used Javanese thoughts, but if he wrote in Dutch (which would make him one of the few at that time who could) he used Dutch thought. Similarly, he used both Dutch and Javanese customs as appropriate. He illustrated his views with quotations from the didactic text *Niti Sruti*.³⁹ As for Wignya Panitisastra's wish that he should continue to publish stories in *Bramartani*, Puspawilaga asked to be excused for he was already old, his strength for writing was gone and his eyes were failing.

The 20 December 1866 issue of the paper also printed an intervention into the debate by one Danasatata of Surakarta, a brave man stepping into dangerous middle ground. He referred to Abdulatip's simile of a dog barking at its own echo, chastising him for using such an improper, unmannerly expression. He went on at length on such issues, then said that he guessed from Abdulatip's (Arabic-sounding) name that he had probably been on the *hajj* to Mecca, and must therefore have a sound knowledge of Islam. So he should know that he should not be arrogant. He said that his own aim was to stop their debate about the abilities of Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga. Otherwise the contestants would become enemies of those who praised these writers. He himself was clearly of the view that the two writers were outstanding. Abdulatip and Wignya Panitisastra should recognise that Javanese *pujonggas*, unlike Dutch *pujonggas*,⁴⁰ could not publicly promote their fame. To Wignya Panitisastra he said that his concern about the abilities of the Javanese *pujonggas* suggested that he was mocking them and was insulting. As for Abdulatip, he was replying frivolously, such as his claim that Puspawilaga had been to England, France, and Germany and had been shipwrecked and saved at Novaya Zemlya, and that Abdulatip himself had met Puspawilaga in the Pusanagaran, all of which was untrue.

Wignya Panitisastra returned fire at Sumanggengkarsa in *Bramartani* of 27 December 1866.⁴¹ The latter had waffled on about the age of a person, but this was a discussion without merit, wrote Wignya Panitisastra. Unable to resist an opportunity to be insulting, he said that Sumanggengkarsa seemed rather ignorant. Wignya Panitisastra declared himself advanced in age but young in mind and character (*budi*).⁴² There followed another letter from Wignya Panitisastra replying to Puspawilaga which raised the rudeness standard of this correspondence to new heights and invoked an old and negative ethnic stereotype.

39. *Niti Sruti* (or *Surti*) is a poem which, Pigeaud observes, was "very much studied at court by erudite gentlemen who took [...] pride in being well versed in classical Javanese literature [...]. The poem contains lessons especially referring to good behaviour and statecraft"; Pigeaud, *Literature of Java*, vol. 1, pp. 105-6.

40. The idea that there could be European *pujonggas* may seem a bit odd to some readers. They may note that when A.B. Cohen Stuart died in 1876, *BM* 17 Feb. 1876 reported his death as the loss of "a great *pujongga* of Javanese, Malay etc. and other most difficult fields" (*pujongga agéng ngatasing tēmbung Jawi, Malajēng sapanuggilanipun utawi liyaning kamēmētan*).

41. *BM* 27 Dec. 1866.

42. See n. 37 above.

“Awful! Awful!” he wrote, “I’ve been taken in by a shaved Chinese and am at my wit’s end!” He had read Puspawilaga’s letter in *Bramartani* of 20 December 1866 with its improper and unmannerly expressions. “O, taken in by a shaved Chinese! [...] You were said to be a competent person, but it has become abundantly clear that you are not up to it. O, misfortune, mate! I thought wrongly and have been taken in by a shaved Chinese!” After further intemperate comments, Wignya Panitisastra went on, “O, taken in by a shaved Chinese! Now I know that your aspiration is just to be praised by the many, so you like being praised, but your conduct is off-course. Indeed, if you carry on you’ll become a laughing-stock.” And his final admonition to Puspawilaga: “Seeing that you are old, you should just concentrate on religious obligations. Don’t seek praise in this world, but rather save up goodness in the world to come.”

We should pause to explicate this phrase “taken in by a shaved Chinese” (*kalěbon Cina gundhulan*, literally “entered by a shaved Chinese”). It is translated by Robson and Singgih Wibisono as “to get cheated”⁴³ and is found in no other dictionary so far as I am aware. The term “shaved Chinese” goes back to previous centuries and is found in Dutch East India Company documents. It was then used for someone of Chinese ethnicity who had cut off his queue, the Manchu-imposed sign of ethnic Chinese subservience, converted to Islam and usually adopted a Malay or Javanese name. The explanation and implication of Wignya Panitisastra’s 19th-century usage is probably that – just as a “shaved Chinese” convert to Islam with a Javanese name was not really Javanese – so also Puspawilaga was not what he had seemed to be. He was not, as Wignya Panitisastra claimed initially to have believed, a person of ability. The use of the exclamation *kalěbon Cina gundhulan* thus tells us something about contemporary ethno-centrism in Java as well as about the coarse, abrupt, rude debate going on in *Bramartani* among aficionados of Javanese literature.

A new contestant also appeared in the issue of 27 December 1866, clearly using a pseudonym playing on the name Wignya (“skillful, wise”) by calling himself Tanpawignya (meaning “without skill, unwise” but also of course “without Wignya”). He had read the correspondence between Abdulatip and Wignya Panitisastra. The latter, whom he familiarly (i.e. demeaningly) called “Mas Sastra,” was just being obstinate. He should go and study with Puspawilaga and Ronggawarsita.

And so the new year of 1867 opened with tempers evidently fraying on all sides and little even in the way of a veneer of gentlemanly conduct, all because Wignya Panitisastra of Kudus had dared to ask questions about the writings of Puspawilaga and Ronggawarsita. In the first issue of the new

43. Stuart Robson and Singgih Wibisono, with the assistance of Yacinta Kurniasih, *Javanese-English dictionary* (Singapore: Periplus, 2002), p. 155.

year,⁴⁴ Wignya Panitisastra replied to the letter from Danasatata. Danasatata had sought to reconcile Abdulatip and Wignya Panitisastra, by asking the latter to cease questioning the abilities of Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga. Wignya Panitisastra thanked and praised him. But there was nothing wrong with discussing the abilities of someone, he said, and it was true that he rather doubted the quality of Ronggawarsita's work. As a lover of the truth, Wignya Panitisastra would accept correction if he was wrong, without taking offense. He regarded Ronggawarsita as superior, given his publication (from *Pustakaraja* in the *Javaansche Almanak*) of 1866-1867, but this was not yet at the standard of a *pujongga*. Nevertheless, it was very different from the work of Puspawilaga, which was not up to standard, probably because he was old and becoming forgetful. Yet Wignya Panitisastra hoped that Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga would continue to publish their tales.

Wignya Panitisastra also blasted Tanpawignya: "Lo," he wrote, "here comes another shaven-headed Chinese, if I am not mistaken, called Tanpawignya!" whose stupidity was, he said, evident from his letter. His name was also very stupid. Rather than Wignya Panitisastra going off to study with Puspawilaga and Ronggawarsita, it was Tanpawignya who should study with Wignya Panitisastra himself, as also should Laraitēm and Sumanggengkarsa, all of whom were not up to their task.⁴⁵

In the same issue, Abdulatip, too, responded to the Danasatata intervention.⁴⁶ He said that he was not surprised that the latter was confused by the correspondence, with which he had only sought to test the intelligence of others. Danasatata's intervention was useless. After all, it was not he, Abdulatip, who questioned the standard of Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga, whom he regarded as *pujonggas*. He had told the story of Puspawilaga's shipwreck on Novaya Zemlya and visit to Germany, France, etc., on the basis of what he had heard, and it was true that he had met Puspawilaga in the Puspanagaran.

A rather curious *kyai* appeared in these pages, too, possibly one who had something less than full mental capacities, to judge from the oddities of what he had to say. This was one Kyai Kerata (a very odd name) from Panaraga (still being written Pranaraga at this time). The letter⁴⁷ was written in *ngoko* ("low Javanese"), as one would speak to children, inferiors or close friends, whereas the bulk of this correspondence was in more proper *krama* ("high Javanese"). Kyai Kerata addressed Wignya Panitisastra and Abdulatip as his grandchildren and explained that he was their most elderly ancestor. He admonished them to end their fruitless dispute and to stop hurting the feelings of Puspawilaga, who probably had to deal with the two of them arguing in his

44. *BM* 3 Jan. 1867.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*

dreams. He himself, said the *kyai*, had no aim but to fulfill his obligations as an older person and seek the welfare of his grandchildren. We may be sure – in case any reader of this is unsure – that Kyai Kerata of Panaraga was not in fact the grandfather of the central disputants.

Into the fray came yet another *priyayi*, as the whole business became something of a *cause célèbre*. A rather effusive Raden Tumenggung Purwawinata of Mataram (the Yogyakarta area) responded to Danasatata's intervention in the battle between Abdulatip and Wignya Panitisastra. He praised Danasatata for his comments and expressed the hope that the court of Surakarta would long support officials proficient in Javanese literature, so that it would remain clear that the Susuhunan of Surakarta was still a great king. And he hoped that Allah would bless Danasatata.

In this same issue of *Bramartani*,⁴⁸ Ronggawarsita himself had a brief letter published but it had nothing to do with the controversy surrounding his reputation, from which he stayed entirely aloof. Rather, he conveyed a command from Susuhunan Pakubuwana IX (r. 1861-93) that the newspaper should change its name. We have been calling it *Bramartani* here because that was the name used during most of its history, but from its revival in 1864 to 11 August 1870 it in fact used the title *Jurumartani*. Now the Susuhunan wanted the title changed back to *Bramartani* because he intended to give the name *Jurumartani* to a prince of his court. F.W. Winter replied that the large characters needed for the new masthead would take time to be made. In fact the paper did not change its name back to *Bramartani* until over three years later. Ronggawarsita's letter, however, does confirm – if any uncertainty should exist about the matter – that he was well aware of *Bramartani* and, no doubt, must have followed the increasingly ill-tempered correspondence about his abilities.

Danasatata, who had sought to dampen the controversy, came back to the fray with a very long letter in the issue of 10 January 1867⁴⁹. He said that he only hoped to stop the conflict between Abdulatip and Wignya Panitisastra about the abilities of Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga. In Surakarta there were many who studied with or went to those two for explanations of words. Danasatata was averse to useless controversies, unless someone forced him to take part, as Abdulatip had done. But he said that because Abdulatip had used the exclamation “*i i i iya jagad dewa bathara*” (a Hindu-style expression of the kind found in the *wayang* theatre) he was obliged to ask whether Abdulatip was of Hindu descent. He wanted Abdulatip to tell him candidly, for Danasatata must be fearful if Abdulatip was a *pandhita* (a learned one, implicitly of a Hindu style), astrologer and magician with a command of spells that could do harm – undoubtedly meant as a sarcastic blast at the

48. Ibid.

49. *BM* 10 Jan. 1867.

pompous Abdulatip. Perhaps Abdulatip already realised that he might win in the conflict but be disliked by many. Indeed he had confessed to not knowing proper conduct. And so on it went, with Danasatata providing further lessons in proper behaviour. Wignya Panitisastra replied to Danasatata in the same issue of the paper in predictable style.

A more interesting letter in the issue of 10 January 1867 was Puspawilaga's final contribution to the controversy, responding to Wignya Panitisastra.⁵⁰ Here the elderly *pujongga* chastised Wignya Panitisastra for his rude and unmannerly words. "If it needs to ask a question of someone, the Honoured Dutch Government which holds all of the East Indies, does not use such ill-mannered words," he wrote, invoking the ultimate example, it seems. "I am ending my replies to Wignya Panitisastra: from now on, you can put on your weapons, like a thousand parakeets, published in *Bramartani*, but you will get no further response from me, for I'm going to take no notice of Wignya Panitisastra." He advised others who had replied to Wignya Panitisastra also to cease doing so, for they could not come to a reconciliation even if they went on for ten years. "The weapons used in reply are dirty words, as bad as faeces, published in *Bramartani* [...] Is this not improper in *Bramartani*, which is read by the elite of all of Java, that dirty words should appear there?" he asked.

In the issue of 17 January 1867, Danasatata responded to Wignya Panitisastra.⁵¹ He repeated that he had no wish to be in conflict with Wignya Panitisastra or Abdulatip. It was Wignya Panitisastra who had begun the controversy by questioning the abilities of Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga, and by using objectionable words. Then there was Abdulatip who pretended to answer on behalf of those two *pujonggas* but did so frivolously, with false stories of Puspawilaga's adventures and claiming untruthfully to have met Puspawilaga. In fact, Puspawilaga had gone to Europe and returned to Java without mishap. Both Wignya Panitisastra and Abdulatip should heed the advice of Kyai Kerata. He didn't know whether the elderly *kyai* was right or not about Puspawilaga's dreams, but he thought that perhaps the old *kyai* liked telling jokes to amuse others.

Abdulatip was not yet done. In the same issue of the paper,⁵² he responded to Danasatata. If the latter's purpose was to bring the disagreement between Abdulatip and Wignya Panitisastra to an end, then he should use rather more refined (*alus*) words (a somewhat ironic comment coming from Abdulatip, we may note). Everything Danasatata wrote was wrong. It was only Wignya Panitisastra who had questioned the abilities of Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga, whereas he, Abdulatip, had only come to the assistance of those two *pujonggas* who had been criticised without being at fault. Danasatata

50. Ibid.

51. *BM* 17 Jan. 1867.

52. Ibid.

asked whether he was of Hindu descent or had been a *dhalang* because he used the exclamation “*i i i ya jagad dewa bathara,*” but this was nonsense, for not only Hindus and *dhalangs* knew this phrase. Mobilising his own sarcasm, Abdulatip wrote that indeed he was of Hindu descent and had been a *dhalang* and wished to be a *pandhita*, astrologer and magician, so was Danasatata not now afraid to disagree with him? It was Danasatata whose words were crude and he understood nothing of what Abdulatip was expressing. All of this was expressed at excessive length and was, we may guess, for the readers of *Bramartani* of rapidly declining interest. Nevertheless, Abdulatip closed by promising that there was more to come.

At this late stage a professional scribe (*juru sĕrat*) intervened, one Jayakarsa.⁵³ He asked Wignya Panitisastra to demonstrate his wisdom (*kawignyan*) by solving the riddles that he posed – riddling being a favourite game among Javanese. He ended by saying of Puspawilaga and Ronggawarsita, “those two *priyayis* are regarded as experts in literature. Period.” A week after that, Wignya Panitisastra struck back at Jayakarsa.⁵⁴ He should read the letters again, for he probably hadn’t understood what was being said – by now a common accusation hurled in all directions in this squabble.

Another *kyai* now published a letter, one named Srĕdajanma (another curious name) of Surakarta.⁵⁵ He was responding to the letter from his fellow *kyai* Kerata of Panaraga and may have been of equally questionable sanity. He was delighted, he said, for there had been terrible floods in Surakarta in which he had lost his uncle who had fled to some unknown destination, had not been heard from for a year and was feared drowned. This uncle was named Kyai Kerata and Srĕdajanma believed that he was now rediscovered through the pages of *Bramartani*. (Given the rather odd, at least fictional and joking tone, and perhaps madness, of the rest of the letter, this is not to be taken seriously.) He and his family – including, we may note, a son who he said was named Danasatata – were well, he reported to his supposed long-lost uncle. He approved Kerata’s efforts to calm the useless argument between Wignya Panitisastra and Abdulatip. He then wrote as if the latter two were brothers who had often been in conflict, whose youth names he claimed to know, and who were his nephews. He admonished the two, using *ngoko* (“low javanese,” as one would use to children). Wignya Panitisastra, he said, had not devoted himself to Javanese literature as much as his brother Abdulatip, who had also studied writing Dutch with a Dutch soldier. Abdulatip was also admonished to behave in a brotherly fashion: what would he gain by winning this argument? Being treated like children and admonished in *ngoko* by this *kyai* can hardly have brought much pleasure to Abdulatip or Wignya Panitisastra.

53. Ibid. Jayakarsa described himself as *juru sĕrat Kawadanan Kumisi Bogormas*.

54. *BM* 24 Jan. 1867.

55. Ibid.

Not yet done, Abdulatip responded to Danasatata for the last time.⁵⁶ He accused him of frivolity and, of course, did so at some length. A week later he responded to Kyai Srĕdajanma,⁵⁷ whom he indulged by addressing as “uncle” (*paman*), but he was mystified that Srĕdajanma thought Wignya Panitisastra and himself to be brothers. “Grandfather” (*ĕmbah*) Kyai Kerata also thought this, Abdulatip wrote, but he was astonished that Kyai Kerata could think anything of the sort, and indicated his own inclinations for the correspondence to come to an end.

The first item to appear in the issue of 7 February was a statement from the editor F.W. Winter, who was by now evidently more able to deal with his grief over his son’s death and wished to reassert control over his newspaper:

The editor of the newspaper *Jurumartani* [= *Bramartani*] informs the *priyayis* who have had disagreements published in *Jurumartani*, i.e. Mas Wignya Panitisastra, Abdulatip, Danasatata, Kyai Kerata, Raden Panji Puspawilaga, Raden Laraitĕm, Sumanggengkarsa, Tanpawignya, Jayakarsa, Kyai Srĕdajanma, and the other *priyayis* whose conflicting letters have not yet been published, that from here on I will not publish the letters of these *priyayis* in *Jurumartani*, because I think that to be without benefit.

The 1866-1867 debate was over and the newspaper was again mainly filled with news. Readers’ hearts may have sunk on discovering that there was another contribution in this same issue from Abdulatip, but it was about *elmu kodrat* (natural science).⁵⁸ In coming years, Abdulatip continued to be a contributor to *Bramartani*, illuminating its pages with an often-fierce judgmentalism.

Hybridity was at the core of this debate about literature, in two senses, for there were two new kinds of literature in dispute. The first was the sort of story-telling, pretty much free of the traditions and conventions of previous forms of Javanese literature, including using prose, which was exemplified in the writings of Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga. The second was the newspaper itself. In fact, the dispute about Ronggawarsita and Puspawilaga became almost secondary to the real source of fuel for this fire, which was about how Javanese *priyayis* should write in the new medium of a newspaper. Some had clearly absorbed what Termorshuizen describes as the “tropical style” of the Dutch colonial press, characterised by “Engagement and combativeness [...] A specific sort of language went along with this. This being often very emotional, the press developed a specific ‘tropical style,’ [...] [a] vigorous and animated style.”⁵⁹ But if this was a style that suited colonial Europeans, at least some Javanese gentlemen found it distasteful, an issue that lingered

56. *Ibid.*

57. *BM* 31 Jan. 1867.

58. *BM* 7 Feb. 1867.

59. Gerard Termorshuizen, with collaboration of Anneke Scholte, *Journalisten en heethoofden: Een geschiedenis van de Indisch-Nederlandse dagbladpers 1744-1905* (Amsterdam: Nijgh & van Ditmar; Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 2001), p. 21.

around the rather equivocal and never entirely clear references to “Dutch thinking” in the debate we have seen above.

In this transitional time, when there was not yet a clearly articulated, generally accepted and truly hybrid style of elite conduct in the realm of literature and publication, it seems that there was opportunity for cultural code-switching. The elderly Puspawilaga – publicly battered, insulted and evidently exhausted as the price he paid for helping a friend by filling pages in *Bramartani* with stories – explained the formula clearly enough: “If I write in Javanese, of course I use Javanese thinking and if I write in Dutch indeed I use Dutch thinking. The same with Javanese and Dutch customs: I have to use them both.”⁶⁰ But what was one to do in a Javanese-language but Dutch-style literary form like a newspaper? And how was one to respond to Ronggawarsita- or Puspawilaga-style innovations in Javanese writing? It is clear from the exchange of correspondence surveyed here that these were still hotly – indeed rudely – contested issues in 1866-1867.

In Ronggawarsita’s last year of life, in 1873, his name again arose in a controversy in the pages of *Bramartani*.⁶¹ A feisty debate about the meaning of works of Javanese literature, conducted by correspondents using various pseudonyms, went on for some time. “It is my accusation that Carik Langēnarja is wrong in his interpretation of *Niti Surti*,” wrote one Pothet Umarmaya. This work had been published two years before by Ronggawarsita.⁶² Pothet Umarmaya went on to debate what it meant to be a *pujongga* in that more modern age. He delivered this devastating judgment:

I confirm that nowadays the Raden Ngabei [Ronggawarsita] is called a *pujongga*, but if he is compared with the students at the teacher-training school [in Surakarta] who can understand arithmetic, Javanese, Malay and some Dutch, geography, natural history, astronomy and other things that are useful to the government, [...] then truly the Raden Ngabei will be left with his standing as *pujongga* rather shaky. But it is still appropriate to honour and praise him, for in an age when everyone slept, the Raden Ngabei arose by himself. Alas he did not stand up and take steps to expand the intellectual realm because there wasn’t any intellectual guide.⁶³

60. *BM* 20 Dec. 1866.

61. Nancy Florida analyses this controversy in her paper provisionally entitled “Living in a time of madness: The last days of Java’s last prophetic poet,” forthcoming in *History and Theory*.

62. *BM* 4 Sept. 1873. On the 1871 edition of *Niti Surti*, see Poerwasoewignja and Wirawangsa, *Javaansche bibliographie gegrond op de boekwerken in die taal, aanwezig in de boekerij van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen / Pratēlan kawontenaning boekoe-boekoe Basa Djawi (tjġtġkan) ingkang kasimpen wonten ing gedong boekoe (Museum) ing pasimpenan (bibliothek) XXXIII* (Batavia: Bataviaasch Genootschap, 1920, 2 vols), vol. 1, p. 405, which describes the language of the text as *kawi madya*. I have not examined this work myself.

63. *BM* 4 Sept. 1873.

Two weeks later, two other pseudonymous writers commented, on the basis of what they had heard from their elders:

The responsibilities of a *pujongga* in the Surakarta court are restricted to *kawi* words, for *kawi* words can be called the language of *pujonggas*. Second, they are responsible for old stories and to hold in high regard the stories that are needed within the court. But a European *pujongga* probably has to be competent with regard to greater knowledge, such as natural history and astronomy, arithmetic and vocabulary from their literary fellows. Although they are both *pujonggas*, their responsibilities cannot be compared. So that appellation depends upon the different ways they are regarded. So Pothet Umarmaya has no difficulty in saying that Raden Ngabei Ronggawarsita's standing as a *pujongga* is shaky, because he is outdone by the students at the teacher-training school.⁶⁴

It is clear from a later correspondent's letter that, as one would expect, Ronggawarsita had read this exchange in the pages of *Bramartani*.⁶⁵ We do not know what he really felt about the doubts that had been raised as to whether he was truly a *pujongga* in the 1860s and again in his twilight year of 1873. But it is hard not to wonder whether this sort of public discussion played a role in the composition of his most famous poem, *Sĕrat Kalatidha*, "A poem on the time of darkness."⁶⁶ Nancy Florida has described *Kalatidha* as being "among the most celebrated of Javanese poems" and writes that it is "generally accepted" that Ronggawarsita wrote this in 1873, near the time of his death in late December of that year.⁶⁷ This laments the "crazy" (*edan*) times through which he lived. He, "the man of letters" (*ponang parameng kawi*), described his heart as being "wrapped in sorrow." He hoped to find patience and to enter the mystical state of transport known in Javanese as "to die within life" (*mati sajroning urip*), a "dying to oneself" which is also a "living in oneness with God's being," as Zoetmulder puts it.⁶⁸ Florida observes that in the final line of the poem, Ronggawarsita refers to his approaching death using words that again constitute his name as an acrostic, but in this case he further displayed his word-playing dexterity by hiding the acrostic in the second, rather than the first, syllable of each word.⁶⁹ Had Nancy Florida not pointed to this, I would not have noticed it myself.

64. *BM* 18 Sept. 1873. The letter is signed *katandhan kalih Wanda Ngajeng Singa akalih Wanda Wingking Singa Mangrĕti*.

65. See the letter from Raden Mas Taya in *BM* (16 Oct. 1873) about his visit to Seh Betalĕmur, another name used by Ronggawarsita.

66. For a text, translation and discussion, see J. Joseph Errington, "To know oneself the troubled times: Ronggawarsita's *Serat Kala Tidha*," in A.L. Becker (ed.), *Writing on the tongue* ([Ann Arbor:] Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asia, Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1989), pp. 95-138.

67. Nancy Florida, "Kalatidha, Serat," pp. 142-143 in Kate Fleet et al. (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam Three*: part 2018-4 (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2018).

68. P.J. Zoetmulder, *Pantheism and monism in Javanese suluk literature: Islamic and Indian mysticism in an Indonesian setting* (ed. and transl. M.C. Ricklefs, KITLV Translation series 24, Leiden: KITLV Press, 1995), pp. 172-173.

69. Florida, "Kalatidha," p. 142; idem, "Living in a time of madness." The last line of the poem reads (with the elements in the acrostic underlined): *Borong angga suwarga mesi martaya*.

Although Ronggawarsita probably composed *Kalatidha* as his death approached, it was not published until several years later. Its lament about the times in which he lived no doubt reflects, as Errington points out, Ronggawarsita's disappointment at not having achieved the high court positions enjoyed by his illustrious literary ancestors Yasadipura I and II; "he counted his own life a failure in some ways," having never reached the high rank of *bupati*.⁷⁰ But his lament may also reflect the public questioning of his standing, of the very value of his contribution, in the pages of *Bramartani*, a newspaper read by Java's literate elite. In the ranks of that elite could be found both respect for tradition and hunger for modernity. Ronggawarsita's problem was probably that he fell somewhere in between those two things: works such as *Paramayoga* and *Pustakaraja Purwa* were a long way from the standards of traditional Javanese verse literature, yet they could hardly be thought to be modern in the European fashion then attracting interest in colonial Java.

Many decades after the *Bramartani* arguments described here, Ronggawarsita's contribution was still disputed. In 1952, Poerbatjaraka dismissed *Pustakaraja Purwa* as a miscellaneous collection of stories rewritten however Ronggawarsita wished, which constituted the author's "empty prattle" (*omong-kosongipun R. Ng. Ronggawarsita*). All of the sources mentioned in the work had never even existed, wrote Poerbatjaraka.⁷¹ Yet Ronggawarsita's reputation as a great *pujongga* among aficionados of Javanese literature has continued.

Thus were the perils of hybrid literary endeavour faced by Ronggawarsita, with poor old Puspawilaga getting thoroughly bruised on the sidelines. Ronggawarsita was rudely attacked for his innovations and his reputation cannot have been undamaged. This must have meant deep personal affront to his core identity and self-evaluation, for Ronggawarsita was by profession a writer: this was his only public role, the task to which he was devoted and by which he was judged. Judgments about his writing thus touched upon a central aspect of his existence. Below, in the Postscript, we will consider the different example of Purwalēlana's innovative writings, which constitute a valuable source for understanding 19th-century Java. Ronggawarsita, the innovative poet and courtier who failed to rise to the rank that he thought he deserved, was fair game for personal attack in that transitional, hybrid "time of darkness," that age that, on the verge of death, he saw as a time of craziness.

Postscript: Purwalēlana's comparative and very different experience of hybridity

In the 20 December 1866 issue of *Bramartani*, Abdulatip brought into the discussion another literary innovator, the *Bupati* of Kudus Condranēgara V (c. 1836-1885), better known as Purwalēlana (the first traveler). C. 1858

70. Errington, "To know oneself," p. 101.

71. Poerbatjaraka, *Kapustakan Djawi* (Jakarta/Amsterdam: Penerbit Djambatan, 1952), p. 15.

he undertook four trips throughout Central and East Java and to Batavia. He wrote a prose account of these travels which had just been published in two volumes over 1865-1866.⁷² Not only was the travelogue with its accounts of contemporary society a new genre for Javanese literature, but Purwalēlana also introduced an innovation by dividing Javanese words one from another while still in Javanese script, in which words were (and still are) not normally so divided. Abdulatip was greatly pleased that someone Javanese was writing about contemporary circumstances and prayed that others would follow this example. But he was astounded to see Javanese words divided from one another, a departure from established practice. Abdulatip commented that Purwalēlana hoped thereby to make it easier to read Javanese, but this way of dividing words had not been done since ancient times. So Abdulatip advised Purwalēlana that, even though he had done this with good intentions, few *priyayis* would endorse this innovation. Indeed, it wouldn't make reading easier but would rather confuse readers. He had tried this out on some others and it had made them laugh. Javanese script should continue to be written as it always had been. When Kyai Kerata joined the literary fray in *Bramartani* (3 Jan. 1867), he said that he was inclined to agree with Abdulatip's criticism of Purwalēlana (about dividing words in Javanese script). Purwalēlana did not reply to this criticism, although he was, as one would expect, among *Bramartani*'s readers, for a letter from him about several pre-Islamic antiquities in Gunung Kidul was published in the paper in 1869.⁷³

Whereas Ronggawarsita's literary innovations, reputation and personal identity were rudely attacked and – possibly because of that – he failed to achieve the status he thought rightly to be his, Purwalēlana / Condranēgara V had no grounds for concern about his standing in the eyes of Javanese society or of the colonial government. His two-volume *Lampah-lampahipun*, with their innovative descriptive travelogue format, after their initial publication in 1865-1866, were republished in 1877 and 1880. Others also followed him in writing travelogues. But the idea of trying to separate Javanese words flopped and Purwalēlana dropped this innovation in the second edition of his travelogues.⁷⁴ Throughout this time, his bureaucratic career prospered. He

72. Purwalēlana [pseud. for Condranagara V], *Cariyos bab lampah-lampahipun Raden Mas Arya Purwalēlana* (2 vols; Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1865-1866). These volumes were published again in Sēmarang in 1877 and in Batavia in 1880; see further Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese society*, pp. 144-145. For authoritative studies and translations, see Marcel Bonneff (transl.), *Pèrègrinations javanaises : Les voyages de R.M.A. Purwa Lelana : Une vision de Java au XIX^e siècle (c. 1860-1875)* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1986); and Judith E. Bosnak, and Frans X. Koot, with the assistance of Revo A.G. Soekatno (ed. and transl.), *Op reis met een Javaanse edelman: Een levending portret van koloniaal Java in de negentiende eeuw (1860-1875); De reizen van Radèn Mas Arjo Poerwolelono* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2013).

73. *BM* 7 Oct. 1869.

74. Bosnak, Koot and Soekatno, *Op reis met een Javaanse edelman*, p. 43 n. 5. See also Willem

was from a distinguished family of north coastal *bupatis*. After serving as the highest Javanese official (the *bupati*) of Kudus from 1858 to 1880, he went on to be *bupati* of Brĕbĕs from 1880 to his death in 1885. But he won no comparable literary distinction. Among most Javanese who are familiar with older literature, Ronggawarsita is still thought of as the last of the great *pujonggas*; one rarely hears the name Purwalĕlana. While Ronggawarsita's works – above all his *Sĕrat Kalatidha* – are frequently republished, after the 1880 edition no one republished *Cariyos bab lampah-lampahipun Raden Mas Arya Purwalĕlana* in Javanese for well over a century, so far as I am aware. A serious scholarly study of his work had to await the attention of Marcel Bonnef in 1986. This was followed in 2013 by the edition and translation by Bosnak, Koot and Soekatno.

Purwalĕlana's travelogues were remarkable and remain a valuable source for understanding 19th-century Java. His *Lampah-lampahipun* were, however, a secondary activity beside his core role as a top-level Javanese official within the Dutch colonial state. His essential realm of activity and his identity were those of a *bupati*. No doubt this status as a *bupati* made him a difficult target for some people to attack. Ronggawarsita was fair game but Purwalĕlana / Condranĕgara V was too grand a figure in the Javanese colonial hierarchy to be subjected to rude denunciations in the pages of *Bramartani*. Not for him was this a "time of darkness."

van der Molen, "Tulisan Jawa," in Henri Chambert-Loir (ed.), *Sadur: Sejarah terjemahan di Indonesia dan Malaysia* (Jakarta: KPG (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia), École française d'Extrême-Orient, Forum Jakarta-Paris, Pusat Bahasa, Universitas Padjadjaran, 2009), p. 324. I am grateful to Willem van der Molen for locating these references for me at a time when illness prevented me from consulting my own research materials.

