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EPISTEMIC EXPLORATION OF WISDOM SCIENCE AND PSYCHOSPIRITUAL CRTICISM IN THE NOVEL *MEARASA PINTAR BODOH SAJA TIDAK PUNYA* BY RUSDI MATHARI

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Abstract. Intellectual superiority illusions in religiosity and social life are the main critique in this study, which is particularly relevant in the modern era when outward appearances are often prioritized over inner sincerity. The analysis of the novel *Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* by Rusdi Mathari aims to uncover the symbols of Islamic dialogue that represent the psychosocial process of individuals facing social challenges such as morals, worship, and Islamic values. Using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach and qualitative methods through reading, observing, and noting, five wisdom narratives were found, addressing sincerity, moral introspection, the balance of vertical-horizontal relationships, as well as critiques of intellectual arrogance and formalistic rituals. This novel offers profound reflection, encouraging readers to internalize religious values substantively and positioning literature as a catalyst for change towards more meaningful and responsible spirituality.

Abstrak. Ilusi superioritas intelektual dalam keberagamaan dan kehidupan sosial menjadi kritik utama dalam penelitian ini, yang relevan di era modern ketika citra lahiriyah sering kali diutamakan daripada kejujuran batiniyah. Analisis terhadap novel *Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* karya Rusdi Mathari bertujuan mengungkap simbol-simbol dialog keislaman yang merepresentasikan proses psikospiritual individu dalam menghadapi tantangan sosial, seperti akhlak, ibadah, dan nilai-nilai islamik. Dengan pendekatan semiotika Charles Sanders Peirce melalui metode kualitatif melalui baca, simak, dan catat, ditemukan lima narasi hikmah terkait keikhlasan, introspeksi moral, keseimbangan hubungan vertikal-horizontal, serta kritik terhadap arogansi intelektual dan ritual formalistik. Novel ini menawarkan refleksi mendalam, sehingga mendorong pembaca menginternalisasi nilai religius secara substansial dan menjadikan sastra sebagai katalisator perubahan menuju spiritualitas yang lebih bermakna dan bertanggung jawab.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature plays an important role in language learning because it provides authentic language use, cultural understanding, and opportunities for critical thinking. Discourse analysis enables researchers to explore how language constructs meaning, identity, and ideology within literary texts. This study focuses on Ursula K. Le Guin's The Word for World is Forest and investigates how language represents cognition and worldview within imagined communities.

Literary works are manifestations of human intelligence in reflecting social, spiritual, and existential realities (Sayuti, 2022). As an artistic expression that carries intellectual and emotional depth, literature has long been a medium of criticism of the order of life that is not in harmony with the essence of humanity (Lafamane, 2020). In this discussion, literature functions not only as an aesthetic tool, but also as an instrument of social criticism that is able to portray various dimensions of human life (Yuliana Kua, 2017). Such critiques are often manifested in narratives that represent collective and individual experiences, leading to the dismantling of the value structures, norms and ideologies of society.

One of the most effective faces of literature in conveying social criticism and reflection on life is the novel (Febrilian et al., 2022). Having a longer narrative and a broader scope, novels are able to cover complex themes such as religion, spirituality, and human psychology (Gunarsih, 2014). As literary entities, novels serve not only as entertainment, but also as vehicles for deep philosophical exploration. Novels often serve as a medium to explore the dark side of humanity that is veiled by social and religious dogma, creating a contemplative space for its readers.

Rusdi Mathari's novel Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya emerges as one of the works that integrates social criticism with spiritual reflection. With the presence of a main character named Cak Dlahom, this small series of novels published by Buku Mojok in 2016 offers a unique perspective on everyday life that is full of paradoxes, both in religious and social aspects. Portrayed as an elderly widower living alone in a hut near the Pak Lurah's goat shed, Cak Dlahom is often dismissed by his fellow villagers for his eccentric behaviour and unconventional thinking. However, behind this judgement, Cak Dlahom has a deep understanding of religion and life, which he conveys through simple yet aesthetically meaningful conversations with the villagers.

Through interactions with characters such as Mat Piti and his daughter Romlah, the novel explores themes such as sincerity, the meaning of worship, and the essence of humanity. For example, in one story, Cak Dlahom explains the concept of sincerity by analogising it to the act of defecating, which is done without remembering or counting, thus emphasising the importance of doing good without expecting reward or recognition. Rusdi Mathari's writing style, which is also simple and easy to understand, allows readers to reflect on existing religious practices and social values. Through humour and dialogue that is close to everyday life, this novel invites readers to be pious not only for themselves, but also in social life.

Along with that, the novel also offers a deeper dimension of religious life through psychospiritual criticism. Beyond mere social rituals, Mathari explores the psychological condition of humans who are often trapped in the futility of unconscious worship. This phenomenon represents an imbalance between the outward and inward aspects of religious practice, which in psychospiritual studies can be interpreted as spiritual entanglement (Che Zarrina, 2001). In the theory of psychospiritual therapy, as proposed by Gerald Corey, effective therapy does not only focus on physical or emotional recovery, but also pays attention to the deep spiritual dimension (Ainul, 2017). In other words, this understanding involves a search for the meaning of life and the individual's relationship with the Almighty, which is one of the crucial

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aspects of this psychic healing process.

Linking this to the concept of wisdom contained in religious teachings, we see that wisdom is not just wisdom in a human context, but rather an ability that goes beyond mere rationality (Bastomi et al., 2017). According to Imam al-Qurthubi, wisdom refers to a deep knowledge of the laws of God that is not only understood through human reasoning, but also through revelation and divine guidance that is transcendental in nature (Mahlani et al., 2020). The wisdom does not only lead to an understanding of religious teachings, but also includes the correct application in everyday life, in every word and deed, as confirmed by Imam Mujahid who interpreted wisdom as *al-haqq fi al-qawli wal-fi'l.*

The novel also presents a deep criticism of the illusion of intellectual superiority that often plagues individuals in the context of religion and social life. Rusdi Mathari brilliantly describes how humans are often trapped in intellectual arrogance which actually obscures their ability to see the essence of truth. This psychospiritual critique becomes relevant in the context of modern life, when humans are often more concerned with external image compared to internal honesty.

This research aims to reveal the values and signs contained in the novel Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya by Rusdi Mathari that reflect psychospiritual criticism through the symbolic structure in the text. Through Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach, this research will explore the meaning implied in the symbols of Islamic dialogue in the novel, and how these symbols represent the psychospiritual process of individuals in facing a social life full of challenges such as morals, perfection of worship and Islamic content.

As one of the major figures in sign theory, Peirce formulated a semiotic system known as the triadic theory or triangle of meaning (Ratih Puspitasari, 2021). This theory describes the process of meaning formation through three main components, namely the representamen, object, and interpretant (A. Dwiyanto & Wihardi, 2019). The representamen (R) refers to the sign itself, the object (O) is something represented by the sign, and the interpretant (I) is the meaning resulting from the relationship between the representamen and the object interpreted by the individual (Gusmail, 2018).

In this research framework, every element in the novel text can be analysed as a representamen that leads to a certain object - be it social ideology, religious views, or the psychological condition of the characters. Symbols that appear in the novel, such as religious values or social actions that are performed, can be analysed as signs that have a certain object intended by the author, be it a form of criticism of social practices, human relations with humans, human relations with God or a superficial understanding of religion. This sign does not only function as an aesthetic element, but also as a tool that leads to a deeper understanding of the spiritual and social conditions of individuals in a broader context.

Peirce's semiotic theory distinguishes signs into three main categories, namely icons, indices, and symbols (Siregar & Wulandari, 2020). Icons are signs that have similarities or resemblance to the object they represent, such as pictures or other visual representations. An index, on the other hand, is a sign that has a causal relationship or contiguity with its object, such as traces or signs that indicate the existence of a larger event or phenomenon. While symbols are signs whose meaning is determined by social or cultural conventions, such as words in language or religious terms used in novels.

Based on the background explanation above, the researcher is interested in studying the novel Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya by Rusdi Mathari with the Charles Sanders Peirce semiotic approach to reveal the critical psychospiritual values and Islamic wisdom issues contained in it. This research aims to explore how symbols and signs in the novel function not

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only as social criticism, but also as a tool of spiritual enlightenment that can help society in achieving higher self-awareness. Therefore, this research is expected to contribute to understanding the application of wisdom in everyday life, as well as enriching the understanding of spiritual dynamics in social life. It is also hoped that through this research, readers will be able to see more about the connection between more esoteric religious practices and psychospiritual awareness, and encourage reflection on the importance of sincerity in understanding religion and facing the challenges of an illusory life.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a type of text analysis of literature studies or literature data collected to analyse a phenomenon using the content analysis method. Qualitative methods are defined as research methods used to understand phenomena based on ideographic perspectives and social realities (D. Dwiyanto, 2021). The data in this study are in the form of direct quotes in the form of sentences and contexts. The data source in this study is the content of the text of the novel Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya by Rusdi Mathari.

This research context is applied through a literature review that focuses on exploring theoretical references, the relevance of the issues raised, empirical data found, and significant scientific contributions. Literature review is a scientific activity carried out through comprehensive techniques to gather information and data supported by various reference tools in the library, such as reference books, results of similar research that has been done before, scientific articles, research notes, and journals related to the problem to be solved (Ovartadara et al., 2023). This research process is carried out systematically to classify, process, and formulate data using certain methods or reviews to identify solutions to the problems faced (Prayudi et al., 2023).

The data analysis process of this research refers to the Miles and Huberman analysis model which includes three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and inference drawing (Sugiyono, 2018). At the data reduction stage, selection, abstraction and categorisation of the information obtained in accordance with the relevance of the research were carried out. Next, at the data presentation stage, information is organised in a structured and systematic format, thus involving the identification of patterns and analytical focus. Finally, at the inference stage, the processed data was interpreted, and findings were integrated to produce valid conclusions based on the entire set of analyses.

The reference considered to strengthen the data in the topic of semiotic studies is the novel Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya. This research is consistent with the literature review method, which focuses on the similarity of theoretical studies on values, culture, and social norms elaborated through articles, books, and similar literature chosen as the main focus of discussion and knowledge contribution. This literature review is also able to formulate conclusions based on a compilation of research that serves as a reference for other researchers in focusing their studies (Julianto et al., 2023).

The method applied in this research is detailed in systematic stages according to the order of implementation, namely (1) read, (2) listen, and (3) record. The first stage involved reading the novel Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya by Rusdi Mathari with deep and repeated rigour, to ensure a thorough understanding of the novel's content. The second stage focuses on listening to snippets of dialogue, contextual circumstances, or sentences that potentially contain epistemic criticism of wisdom and psychospiritual issues. The third stage involved recording relevant quotations suspected of being full of messages, and analysing them using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach to reveal their meanings.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores segments in the novel Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya by Rusdi Mathari that are indicated to contain wisdom narratives and psychospiritual criticism. The analysis was conducted through Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach, which relies on three main components, namely the representamen, object, and interpretant. The following data presentation presents the relevant findings in the novel.

(Data 1)

'Mat, something that is obligatory is something that humans do not like to do. If people like to do it, why make it obligatory, Mat?...of course, Mat. The problem is: do you really like fasting?...if so, let's propose to Allah that Ramadan fasting should not be obligatory, let alone only once a month a year, because humans, including you, already like it...that's your problem. You should be honest with Allah that you don't like praying or fasting, but you are ready and willing to do what you don't like so that your status will be high before Allah. If you like it, then your status will not be high, Mat.' (Mathari, 2020:5-7)

In terms of object (O), the quote shows the concept of religious obligation in Islam which is taklifi or obligatory. In this case, it refers to divine commands that humans must fulfil without considering whether they like them or not. Obligations such as prayer and fasting, then, serve not only as formal rules, but also symbols of a test of human obedience to God. This concept confirms that the performance of worship aims to hone submission and sacrifice, as man's success in fulfilling these commandments becomes a measure of his closeness and rank before God. The quote uses reflective dialogue to criticise the human attitude that often equates liking worship with the level of devotion, whereas the true meaning of obligation lies in the willingness to carry out things that one dislikes.

Representatively, this dialogue is present as a sign that brings together the paradoxical narrative between fondness and spiritual obligation, articulated through rhetorical questions and criticism of erroneous views on the essence of worship. Meanwhile, the resulting interpretant is an understanding that religious obligations are not only normative, but also symbols of struggle and sincerity. The conclusion is that when doing something that is disliked, humans actually show the sincerity of faith and submission which ultimately improves their position before God.

(Data 2)

'Then when did you witness Allah?''I can't, Cak.''...who says? Allah says in the Qur'an: He is the beginning and the end, the visible and the invisible, and He knows all things, so Allah is visible, Mat...just like you finish breaking your fast, it's best if you want to know something about religion, also slowly. Little by little. If you take a lot at once, it will be dangerous for you. If you're full, maybe it's okay, Mat, but if you keep going crazy? You'll feel smart, like you know more than everyone else' (Mathari, 2020:17-19)

The quote is symbolic of the process of graduality in understanding theological concepts, particularly the essence of God's existence as described in the Qur'an. The object in this context refers to the belief that Allah is an entity that is both beginning and end, visible and invisible, as stated in the quoted verse. This dialogue implies the importance of a gradual approach in understanding metaphysical aspects, when speed and haste in learning matters of faith can lead to

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misunderstanding or even intellectual arrogance.

Representatively, this quote is articulated through a dialogue that combines authoritative statements based on sacred texts with practical analogies close to everyday experiences, such as breaking the fast. The dialogue becomes a sign that emphasises the relationship between human capacity to understand religious teachings and the need to maintain intellectual and spiritual balance.

The resulting interpretant is an understanding that the process of seeking and absorbing religious knowledge must be done slowly, carefully, and in accordance with the intellectual capacity of each individual. Through this quote, criticism is implied towards the tendency of humans to feel 'smart' and excessive in understanding religion, which can be harmful both mentally and spiritually. This reinforces the message that wisdom in understanding religion does not lie in the amount of knowledge gathered instantly, but rather in the ability to reflect and internalise meaning deeply and gradually.

(Data 3)

'A month ago? A year ago? Since you were born, do you remember how many times you pooped and peed?' "You don't remember either, Cak?" 'That's what ikhlas is...your deeds that you never remember...peeing and pooping are your deeds, Mat. You take something out of your body without holding it in and forgetting it immediately. You don't remember what it smells like, what colour it is, what it looks like. You consider peeing and pooping unimportant, even though it releases something that is very important for your stomach or kidneys. For your blood circulation, for your health.' (Mathari, 2020:42)

This excerpt (3) shows a symbol of authentic sincerity in performing deeds, when sincerity is identified through actions without pretensions that are not remembered or associated with certain impressions. The object in this analysis refers to the concept of ikhlas as the core of moral and spiritual teachings, which requires individuals to do good without paying attention to the recognition, results, or impact of such deeds. The physiological analogy used, a basic activity such as relieving oneself, reinforces this principle by showing that unremembered or overly conscious actions often have a fundamental impact on life, much like biological functions for bodily health.

Representatively, the dialogue serves as a sign that embodies the idea of sincerity through an everyday parable that is highly contextual, yet reflective. The description of 'peeing and pooping' is used as a medium to convey a deep spiritual message, emphasising the simplicity of action and the neglect of results or appreciation. This becomes a semiotic strategy to simplify complex concepts through concrete visualisation.

The resulting interpretant is an understanding that true sincerity is not something that is made explicit or used as a tool to build self-image. Instead, it comes in the form of the realisation that every deed done does not require recognition, just as the human body naturally performs biological functions without expecting attention or appreciation. This message criticises the human tendency to judge deeds based on external appreciation, while teaching that the meaningfulness of an action often lies in sincerity that is not tied to the outcome or memory of the action itself.

(Data 4)

'Do not pray if you do not know whom you are worshipping. If you do that too, you

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are like bow archery but without removing the arrow from the bow. Your prayers and so on are your business with Allah, but Sarkum the orphan and his poor mother should be all of our business...those people only have wealth and riches and are already reluctant to give alms. What if they are poor and destitute?' (Mathari, 2020:117)

This quote (4) represents a symbol of balance between the vertical dimension (human relationship with God) and the horizontal dimension (human relationship with others) in religious teachings (hablum minallah wa hablum minannas). The object refers to the idea that formal worship such as prayer is not just a mechanical ritual, but must also be based on a transcendental awareness of the God being worshipped. Without deep understanding, worship becomes meaningless and nothing more than a symbolic act without substance. This quote also highlights the importance of social care as a tangible manifestation of the practice of religious values, as exemplified through the concern for Sarkum's orphaned character and his poor mother.

Representatively, this dialogue is a sign that uses metaphorical similes to illustrate the importance of understanding the essence of worship. The simile of 'shooting a bow without releasing the arrow' illustrates the ineffectiveness of worship performed without appreciation of the object of worship, which is God. In addition, this dialogue implies criticism of egoistic behaviour that separates the spiritual dimension from social responsibility, such as indifference to the poor, even though the perpetrator has wealth and property.

The resulting interpretation is an understanding that the perfection of worship lies in the balance between spiritual appreciation and social practice. Prayer as a manifestation of relationship with Allah should not be separated from moral responsibility towards fellow human beings, especially those who are marginalised. This interpretation also conveys a moral critique of the human tendency to separate the ritualistic aspects of religion from fundamental human values, so that faith is not only measured through rites, but through alignment with those in need. The message asserts that true faith is realised in the harmony between obedience to God and concern for society.

(Data 5)

'My mouth often speaks words that hurt others. Even hearing my voice scares some people. I often feel like I'm speaking from my conscience, but I'm actually only planning to make others admire me and not look down on me. The words from my mouth I design to be as subtle as possible, but I mean to slice the feelings of others...I'm really afraid of my mouth. I was tired...then you came looking for me. What were you looking for? Dlahom? Dlahom's mouth? For what? So that my mouth can tell lies?... So that my mouth can entertain?...what a hypocrite I am. How evil my mouth is. Forgive me, O Allah' (Mathari, 2020:190-191)

This quotation (5) shows a symbol of deep introspection on the issue of communication ethics and the destructive impact of words spoken without moral control. The object refers to an individual's moral awareness of the power and danger of words, which can not only hurt others but also reflect hypocrisy and ego manipulation for personal gain. In this case, the object shows the duality of the function of communication: as a tool to convey the truth or, conversely, a means to deceive and emotionally hurt others.

Representatively, this quote is expressed through a personal confession full of honesty and inner contradictions, reflected in the fear of sin produced by the 'mouth'. The representamen

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includes a verbal confession of the evil done through words, which is illustrated as a 'lie' wrapped in the aesthetics of language but intended to hurt the feelings of others. Thus, the representamen becomes an explicit sign of the internal conflict between conscience and verbal actions that distort morality.

The resulting interpretant is the understanding that language and communication are not just tools for self-expression, but also carry a huge moral burden. Through this quote, individuals are reminded of the ethical responsibility of using language, where every word should reflect good intentions and honesty, not manipulation to gain recognition or harm others. The implied message is the importance of self-control and integrity in communication, while criticising the human tendency to use words to bolster the ego or justify immoral actions. It also implies that acknowledgement of mistakes and asking for forgiveness is the first step towards greater moral transformation.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Conclusion

This study reveals that the novel Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya by Rusdi Mathari explicitly contains wisdom narratives and psychospiritual criticism. These expressions are seen in various reflective dialogues. Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach shows that the representamen, object, and interpretant in this novel represent various religious concepts, such as sincerity, spiritual obligation, moral introspection, and the balance between vertical and horizontal relationships (*hablum minallah wa hablum minannas*). Through the analysed data, it was found that the author uses everyday analogies to simplify complex theological concepts, such as sincerity described through biological functions, or the importance of stages (*murokkabul iman*) in understanding religion. The dialogues also criticise the human tendency to get caught up in intellectual arrogance, mechanical rituals, and verbal manipulation for social recognition. The findings confirm that true spiritual value lies in honesty, submission and a balance between devotion and social responsibility.

Therefore, the novel Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya by Rusdi Mathari can be a basis for reflection for readers to internalise religious values more substantially. The message conveyed not only reminds readers of the importance of sincerity and balance in religious life, but also invites them to avoid the trap of formality and religious egocentrism. By bringing together theological, moral and social elements, Rusdi Mathari's work shows that literature can act as a catalyst for changes in consciousness, leading individuals to a more meaningful and responsible spiritual life.

B. Suggestions

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several suggestions are proposed for future research, pedagogical practice, and methodological refinement. Firstly, about strengthen the pedagogical bridge. This study identifies psychospiritual and wisdom based value in *Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya,* but it stops short of translating these findings into instructional application. Future research particularly within Indonesian language and literature education program should explicitly connect the identified wisdom narratives to literature-teaching design.

Secondly, calrify and justify the methodological framework. Subsequent studies using Pierce's semiotic triad should avoid combining multiple analytic paradigms without starting how each contributes distinctly to the analytiv process. A cleaner design woudl commit to Piercean semiotic analysis as the primary method and use Miles and Huberman only as the data

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management procedure feeding into it, with an explicing sampling rationale.

Thirdly, apply Peirce's sign typology explicitly, not just the triad. The theoretical section introduces the icon-index-symbol distinction but the results section analyzes only representamen-object-interpretant without classifying each finding by sign type Future work should categorize each data excerpt explicitly (is a given phrase functioning as an icon, index, or symbol?) to use the full analytic power of Peirce's framework rather than a partial application of it.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that Peircean semiotic analysis can uncover layers of psychospiritual meaning embedded in seemingly simple literary dialogue, positioning Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya as more than a work of social satire. The wisdom narratives identified here sincerity, moral instrospection, and the critique od intellectual arrogance remain relevan to contemporary religious and social life, where outward performance often eclipses inward integrity. It is hoped that is analysis serves as a starting point for further inquiry that more deliberately bridges literary semiotic interpretation with its practical application, particulary in contexts where literature is used as a tool for moral and spiritual formation.

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