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## **Transforming wayang for contemporary audiences: dramatic expression in Purbo Asmoro's style, 1989-2015.**

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## PROLOGUE

Let's say it's a wayang done in classical style. *Pak Camat* and *Pak Lurah*<sup>1</sup> arrive during Talu, stay for an hour or so, accompany their wives home, and then decide to come back to the wayang site. When they return, the first court scene narration hasn't even finished yet! And if they decide not to return? What have they gotten from the performance? If this is the way the performance precedes, by the time it's midnight what have we accomplished? And these days, people watching wayang only last until about midnight. Truly. Almost any region you go to, this is true. People can manage to stay only until about midnight. After midnight they will start to leave—some may go to the little *warung* and have something to drink but then they will go straight home, and the like. When we realize this we have to ask ourselves, if up to midnight is the window when the audience is the freshest, why not turn things around and make use of that time, so that when they go home they have gotten something out of the performance, and have experienced—even if only a little bit—each of the different elements of wayang? (Purbo Asmoro, Balai Soedjatmoko, May 2013)

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<sup>1</sup>The provinces of Indonesia, each led by a governor, are broken into regions called *kabupaten*, and then further divided into districts called *kecamatan*. *Kecamatan* are divided again into *kelurahan* and/or villages. *Pak Camat* is the generic name for the appointed head of a *kecamatan*, and *Pak Lurah* the appointed head of a *kelurahan*. At a wayang, they would sit up front as VIP guests, and would have been involved in either the sponsorship or the permissions for the wayang. When *Pak Bupati* let along *Pak Gubernur* are in attendance it is an unusual honor for the dhalang.

This chapter will examine the structure of prologues, as crafted by Purbo Asmoro for his all-night *garapan* performances over an 11-year period, from 2004 to 2015. As we will see, Purbo Asmoro crafts prologues with two main intents: to offer audiences as much storyline and variety as possible before midnight, and to firmly define his themes for the episode from the start. We will begin by examining the prologues to *Rama's Crown* and *The Grand Offering of the Kings* (Asmoro 2013) and then look briefly at a wide variety of other performances' prologues in order to draw broader generalizations about dramatic function and Purbo Asmoro's processes.

## What Do We "Get" in 30 Minutes?

### *Rama's Crown*

#### *Classical Opening*

What would audiences experience in the first half-hour of a classical performance, as opposed to a contemporary-interpretive performance? If we take the palace-classical performance of *Rama's Crown* as an example, in the first half-hour we have the opportunity to enjoy a beautiful gamelan piece (*Kabor*) and hear a familiar, standard poetic narration for the first audience scene. This is followed by two expansive *sulukan*, and elaborate greetings between the characters [MK-Class 1, tr 1]. Yet up to the half-hour mark (29 minutes to be precise, in this recording) we find out nothing specific about the lakon to be performed, beyond the information that it is from the *Mahabharata* story cycle and takes place during King Duryudana's reign in Astina Kingdom. As Purbo Asmoro alluded to in the above quote (exaggeration about the actual length of the narration aside) the *camat* and *lurah* officials are perhaps ready to go home at this point and yet, so far, the performance is identical to any of the 100 or more lakon that take place during Duryudana's reign.<sup>2</sup>

In the following transcription and translation of the opening narration to *Rama's Crown*, classical version, sections are highlighted that are specific to Astina Kingdom. If the audience scene took place in any other earthly kingdom, everything except the highlighted sections would be much the same. Of course the exact

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<sup>2</sup> It is impossible to name an exact number, as there are so many *lakon carangan*, with more appearing every decade. Lakon taking place during King Duryudana's reign in Astina Kingdom are the most commonly performed, and form the bulk of the standard, Central Javanese wayang repertory.

language of this standard narration varies among regions and among individual dhalang. But the same dhalang, performing two different lakon on two different nights in traditional style, would only need to adjust the highlighted sections to fit the kingdom in question, and would have committed this narration to memory early in his career. What is more, there are no phrases, or even single words, specific to this particular lakon in the entire excerpt.

### *Jejer Sepisan: The Kingdom of Astina*

[The *kayon* is removed from the middle of the *deboq* (banana log), twirled, brought lightly to the dhalang's face in reverence, and placed to the far right.]

→ *buka gendèr, Ketawang Gendhing KABOR, kethuk 2 kerep, sléndro nem*

[Enter two maid servants, King Duryudana, Durna, Sangkuni, and Kartamarma.]

(*Kabor, the gamelan comes down in volume.*)

NARRATION: From a vast and silent emptiness emerges existence. Which land is it, the place deemed *kaéka adi dasa purwa*? *Éka* meaning one, *adi* exalted, *dasa* ten, *purwa* beginning. Although the gods' creations are many, each sheltered by the arch of the sky, supported by the weight of the earth, and nestled in by ocean shores—and although many stand alone in their excellence—none are equal to the kingdom of **Astina**, also known as **Liman Benawi**. Thus it serves as the opening of our story. Search one hundred countries you will not find two, nor among a thousand, ten, to match this one.

The old adage is fitting: *panjang punjung, pasir wukir, loh jinawi, gemah ripah, tata tur raharja*. *Panjang*, as in far and wide its reputation; *punjung*, as in noble its name. *Pasir*, as in oceans; *wukir*, as in mountains. For it is an expansive country with mountain ranges as backdrop, rice fields to one side, planted fields to the other, and a great port as its entrance. *Loh*, for fertile is its soil; *jinawi*, as goods are readily available to all. *Gemah*, meaning the prosperity of trading continues unceasingly day and night, as there are no dangers of any kind hindering its path. *Aripah*, being a kind of bustle, reflected in the merchants from all over who flock here in search of opportunity, crowding together in harmony. Their roofs touch, their walls meet, making wide spaces feel cozy, so prosperous is the land. Livestock and fowl are tended in open fields untethered; by the day scattered about the fields grazing, while at dusk returning to their respective pens.

Palace, state and justice officials, every one is a pillar of wisdom and good judgment, eternally dedicated to the prosperity and health of the kingdom. This allows the tillers of the land to feel safe, reassured, and able to concentrate their efforts on the practice of farming. A kingdom considered to be an inspiring flame, a focus of light; firmly established, its fame widespread. Those nearby bow down in respect, while those from afar bend down in homage. Those in deference however, are not only from within Java but from across the sea as well. Numerous foreign kings profess allegiance to **Astina**, not because they have been defeated in battle, but simply because they are taken with the ideals of the kingdom. They even offer young maidens into the king's service, and in the appropriate season each year, pay annual tribute in the form of taxes and tokens, along with finery and filigree, raw goods, finished goods.

Who is the one holding the title Ruler of **Astina**? He with the right to be referred to as King **Duryudana** the Great; also known as **Kurupati**, **Jakapitana**, **Anggendarisuta**. "**Duryudana**" meaning a king extremely talented in battle. "**Kurupati**" as he heads up the entire lineage of the **Kuru** family. "**Jakapitana**" because when His Majesty was crowned king he was still a bachelor,

had not yet entered into marriage. And finally “Anggendarisuta” as His Highness is, of course, the eldest son of the revered Queen Gendari.<sup>3</sup>

It is said that King Duryudana is famous the world over as a generous and giving ruler, who enjoys distributing charity and serving the poor, yet at the same time is not well versed in matters of discipline. He indulges the every whim of his one hundred siblings residing with him in the palace. As a result, his brothers go overboard in their arrogant displays of power, position, and pride, and are forever cultivating their closeness with the king.<sup>4</sup> Yet, to describe the breadth of the colonies or the glory of the kingdom would take an entire night without stopping. Thus, we had best bring the narration to an end here. It is now Monday, and the king has appeared to hold court in the tiled Audience Hall, sitting on an ivory throne embossed in gold and bedecked with stones and gems. Under the throne lays a soft, luxurious carpet that exudes the scent of musk and is sprinkled with flowers. From left and right the king is being fanned with peacock plumes, causing his fragrance to waft all the way through to the outer courtyard.

There is a striking silence, with not even the sound of a cricket chirping; the leaves are motionless, the wind lifeless. All that can be heard is the lilting sound of the court gamelan, complimented by the chattering of the birds perched in the banyan tree, together with the sounds of the court’s craftsmen—brass workers, goldsmiths and blacksmiths—all busy at work. Heard from inside the king’s Audience Hall—“cling, clang, cling, clang”—their rhythm interlocks in a pattern resembling gamelan, enhancing the air of beauty that takes hold over the Audience Hall. The courtyard is packed with flying pennants, large parasols, and ceremonial umbrellas, making it seem almost overcast and dark. Officials appearing to pay homage before the king overflow like a rising tide, reaching all the way to the rear gate of the palace grounds.

Now who is he, sitting respectfully alongside the king? He is the court tutor, the priest Durna, also known as Kumbayana. And sitting cross-legged, with his head bowed in humility before the ruler, we see the Chief Minister, Sir Sangkuni. Not to be forgotten is Prince Kartamarma, the court keeper of records, who is poised, ready to be directed. After all have been in position for some time, prepared for the audience, the king gives a signal to his chief minister that he is ready to speak.

In summary, 87% of the 1,046 total words are entirely generic, 13% are specific to any lakon opening in Astina Kingdom, and are highlighted here, and none of the words are in any way specific to this lakon. A signal is then given for the gamelan to come up in volume, which has been playing the first section (*mérong*) of *Kabor* softly. The musicians then move on to the second section of *Ktw Gd Kabor* (*inggah ladrang*), which, depending on what treatment is used, could result in a musical interlude lasting anywhere from two to five more minutes.

After two lengthy, atmospheric poems (*sulukon*) are sung by the dhalang, the members of the court exchange the formal greetings below. These greetings are specific to the relative position of each of the characters present, so the highlighting

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<sup>3</sup> Although this section is specific to Astina, the exact same general format would be followed for any kingdom: a list of the many different names of the king.

<sup>4</sup> This section is rather unusual in its criticism of King Duryudana, and reflects a more modern realism, to be discussed further in the next chapter. Purbo Asmoro took this section from *Pakem Pedalangan Lampahan Makutharama*, Siswoharsoyo, 1979. It is the only passage that actually addresses Duryudana’s character. In a typical palace-classical narration more praise for the king would be in its place. Sometimes it was difficult for Purbo to consistently stay within the restraints of palace-classical style for this project, and his *garapan* approach seeps through, even in this performance.

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technique above is not applicable. The exchanges would not be repeated verbatim in another episode, as one or two of the characters might be different, but the general wording, type of greeting, and spirit of the content would be the same. This type of dialogue simply communicates an elaborate show of respect between one character and another, extreme humility on the part of court members, and a bit of small talk, with nothing specific to the lakon.

**DURYUDANA:** My respects Durna, beloved elder. I greet your arrival in the Audience Hall with open arms and the greatest of deference.

**DURNA:** Ah well, my, my, yes, Your Highness. My heart is overflowing with joy to be here. I accept this greeting, and can only hope that I may live up to the expectations. As your elder from Sokalima, I offer my deepest prayers and wishes in the name of His Highness, the King.

**DURYUDANA:** I hold your good wishes in the highest esteem and consider them to be a precious amulet; may they enhance my strength and steadfastness. My elder Durna, perhaps it comes as a surprise that I sought you out and asked you to appear before me today.

**DURNA:** Because of the urgency of the summons by Your Imperial Highness, I traveled the entire way from the hermitage to the Audience Hall in the greatest strides possible. Even if my garments got torn a bit on the way, I paid no heed. Does His Majesty require my expertise with regard to the secrets of success in life, the key to power of the spirit, or how to attain physical resilience and strength? If so, I am more than ready and willing, right here and now, to impart this knowledge to His Highness.

**DURYUDANA:** I feel the strength from the magical *tala* oil that was applied to my entire body those many years ago has served me well enough in those areas. I apologize dear Durna, my elder, please be seated comfortably.

**DURNA:** Ah well, my, my, yes, whatever you wish. Nothing is lacking with regard to my comfort here, Your Highness.

**DURYUDANA:** Uncle Sangkuni, do I understand correctly that it engendered a sense of nervousness in your heart when I called upon you to appear in the Audience Hall?

**SANGKUNI:** I am your humble servant. I answered His Majesty's summons in extreme haste, and as I was waiting outside it was as if my chest were tight with concern. I felt an ominous and unsettling premonition in my depths. But now that I am in the presence of His Majesty the Great, a sense of calm has taken over my heart. It is as if I have been washed over by fresh morning dew drops, and all apprehension has vanished.

**DURYUDANA:** How is that the case Uncle? Please do explain further.

**SANGKUNI:** Ah yes, you see I feel as though my very existence is protected by being before Your Highness, Great Ruler on this Earth. Thus I urge His Majesty to employ me as you wish. Hand me the most difficult of missions and the most far-flung of tasks. If I meet with injury find a way to use that to your gain, or cast me out without a care and continue on. I am completely at Your Majesty's beck and call.

**DURYUDANA:** Don't misunderstand your situation, Uncle. I would never order your punishment or pain. If you were to experience death or serious harm, it would only be as a result of your bravery in all matters, and your great sense of responsibility, which enables you to engage

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in the most complex of problems. Now Uncle, what is the current situation across my kingdom, the land of Astina?

**SANGKUNI:** Ah, yes, yes, well, the people are in complete solidarity with your reign. Their hearts are joined and they work with one intent and purpose, which is to strive day and night to enhance His Majesty the King's wellbeing.

**DURYUDANA:** Excellent, I am thoroughly pleased to hear that, and express enthusiastic approval. Now, I ask of you respected elder, dear Durna, please come forward a bit and take a seat, as there is something troubling me that I would like to explain at this time.

These greetings (known as *bagé-binagé*, or exchanges of acknowledgement) are followed by another shorter *sulukan*. At the half-hour mark, Duryudana finally brings up a dream he had, in which a boon is to be handed down to a worthy mortal by the gods.

Pak Camat, Pak Lurah, and their wives, if for any reason asked about the lakon's plot upon returning home after 30 minutes, could only offer the information, "He was doing one of those *wahyu* (boon from the gods) stories and it started in Duryudana's kingdom." Even the one detail about the *wahyu* became clear only in the last few seconds of their time at the wayang.

### *Contemporary-Interpretive Opening*

By contrast, how much of the plot would Pak Camat, Pak Lurah, and the audience have gotten out of the contemporary-interpretive performance of *Rama's Crown* in the same 30 minutes?<sup>5</sup> Below is a summary of the first half-hour, followed by a word-for word transcript in English [MK-CInt 1, tr 1]:

#### **Prologue Part A: *Gara-gara Kayon Narration*<sup>6</sup> (8 minutes)**

All sorts of natural disasters are ravaging the land in ever increasing frequency. Those hardest hit by these tragedies are women, children, and the poor. Arjuna appears distressed by the suffering. The Kurawa brothers dismiss the plight of the victims as not their concern, and embark on a 40-day, 40-night orgy of gambling and drinking.

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<sup>5</sup> This is a comparison of the unfolding of the plotline only. It is meant to support Purbo Asmoro's own comments in seminars, interviews, and performances about how he strives to offer audiences more storyline than just a standard, generic narration by 10:00 PM. Classical performances are profoundly beautiful aesthetic experiences, and these comparisons are not meant to challenge that.

<sup>6</sup> These sub-headings for sections of the prologue are mine, not Purbo Asmoro's, and are explained later in the chapter. I include them here so they are available for reference later, after the categories have been explained.



**Prologue Part B: A Protagonist and His Adviser** (11 minutes)

As Arjuna turns to meditation for an answer, his adviser and loyal companion Semar appears from above. Semar encourages Arjuna to take a step toward action, even if he may feel helpless to face such overwhelming obstacles alone. He praises Arjuna's feeling of uncertainty, explaining that humility is a positive quality. He reminds Arjuna that he must always strengthen his spiritual and intellectual understanding in life, while seeking balance and perspective. Finally, Semar tells Arjuna about the boon, known as the Legacy of Rama's Crown, to be handed down by the gods to a worthy mortal, and encourages Arjuna to try to attain it. Arjuna departs.

**Prologue Part C: An Ogre Antagonist** (9 minutes)

Kumbakarna, from the days of the *Ramayana*, appears. He is restless and being pursued by his older brother Dasamuka. They are caught up in a kind of ill-defined middle-world hell, with no chance of a peaceful afterlife. Dasamuka feels perfectly happy to live there, as he has secured a position as ruler. Kumbakarna, on the other hand, refuses to accept this eternal damnation. He knows this has happened because of his association with Dasamuka's criminal deeds in life, but he plans to strive for a way out.

**Prologue Part D: A Love Scene** (10 minutes)

Kumbakarna takes off in search of redemption, and is visited by the spirit of his wife, Kiswani. [This is the half-hour point. The full prologue lasts for eight more minutes, during which Kiswani and Kumbakarna express their eternal love. She assures her husband that the answer lies in finding his little brother Wibisana, who is still living, and asking his advice about achieving peace in the afterlife.]

**Prologue Part A: Gara-gara Kayon Narration<sup>7</sup>**

*Ayak-ayak Anglaèng, pélog lima*

*As a sacred and powerful mantra says,  
"Om ... may there be no obstacles to our entreaty,"  
Wellbeing to all before us,  
As the powers that heal come forth,  
Maladies among us are snuffed out,  
The death of all maladies leads to wellbeing,  
Wellbeing for all the living.*

[The three *kayon* are removed from *debog* (banana log) in various combinations, and twirled.]

→ *Sampak Galongan, pélog lima*

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<sup>7</sup> The following transcript may be a lot to digest, but really that is the point of inserting it here in full. I want the reader to sense the dense, fast-paced, transition-filled nature of some sections of the prologue, and yet the philosophical nature of other sections. I mean to point out the specificity (lack of generic content) in the vocal and narrative texts, and the vast contrast between this 30 minutes and the first 30 minutes of the palace-classical performance. To get an idea of how this prologue represents aspects of the entire plotline, read the classical version summary in Appendix 2.

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[The flame sides of the *kayon* face forward, depicting destruction caused by natural disasters.]

(*Sampak Galongan, sirep*)<sup>8</sup>

→ male chorus sings an *ada-ada* over *Sampak Galongan*:

*The land in chaos, the tumult horrifying,  
Ravaging destruction, all is as if swept away,  
Great suffering takes hold, finding its end in death.*

(*Sampak Galongan, udhar then sirep*)

**NARRATION:** The universe is aging. Disasters rock the earth. Violent earthquakes; landslides; volcanoes erupting, spitting out oozing hot magma that envelopes the villages. Tempests sweep away all foliage from the earth. The ocean waters are rising, rolling over the coastline. Hot mud springs up and spills out from the center of the earth. Lava overflows, boulders overturn. Only the chaos of death, and the multiple cries of the victims.

(*Sampak Galongan, udhar*) → *Garap Balungan Tiga-Perempat, pélog lima*

[Villagers are portrayed as victims of the natural disasters.]

VILLAGERS: Help! Help! Oh my, what's to become of me!

(*Tiga-Perempat, sirep*)

[Arjuna hears the cries.]

(*Tiga-Perempat, udhar*)

[Dursasana appears.]

→ crashed into by *Lancaran PANCER PAPAT, pélog lima*

DURSASANA: Ha, ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha, ha. Come on guys! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

[The Kurawa are seen passing through the village.]

SANGKUNI: Let's go my friends, keep it flowing!

KARTAMARMA: Hey, bring that bottle too. And the flask, the flask. Don't leave that behind either.

DURMAGATI: Don't forget the gin rummy, the gin rummy. And the poker cards, and the rummy cards. Hey, are you playing against me?

(*Pancer Papat, sirep*)

DURSASANA: Ha, ha, ha, ha. Uncle, ha, ha, ha, ha, don't just stand there, come on! Let's keep the party going for 40 days and 40 nights.

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<sup>8</sup> *Sirep* is a musical command referring to when the gamelan comes down in volume so that the dhalang's voice, (or, in some more contemporary treatments like this, the musicians' voices) can be heard over the instruments. In addition to reducing volume, the louder instruments like *demung*, *saron*, *peking*, and *bonang* drop out temporarily, and the drummer often leads the musicians into a more relaxed tempo. The opposite of *sirep* is *udhar*, when the gamelan comes back up to normal volume, instrumentation, and tempo. The dhalang gives a signal to the drummer from the *keprak* or *cempala*, who in turns passes on the *sirep* or *udhar* signal to the musicians. "Over" in these transcriptions is a translation of *ditumpangi*, "crashed into," for *ditabrak*, "sudden halt," for *suwuk mronggol*.

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**SANGKUNI:** Yeah, yeah, I'm all for that. Sounds good.

**DURSASANA:** Don't pay attention to all those screaming, starving masses. Ha, ha, ha, ha. If they don't eat today that's their problem. What's all our wealth for anyway if we don't take advantage of it? Why should we put it toward handouts for the rabble?

**SANGKUNI:** Yeah, that's right. Anyway there'll be someone to take care of all those disaster victims. And if not, let them find their own refuge or something, it's not our concern. Come on, let's get back to the festivities.

**DURSASANA:** That's right. After you.

*(Pancer Papat, udhar)*

**SANGKUNI:** Don't stop now my friends. Even if you have to find a dark, secluded place, keep it up!

→ *Garap Balungan Tiga-Perempat, pélog lima*

**[Villagers are portrayed again, victims of the disasters.]**

**VILLAGERS:** Oh no. Now a fire has engulfed everything! We're done for. Oh no! Where will we go now? My child, my child is dead!

→ *Sampak Tlutur, pélog lima*

**[Arjuna is seen inspecting the destruction in the village.]**

*(Sampak Tlutur, sirep)*

→ **male chorus sings the melody** *Pangkur Macapat, pélog lima over Sampak Tlutur*

*Enflamed in devastating havoc,  
Everything strewn helter-skelter,  
Ablaze, smoldering, burnt to ashes,  
Arjuna looks on with concern,  
As he asks for the protection of The All Powerful,  
In his heart focusing his prayers ...*

→ **crashed into by** *Sampak Tlutur, sirep*

### Prologue Part B: A Protagonist And His Adviser

**[Arjuna appears alone, in great distress.]**

→ *Ketawang DURMA RANGSANG, pélog lima*

*(Durma Rangsang, sirep)*

**NARRATION:** An overcast sky hangs darkly over the earth, as an even deeper blackness tightens its hold from all directions. The brightness of the Sun God fades in sorrow, like looking into the eyes of one in mourning. Anguish and hopelessness mix with despair, filling Prince Dananjaya's heart. He reflects on the situation in the world: the breakdown of meaning in life, the loss of compassion. Advisor Semar, the Venerable Badranaya, senses his troubles and appears at his side.

→ **crashed into by** *Monggangan, sirep*

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**A solo male vocalist sings the melody *Pangkur Gedhong Kuning, pélog lima* over *Monggangan* as Semar appears:**

*May all evil spirits be warded off,  
All in service to Durga-Kala be pushed aside,  
Those with heads and those with feet,  
Those not visible to the eye,  
Those with throats, with hair, or with shoulders,  
May they be pushed aside,  
To the very depths of the ocean.*

→ *Ketawang PANGKUR KAWEDHAR, pélog lima*

(*Pangkur Kawedhar, sirep*)

**SEMAR:** Ah, ah, ah, ah, *mbegegeg ugeg-ugeg hemel-hemel sadulita*. Oh, my lord, my Prince. You look so confused. The world is different now. Things have changed.

**ARJUNA:** Yes, my elder, Semar. I just can't stand to watch all the destruction. Why is it that over and over again, the victims are the poor and disadvantaged? Why does life have to be like this, my elder?

**SEMAR:** It's very rare you know. Very rare that a prince such as yourself takes these things to heart. Usually once someone is in control of a kingdom—whether in the role of leader, member of the army, or prince—they forget where they have come from. They forget that everyone has their roots somewhere as a commoner. My lord is a true protector.

**ARJUNA:** My elder Semar, it is as though my innards have been ripped to pieces or my heart cut in half. These disasters continue unabated. As if month after month there is no end to them. It pains me to watch the lives of everyday people as they limp through life. Living as refugees and having to search for every small handful of food. Sweating from head to toe in their efforts and weeping as they travel from place to place, yet still faced with new disasters everyday. And then there are those who simply look on, smiling and laughing. Capable of coming to their assistance, but not willing to lend a hand to the poor. Is the world simply beyond hope? Are we faced with a culture of contemptible attitudes, a weakening of truth and idealism, and a basic loss of confidence, which is causing humanity to leave its integrity behind?

**SEMAR:** Yes, you're not mistaken. What you say is completely valid, Janaka. Overturn any piece of land and look under any parcel of the sky; it's not easy to find someone who can truly empathize with the feelings of the commoners. It's quite rare. As time goes on I just keep coming back to the old phrase: *tunggak jarak mrajak, tunggak jati mati*. Meaning, those of inferior quality are a dime a dozen, and those of high quality few and far between.

**ARJUNA:** My elder Badranaya, I do plan to act, but it's as if I'll be all alone.

**SEMAR:** There's no reason to feel helpless, my Prince. If we start from what we ourselves are each able to do, it will always be of use to society at large. Look, here is some advice. Wise elders of the past used to say: Whoever feels he is the best will inevitably reach a dead end. Whoever feels he has gathered plenty of wisdom will eventually start slipping. Whoever feels he is cleverest of all is only proving that he is in fact quite stupid. And lastly, whoever feels that it is only he who is truly perceptive is quite definitely blind.

**ARJUNA:** Your advice is profound if one really thinks about it, my elder Semar.

**SEMAR:** Alright, alright my Prince. But I hope you will hold these ideas deeply to your heart, so they may be of use in your work to improve this nation and its people. So that you may offer your

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opinions and put forth your effort. But now is the time to act. The first key is to strengthen your spiritual side. Next, you should continue to search out knowledge to enrich your understanding. Thirdly, live your life in balance and with dedication to society. It's admirable to have high ideals and goals, but you must work toward achieving them patiently. And lastly, remember where life is going in the end. If people would just keep in mind that eventually we all return to where we came from and our life on Earth will come to an end, there wouldn't be so many taking the wrong turn.

**ARJUNA:** Then let's get on with it, my elder. Please stay by my side though.

**SEMAR:** Actually there is some light at the end of the tunnel. The Creator of the Universe is planning to hand down a great gift: the basic principles of thought that the leaders of yore lived by, known as the Legacy of Rama's Crown. This will be bestowed from above by a chosen representative of the Great God in the Heavens who has been appointed to hand down this legacy. And hence my Prince, I urge you to go forward. Because whether your country and its people are facing enlightened times or times of darkness, the only way to fix the problems of the world is to start with yourself. This is the moment. The time has come my Prince, to start your quest to become the holder of the Legacy of Rama's Crown.

→ **crashed into by** *Ladrang RONING TAWANG, pélog lima, loud style*

[Arjuna and Semar depart.]

→ **crashed into by** *Sampak Tlutur, pélog lima*

## Prologue Part C: An Ogre-Antagonist

### Tawang Gantungan: The World of the Afterlife

[Kumbakarna enters.]

**KUMBAKARNA:** Oh dear gods in the heavens, dear gods.

→ *Palaran Dhandhanggula, pélog lima* **sung by a solo male vocalist:**

*There is yet another outstanding example,  
The great prince of Alengka,*

[Dasamuka appears.]

*Known by the name of Kumbakarna,*

→ **alternate back to** *Sampak Tlutur, pélog lima*

**DASAMUKA:** Hey Kumbakarna! You bastard! Where are you going?

→ **alternate back to** *Palaran Dhandhanggula, pélog lima*

*What's more he is of ogre form,  
Although with noble aspirations,  
Back during the great war in Alengka,  
He held a vow,  
That he would not oppose his older sibling,  
Dasamuka holding fast to his dictate,  
To fight against the monkey troops.*

## Ch 6: Prologue

**DASAMUKA:** You devil, get back here! Don't you dare leave!

*(ompak Palaran, crash ending)*

*Ada-ada Sanga Jugag, pélog lima  
Leng-lenging driya mangu-mangu,  
Mangun kung kandhuan rimang,  
Lir léna tanpa kanin.<sup>9</sup>*

**KUMBAKARNA:** Why are you following my every step, never letting me out of your sight Dasakumara?

**DASAMUKA:** Cursed spirit! Where do you come off not enjoying life here in Tawang Gantungan? This is the parcel of heaven I am in charge of, I'll have you know.

**KUMBAKARNA:** You are sadly mistaken in your perception. Your soul may experience this as heaven, but actually this is clearly a place for the damned. Oh my dear brother, my dear brother. From when we were tiny tots through to our days as men living in the same kingdom, I never dreamed that in the afterlife I would end up in this hell hole because of my association with your sins.

**DASAMUKA:** Hey! Shut your mouth, you insolent lowlife! What do you take me for? Who said I am a sinner? The fact of the matter is, I feel proud of my life here in Tawang Gantungan. I continue to have the status of a leader. I live here in the role of king. If necessary I still have the capability to take over the entire universe. Don't you see that?

**KUMBAKARNA:** Yeah, yeah, keep it up, keep it up. If that's what you've set your mind to do—indulging your every desire—I won't stand in your way. But understand this, my brother. Every living thing on Earth, whether it walks, crawls, or flies, will eventually have to answer to He Who Created the Universe. You need to understand that there are three types of death, the first being a disgraceful death. Those who end their own lives: stab themselves, hang themselves, or in some other way commit suicide. This kind of death is not allowed in the eyes of He Who Created the Universe, and leads you to hell. That's one type. The second type is an ambiguous death. This is when you die because you have fallen ill. The fate of those who die from an illness depends on how they have lived their life. If they lived a good life and followed pure and virtuous practices they will go to heaven. But if they paid no attention to righteous teachings, they will certainly be damned to hell. And the final type of death is martyrdom.

This is what I have striven for since the days of Ngalengka and it's the death the brave and courageous wish for. Why is that? When a priest dies in meditation, when a soldier perishes defending his country, when a person dies in the pursuit of a promise they have made—one that reflects princely principles—this is the type of death that leads one directly to heaven. And yet, although I fought for Ngalengkadiraja and defended my country and people using princely ideals, it turns out I still ended up tainted by your heinous character and depraved nature.

If you're planning on taking over the world, that's your prerogative and your choice. But you are dragging me—an innocent victim who has not sinned—down with you. I'm being thrown into the same despicable pot as you. I can't take it here anymore. Instead of rising to heaven I am to become one with the rocks and the trees. The superstitious will chant before me once a month on an auspicious Friday, like some sort of sacrificial temple offering. Forgive me my brother. This is no heaven to me but rather a place of torture. You go ahead and continue your endless pursuit to claim the reincarnation of Widawati as yours, but I have no intention of aligning myself with you anymore.

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<sup>9</sup> Just as was the practice in the Lontar publication (Asmoro 2013), any *suluk* that serve a conventional function and for which the meaning is not directly tied to the dramatic action are not translated in the text. This is meant to reflect how a typical audience member would experience such *suluk*—as atmospheric.

## Ch 6: Prologue

*Sampak Tlutur, pélog lima*

**DASAMUKA:** You bastard! Get back here Kumbakarna!

**[Kumbakarna departs and is intercepted by his wife, Kiswani.]**

*(Sampak, Yogya-style ending)*

### Prologue Part D: A Love Scene

→ *mérong Gendhing LOGONDHANG, kethuk 2 kerep, pélog lima, garap koor Semarangan*

*(Logondhang, sirep)*

**KISWANI:** The truth is, for some reason wherever I may be, I sense that my esteemed husband Kumbakarna is trapped in some sort of perilous place.

**KUMBAKARNA:** That's right Kiswani. It's amazing that even though you are in heaven you can still sense what your husband is going through. That's the proof of a completely dedicated spouse: one who stays loyal through and through, from life on Earth through to the afterlife. The thing is, I'm being damned under the same umbrella because of my brother Dasamuka's evil actions. Regardless of my attempts to behave in accordance with all guidelines of princely behavior, this seems to be the fate that has befallen me. You don't know how much I appreciate it Kiswani, that you are here and can empathize with my suffering.

**KISWANI:** The sign of a loyal spouse is not only support when things are going well, but also when the road gets difficult, my husband.

**KUMBAKARNA:** Oh my dear wife. You're right, and your words fill my heart.

**KISWANI:** I resolve not to return to heaven until I know my esteemed husband has found his rightful place in the afterworld.

*Logondhang crashed into by Pathet Jugag, pélog lima*

**KUMBAKARNA:** I cherish your words so, my love. Imagine if one overturned every piece of land or looked under every parcel of the sky and were able to find even just three other women like you, my dear Kiswani. Tranquility could be achieved for all. No wonder that a spouse can also be called a soul mate. Many refer to their wife as their soul mate, since the love of a wife toward her husband has to be as great as the love she holds toward herself. There are also those who refer to a wife as their ultimate companion, which means the wife will be completely faithful to her spouse in every way. When a husband has met with good luck and success in life, the wife befriends him in his happiness. But when the husband is suffering in some way, the wife acts as a motherly caretaker, trying to cheer him up.

**KISWANI:** My deepest respect my husband. But you know, something has come up that is very possibly a way out of your suffering.

**KUMBAKARNA:** How's that my dear?

**KISWANI:** The gods in the heavens are planning to reveal the principles by which Sri Rama lived in generations past. As we speak, a priest has taken up residence in Swélagiri, in the Duryapura Forest. This chosen one will hand down the gift leading to world peace. I think it would be best, if my husband agrees, for you to go find your little brother Gunawan Wibisana, who has also recently taken on the personage of a priest. Gunawan, ever since the early days, apprenticed under

## Ch 6: Prologue

His Highness King Rama the Great. That's why I believe that your little brother could be the vehicle through which you may find a solution.

**KUMBAKARNA:** Oh my ...

*Sampak Sanga, pélog lima*

**KUMBAKARNA:** Oh my dear Kiswani I can't thank you enough, as you have reminded me to request help from my sibling. Of course, of course. I ask for your good wishes Kiswani, so that I might find a way to enter heaven.

**KISWANI:** My deference will accompany your travels, my esteemed husband.

*Sampak Sanga, pélog lima*

**[Kumbakarna departs, scene disperses.]**

Clearly Pak Camat, Pak Lurah, their wives, and the audience, would have experienced a dense and meaningful (*padat*) 30 minutes in the contemporary-interpretive opening. They come away after the first half-hour knowing, as in the classical version, that the lakon is *Mahabharata*-based, takes place during King Duryudana's reign in Astina, and concerns a boon to be handed down from the gods, but they know much more about the boon than in the classical version. They also find out that Arjuna will play a major role as the protagonist for the night, rather than Bima, Puntadéwa, Kresna, Gathutkaca, Abimanyu, Wisanggeni, Srikandhi, or any number of other common protagonist figures during the Duryudana era. In addition, they have learned that this lakon will concern a number of *Ramayana*-based figures and specifically Kumbakarna, who is on a mission to find a way out of middle-world hell, and into an eternity of peace. But the 30-minute prologue offers much more than that, as described below by taking a look at each individual performance element.

### *Scene Structure*

The classical version presents only one scene: the Astina Kingdom court audience scene. Even at that, by the first half-hour, the court audience scene has simply been set up, with discussion barely poised to begin.

In the contemporary-interpretive version, the audience experiences four types of scenes in 30 minutes: a highly dramatic depiction of the contrast between the Pandhawa and Kurawa characters' reactions to tragedy, a philosophically-based dialogue in which Semar gives advice to Arjuna, the distraught and emotional state



## Ch 6: Prologue

of the ogre Kumbakarna and his brother Dasamuka's rough and flippant response, and finally a touching love scene between Kumbakarna and his wife, Kiswani. The four small-scale scenes within the prologue, each offering a different emotional profile, are only 8, 11, 9, and 10 minutes long respectively, as opposed to 30 minutes spent simply setting up a court scene in the classical version. Purbo Asmoro crafts the scenes (*garap adegan*) with a concern for both content and variety, rather than a concern for regulations and traditional structures. He also considers the rhythm needed to keep the audience "on the edge of their chairs" from the opening, yet rejects relying exclusively on ogre-dance or battle attractions, as many prologues from the *hura-hura* era did. As Purbo Asmoro often comments in public, an altered aesthetic, differing audience expectations, and the fast pace of modern life all demand a new approach to the rhythm and timing of the scenes in a performance. He describes this in *Limbukan*, during a performance in Eromoko, Wonogiri on 19 March 2014:

**LIMBUK:** Don't the elder dhalang get angry with you? You're destroying the patterns in a wayang performance!

**CANGIK:** It's not destroying anything, my dear, we're in different times. We're in global times. The world has become one, time goes by faster, people insist on everything coming their way instantly, ever faster, clearer, matter of fact, to the point. They aren't interested in all that time spent on etiquette-determined rules. But that's not to say that conventional practice is bad, not at all—we preserve it and do our own thing at the same time, going in parallel. Which parts do we take, which parts do we like. Wayang in the Kraton style is my everyday job. My everyday job in the sense that I work with that style every single day on campus. *Kabor* for Astina Kingdom, then *Damarkèli*, *Titipati*, *Kedhaton Bentar*, *Semukirang*.

**LIMBUK:** Oh, I see.

**CANGIK:** My daily bread.

**LIMBUK:** Oh.

**CANGIK:** So there is no way someone like me is going to change the structures of the elders and our ancestors, but I myself, as a dhalang, am facing a different era.

**LIMBUK:** Yeah.

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**CANGIK:** Just think about it. Imagine the wayang started late due to too many speeches and such, like tonight,<sup>10</sup> and then I start with an audience scene, maybe *Krawitan*, that long piece, do you know it? What's more if I decide to stick with all the formal introductions, all the regulations from tradition. It would eat up an entire hour just to get that far. It's too long, too long.

### *Theme and Character*

As described in Chapter 3 on *pakeliran padat*, a *garapan* practitioner begins his planning by choosing a focus, theme, or message that will determine how other elements are treated throughout the lakon. As noted also in Chapter 3, this is not a priority of the classical tradition, and certainly not in the first half-hour of the performance. In the all-night *garapan* performance of *Makutharama*, there are strong hints right in the prologue as to what the two themes will be. In an interview in October of 2007, Purbo Asmoro described his vision of the theme for the *padat* version of *Rama's Crown*:

Great and virtuous leaders can in fact overcome the suffering of the people. A great leader can and does make a difference. Moreover, the actions of one person—starting from their own internal process, their own behavior—can change the world. In short, we all make a difference by setting an example, but for a virtuous leader it is absolutely a priority.

In an interview in January of 2014, Purbo elaborated on his focus for the all-night version:

Well the primary theme still concerns leadership, how great leaders do make a difference, and individuals do make a difference. Arjuna will make a difference, as long as he starts from inside and works to change the world starting with himself. But in the contemporary-interpretive performance, there is time to devise a second focus and a second theme: Kumbakarna and Wibisana, and the nature of death. This sub-plot is going on entirely separately from Arjuna's process of growth as a leader. Kumbakarna needs to reconcile his decisions in life and what they mean for his eternal existence. Wibisana needs to examine his life and whether he is prepared for death—what do we leave behind, what do we take with us, how does it affect those still living? At the same time that the legacy of Rama's wisdom is to be handed down to a worthy future leader, other major figures from the *Ramayana* are dealing with the nature of death.

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<sup>10</sup> This is a definite jab at the officials, who had subjected the mass audience, eager for wayang, to an endless line of speeches that night, during this, an election-season wayang.

In the first 30 minutes of the all-night *garapan* performance, audience members will have gained some insight into both of these themes. Arjuna appears within the first four minutes of the wayang, and Kumbakarna within the first 20 minutes, bringing the central characters to the fore and into the consciousness of the audience immediately. Not only are the characters introduced early on, but their aspirations, fears, strategies, and the rationale for their struggles are all touched upon in the first half-hour. What is more, the theme is presented in the context of relevant, current issues: the natural disasters raging Java in the years preceding the Lontar recording.<sup>11</sup>

By contrast, in the classical version, the first sighting of Arjuna is over five hours into the eight-hour performance [MK-Class 4, 1:04:00]. This first appearance occurs during an exquisitely artistic but highly generic set of scenes, lasting a total of an hour: Arjuna's meditation in the forest with the *panakawan* (*Adegan Satriya ing Wana*), his departure down to the valley from the mountains (*Alas-alasan*), and his meeting up with ogres challenging him along the way (*Prang Kembang*). We understand nothing specific about his attitude toward the boon until over six hours into the performance, when he is challenged by one of Anoman's allies guarding access to the boon, the *garudha* bird Mahambira [MK-Class 5, 14:00].

In an informal chat with *pedhalangan* friends at my home in Kemang, South Jakarta in May 2013, Purbo shared another reason why Arjuna should be brought to the forefront from the beginning of the wayang, namely character and plot development:

In *Makutharama*, is Janaka [Arjuna] just suddenly going to get the *wahyu* in the end? Get to Priest Késawasidi's place and just that's it, there you have it? If it's like that, then Késawasidi is clearly discriminatory [*diskriminatif*! Karna appears and is turned away, but as soon as Janaka shows up, "Here you go" hands it over? It doesn't make sense. A person comes to achieve something through a process that is truly extraordinary, and needs to be developed. That's my thinking.

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<sup>11</sup> In the years previous to this 2007 recording, an unusual number of natural disasters had struck Indonesia. Some of the disasters include the earthquake and Indian Ocean tsunami that destroyed much of Northern Aceh (December 2004), an intense volcanic eruption of Mount Merapi (2006), the earthquake that devastated Yogyakarta and Klaten (May 2006) and the eruption of an underground mud volcano in Sidoarjo, East Java that caused oozing mud floods and devastation (2006). Many of Purbo Asmoro's narrations around this time were influenced by these current events. Even the very structure of his performances (what he chose as a focus in prologues such as this one, for example) reflected his concern over these tragedies. Many Javanese believe that such events are the result of human failings, building up over time.

Wibisana appears for the first time in the classical version over three hours into the wayang [MK-Class 3, 23:00] and Kumbakarna a bit later, almost four hours into the performance [MK-Class 3, 45:00]. Hence the theme of death and eternal perfection is first discussed at about 1:00 AM. Classical wayang-goers expect this of course—that the second theme or sub-plot will be introduced during *Adegan Sabrang* or *Sabrangan Rangkep*. Purbo Asmoro, however, is intent on bringing both themes and both subplots in before midnight, and in most cases within the first hour during the prologue.

### **What Do We “Get” in 56 Minutes? *The Grand Offering of the Kings***

#### *Classical versus Contemporary Opening*

Contrasting the village-classical and contemporary-interpretive performances of *The Grand Offering of the Kings* offers an even more extreme example of the effect and function of Purbo Asmoro’s prologues. Audiences staying only for the first half-hour of *The Grand Offering of the Kings* [SRS-Class 1, tr 1] would know nothing more about the episode than, “He was doing an episode from the *Mahabharata* and it started in Kresna’s kingdom of Dwarawati.” In fact in the case of this performance, it will take 52 minutes before audiences will know anything specific about the lakon—before they find out that there is a major threat to world peace, King Jarasandha, who is ravaging neighboring kingdoms. By contrast, in the 56-minute prologue of the contemporary-interpretive performance [SRS-CInt 1, tr 1], audiences not only find out about the threat of Jarasandha, but also learn that the Pandhawa are planning a cleansing ritual known as *sesaji raja suya* to counter this threat. What is more, audiences are given insight into the background of Jarasandha’s hatred of the world, and experience the entire story of his birth, played out dramatically on the screen.

#### *Scene Structure*

The first 52 minutes of the village-classical performance are spent setting up the Opening Audience Scene in Dwarawati Kingdom. King Kresna is visited by his older brother King Baladéwa of Mandura. His son Samba and cousin Setyaki are also present. A few of these 52 minutes include cursory references to the threat of

Jarasandha. The bulk of the scene, however, is taken up by refined entrances of characters, elaborate greetings, expansive *sulukan*, and the same lengthy opening narration we heard for the Astina Kingdom, with a few substitutions to fit Dwarawati.<sup>12</sup> There are four minutes dedicated to compelling and profound advice from Baladéwa to Kresna, but this is a standard element in every Dwarawati scene attended by Baladéwa. Any experienced dhalang will vary the content of the advice from performance to performance, but the actual advice itself has little or nothing to do with the lakon and is a highly predictable feature of a Dwarawati court scene.

While in the classical performance 52 minutes are used to set up the Dwarawati Kingdom scene, the opening of the contemporary-interpretive performance is a 56-minute prologue, consisting of seven small-scale scenes, summarized here:<sup>13</sup>

**Prologue Part A: A Protagonist's Troubled Introspection** (4 minutes)

King Puntadéwa of Amarta Kingdom appears, visibly troubled. The vocal text tells of his loneliness and heavy heart. The remaining four Pandhawa brothers join him, but he still feels profoundly alone in his responsibilities. He has a nightmare vision of King Jarasandha of Giribajra Kingdom, ravaging neighboring lands and kidnapping friendly kings.

**Prologue Part B: A Protagonist and His Adviser** (10 minutes)

King Kresna of Dwarawati befriends Puntadéwa, encourages him out of his brooding, and tries to comfort him. Kresna assures Puntadéwa that his outlook, intentions, and strategies have all been in the right direction, and that he should have confidence in himself. Puntadéwa explains that he feels unworthy as a king, having allowed this violent force to grow under his leadership. He will attempt to stage a sacred offering ceremony, *sesaji raja suya*, as a counter to Jarasandha's threat. Kresna warns that before taking Jarasandha on, Puntadéwa should understand who he is dealing with and should understand the depth of Jarasandha's anger and hatred for the world.

**Prologue Part C: A Flashback of Jarasandha's Birth** (42 minutes)

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<sup>12</sup> The Dwarawati narration in this recording differs more significantly from the Astina narration than might normally be the case when comparing one single dhalang's narrations, as Purbo Asmoro was attempting to be two different types of performers—palace-classical for *Makutharama* and village-classical for *Sesaji Raja Suya*—hence his sources were different. But as readers can see from comparing them, they are still much the same. For an English translation of the Dwarawati narration, see Asmoro, *The Grand Offering of the Kings* (2013, 5-15).

<sup>13</sup> For a full English translation, see Asmoro, *The Grand Offering of the Kings* (2013, 137-156). For a classical treatment of the plotline, see the summary in Appendix 2.

**Flashback Scene 1—A Love Scene** (7 minutes)

A flashback to the days of King Brihadrata and his twin wives, Retnadi and Retnadati in the kingdom of Giribajra. Their lives are happy and harmonious in every way, except that neither wife has been able to produce a child. King Brihadrata decides it is time to meditate in the forest, and vows not to come back until he has an answer.

**Flashback Scene 2—A Protagonist and His Adviser** (7 minutes)

King Brihadrata meditates and is visited by the god Naradha, who gives him a magical mango. He promises that if one of Brihadrata's wives eats the mango before love-making, she will become with child. Brihadrata returns to the kingdom, elated.

**Flashback Scene 3—Plotline** (11 minutes)

When the king returns, his wives argue over who will eat the mango, and thus conceive Brihadrata's child. Since Brihadrata cannot decide, his wives split the mango in half, and each in turn has relations with their husband. They both become pregnant. When the day comes, each give birth to half of a baby: one emerges head to waist, and the other waist to feet. Brihadrata is enraged and throws the babies into the forest, to the despair of his wives.

[In the classical version, audiences would still be watching the setting up of a generic court scene in Dwarawati, with no idea yet what the lakon was. To the end of the classical version at sunrise, audiences might have heard this story of Jarasandha's birth in an abbreviated narration, but would never have seen it played out on the screen.]

**Flashback Scene 4—An Ogre Antagonist** (12 minutes)

A forest ogress named Jara comes across the two babies. She decides to meld them together as one, using her special powers. She then washes the resulting whole baby in magical water and this causes him to immediately transform to an adult. She names him Jarasandha. He asks who his father is and when she explains that he was discarded near Giribajra Kingdom, Jarasandha is furious.

**Flashback Scene 5—A Battle** (5 minutes)

Jarasandha takes off for Giribajra Kingdom and kills off every minister and soldier in his path until he finally comes across King Brihadrata. After lecturing Brihadrata on how a father should love his child no matter what, Jarasandha chillingly vows never to have empathy or love for any creature on Earth, since he himself was brought up with none. He then kills his father, rips off his skin, and makes a drum out of it that will be used to guard his kingdom.

*Theme and Character*

In an interview at his home in April 2008, Purbo Asmoro described the theme he wished to communicate in his *padat* performance of *The Grand Offering of the Kings*:

True leaders have a responsibility to address evil forces at play, both by doing their part to forge goodness and unity in the world and also by coming to better understand the said evil forces. There is surely both a history and a set of reasonings (however faulty the other side may find these) behind any violent force, and these should be understood.

As with *Makutharama*, in an informal chat in Kemang, South Jakarta in May 2013, Purbo expanded on his intent with this theme in the all-night version:

I thought to myself, “Jarasandha ... where will I start? What is this lakon really about? *Sesaji Raja Suyu*—where is the inner meaning?” And I realized it would work if I connected it to what was happening in the world today. That the entire world is under the grip of an incredible force right now, and that there is a foreign nation, a *superpower*, planning to cause tremendous destruction. Puntadéwa is worried. This can be how I work in the *raja suya* ceremony. Because otherwise [it would be so simplistic]: “And thus, with the attainment of this new kingdom known as Indraprastha, created from the spirits of the forest and made of heavenly gold, we plan to call forth the priests and put on the ceremony, alright?” “ALRIGHT!” Ah, if you present it like that you’re done, easy. But better that we find a way to connect it to what is happening today. A world that is falling apart because in fact there really is a certain force that truly is threatening the world—terrorists [*teroris*] and their senseless violence. Hence I decided to create the debate between Jarasandha and Kresna about radical beliefs, and for me at the time, Jarasandha was the manifestation of this radical belief system.

Jarasandha’s character is thus developed early in the all-night *garapan* version. His initial appearance is less than four minutes into the performance, when he is shown violently kidnapping mass numbers of kings. Of the 56-minute prologue, 42 minutes are dedicated to playing out the story of Jarasandha’s birth, culminating in the chilling murder of his father. We come to understand his despicable nature, and hear his vow to refuse empathy for all living creatures for the rest of his life. In the classical version, although there are frequent references to Jarasandha throughout the night, he does not make an actual appearance until 45 minutes before the end of the seven-hour performance. Even then, he is given only 25 minutes of screen-time. While one could argue that this delay effectively builds suspense and a dramatic

sense of dread for his eventual appearance, clearly Purbo Asmoro feels he cannot afford, in this day and age, to introduce the primary antagonist at 3:30 AM.

### **Narration, *Iringan*, and Movement Techniques**

While what stands out most about Purbo Asmoro's prologues is the recrafting of scene structure—the way a number of small scenes are structured to develop theme and character from the start, as well as aesthetic and emotional variety—there is also substantial special treatment (*garapan*) of narration, gamelan accompaniment, and movement techniques in the prologues.

#### *Dialogue, Narration, and Text*

The prologues consist exclusively of lakon-specific narration, description, and dialogue, with generic language at a minimum. In other words, there is almost exclusively *catur baku* in the first 30 minutes to an hour, rather than the almost exclusively *catur blangkon* one hears in the first 30 minutes of a classical performance (see Catur Tulus's categories from Chapter 3, p. 80). This follows the concepts of *padat* practice, by which cliché (*klise*) language is to be replaced with situational, emotionally-specific, newly thought-out texts written by the dhalang. In this way, prologues present a blank slate in the dhalang's planning not only in terms of scene structure, but also with regard to the use of language.

In the classical performance of *Rama's Crown*, the opening contains a total of 1,046 words of narration, 87% of which could be repeated verbatim for any episode starting off in an earthly kingdom. Only 13% of the expressions are even specific to Duryudana's Astina Kingdom, and not a single one is specific to this episode. The rest of the initial 30 minutes takes the form of stylized greetings between the characters. The same general proportions would be true for the opening to the village-classical performance of *The Grand Offering of the Kings*.

By contrast, the very first words heard<sup>14</sup> in the contemporary-interpretive performance of *Rama's Crown*, were written by composer Dedek Wahyudi in the

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<sup>14</sup> "Heard" in the sense that they are sung in a clear, exclamatory manner, meant to be attended to. This is a different aesthetic from the very first words "heard" in the classical performances, which would be the first *wangsalan* the *pesindhèn* sings. The *pesindhèn* line is meant to be heard as woven into the other melodic lines, and her text is simply part of the idiom of the human voice, chosen for its poetic meter rather than any intrinsic meaning.



## Ch 6: Prologue

1990s and serve as a standard opening to many of Mayangkara's performances. The sung text is a meditative wish for the wellbeing of all those in attendance. After this one-minute opening, the next words uttered are sung in choral *ada-ada* style by the *gérong* section and were written by Purbo Asmoro, specifically for this performance (although they have been used often since):

The land in chaos, the tumult horrifying,  
Ravaging destruction, all is as if swept away,  
Great suffering takes hold, finding its end in death.

This is followed by the first utterance from the dhalang, a narration written by Purbo Asmoro for this performance (see English translation, p. 192):

Jagadé wus tuwa. Horeg bumi gonjing, lindhu prakempita, gunung jugrug njeblug, muntah lahar mblabar nrajang padésan. Angin lésus nyapu tanem tuwuh. Toyaning samodra mumbul gumulung hangelem dharatan. Endhut panas mubal saka telenging bumi, banjir ladhu walik watu gègèr kepati pating jalerit ngungsi urip.

Purbo Asmoro wrote the passage using a couplet technique he often employs, in which adjacent pairs or trios of words have similar sounds (underlined): *jugrug-njeblug*, *lahar-mblabar*, *tanem-tuwuh*, *mumbul-gumulung-hangelem*, *banjir ladhu-walik watu*, *kepati-pating-jalerit*.

This is followed by interchanges in low Javanese among the Kurawa army members, who scoff and show no care for the suffering of the people. In a classical treatment, it could be an hour or more into the performance before such common language was heard, usually during the Paséban Njaba scene. The next literary passage is another vocal text written by Purbo Asmoro, in the poetic form of *macapat pangkur*, and focused on the evening's hero:

Enflamed in devastating havoc,  
Everything strewn helter-skelter,  
Ablaze, smoldering, burnt to ashes,  
Arjuna looks on with concern,  
As he asks for the protection of The All Powerful,  
In his heart focusing his prayers,  
For health and prosperity.

This male chorus is crashed into (*ditabrak*) by *Sampak Tlutur*, which then leads into *Ktw Durma Rangsang*, and a second narration by Purbo Asmoro. In this

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passage, Purbo uses another technique he employs often, in which a short series of words, rather than just a pair or trio, shares similarity in sound, underlined below.

Mendhung tumiyung, cemeng hanggembuleng ireng, ke-ket ngèbegi ké-blat ing awiyat.  
Sirating Sang Hyang Arka anglayung lir soca ingkang karuna karantan. Rudah rurah  
rinoban rungsiting raos karanta Risang Dananjaya, anggènira maspaosaken  
kawontenaning bawana, risaking tata panguripan, sirnaning raos kamanungsan.

The phrase climaxes in the double-underlined phrases using yet another technique, in which Purbo Asmoro juxtaposes phrases with parallel syllable and sound structure:

risaking tata panguripan  
sirnaning raos kamanungsan

Both phrases have a total of nine syllables structured 3 + 2 + 4, and in both the third syllable is *ing* and the final syllable *an*. This narration helps to support the main character of the lakon. Purbo could have written a narration for the entrance of the Kurawa, or concerning Semar, but he consciously chose to “thicken”<sup>15</sup> the moment Arjuna first appears with a short, precise, meaningful and poetic narration. Whenever coupling techniques like this are used that play with parallel structure and sound, audience focus tunes in more on the text, and it is no coincidence that the only texts built this way by Purbo Asmoro, concern the main theme or protagonist.

Semar greets Arjuna to the accompaniment of another unique text, *singgah-singgah* (authorship unknown) and the conversation turns into an extended *wejangan*, or philosophical teaching. Semar’s words of wisdom, on humility, on having the courage to act alone, on the state of the world today, were written by Purbo Asmoro at various times in his career but not specifically for this prologue. They appear on scraps of paper all over his lap when he performs, and anyone nearby can see him exchanging one for another at the last minute as he makes split-second decisions on which to use. One example is Semar’s advice to Arjuna:

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<sup>15</sup> Purbo Asmoro frequently speaks of his intent to “ngandeli” (thicken) a moment. Another factor that just happens to help to thicken this moment in the video, is how Lontar’s studio editor Nanang Hape (Nanang Henri Priyanto), a former student of Purbo Asmoro’s and a dhalang himself, chose the one shot here that focused in, up-close on Arjuna.

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Wise elders of the past used to say: Whoever feels he is the best will inevitably reach a dead end. Whoever feels he has gathered plenty of wisdom will eventually start slipping. Whoever feels he is cleverest of all is only proving that he is in fact quite stupid. And lastly, whoever feels that it is only he who is truly perceptive is quite definitely blind.

The Kumbakarna scene opens with a text by Mangkunegara IV, from *Serat Tripama* (circa 1878). This is a poem in *dhandhanggula* form comparing the heroism of three figures from three eras: Sumantri of the Arjunasasrabau era, Kumbakarna from the *Ramayana*, and Karna from the *Mahabharata*. Again, it serves as an example of the crafting or, in this case, selection of new or unusual texts in order to thicken the entrances of the main focus figures:

There is yet another outstanding example,  
The great prince of Alengka,  
Known by the name of Kumbakarna,  
What's more he is of ogre form,  
Although with noble aspirations,  
Back during the great war in Alengka,  
He held a vow,  
That he would not oppose his older sibling,  
Dasamuka held fast to his dictate,  
To fight against the monkey troops.

After fierce debate between Kumbakarna and Dasamuka, the scene transitions into the love scene, and appropriate language of love, between Kumbakarna and his long-lost wife, Kiswani.

Hence we can see that the opening of a classical performance is primarily clichéd, generic, memorized text. The prologue of the contemporary-interpretive performance contrasts a number of different, albeit already existing, literary techniques: coupling, alliteration, symmetrical phrases. The language also serves a number of different purposes—description, everyday dialogue, philosophical teaching, vocal text, fiery debate, and love. Purbo Asmoro avoids clichés as much as possible, and selects carefully which moments to thicken with special texts.

### *Iringan*

The gamelan accompaniment for Purbo Asmoro's all-night *garapan* performances was discussed in detail in the previous chapter, but it is interesting to briefly

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compare the openings with regard to *iringan*. The 38-minute prologue to *Rama's Crown*, contemporary-interpretive style, is entirely in *pélog lima*, while the 56-minute prologue to *The Grand Offering of the Kings* is entirely in *sléndro sanga*. Of course neither of these is typical, as a traditional-style wayang begins in *sléndro nem* and remains in this mode for some four hours. While Purbo Asmoro's prologues usually contain a number of separate small scenes, they are almost always tied together under a single mode, most often either *pélog lima*, *pélog nem*, or *sléndro sanga*. The wide variety of forms, techniques, and sources is striking in comparison to a classical performance, as laid out in Figures 6-1 to 6-4, below:

Figure 6-1: First 38 minutes of music in the classical performance, *Rama's Crown*.

FORM	TITLE	COMPOSER
ketawang gendhing	Kabor	traditional
pathetan	Nem Wantah	traditional
ada-ada	Girisa	traditional

Figure 6-2: The 38-minute prologue to *Rama's Crown*, contemporary-interpretive style.

FORM	TITLE	COMPOSER	ERA	TECHNIQUE
ayak-ayak	Anglaèng	Dedek Wahyudi	1990s	vocal chorus
sampak	Galongan	Purbo Asmoro	2007	ditumpangi
garap balungan	Tiga-Perempat	Purbo Asmoro	2007	_____
lancaran	Pancer Papat	Purbo Asmoro	2000s	_____
sampak	Tlutur	traditional	_____	ditumpangi
ketawang	Durma Rangsang	Nartosabdo	1970s	vocal chorus
monggangan	_____	traditional	_____	ditumpangi
ketawang	Pangkur Kawedhar	Nartosabdo	1970s	vocal chorus
ladrang	Roning Tawang	traditional	_____	soran
palaran	dhandhanggula	Mangkunegara IV	1878	garap balungan
sampak	Sanga Pélog	traditional	_____	_____
ada-ada	Sanga Jugag	traditional	_____	_____
pathetan	Pélog Lima Jugag	traditional	_____	gérong chorus

Figure 6-3: First 56 minutes of the classical performance, *The Grand Offering of the Kings*.

FORM	TITLE	COMPOSER
ayak-ayak	manyura	traditional
ketawang gendhing	Krawitan	traditional
pathetan	Nem Wantah Lawas	traditional
ada-ada	Girisa Lawas	traditional

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Figure 6-4: The 56-minute prologue to *The Grand Offering of the Kings*, contemporary-interpretive style.

FORM	TITLE	COMPOSER	ERA	TECHNIQUE
ayak-ayak	Anglaèng	Dedek Wahyudi	1990s	vocal chorus
ketawang	Dhandhanggula Tlutur	traditional	_____	ktw to palaran
garap balungan	"V"	Lumbini	2007	
sampak	Sanga	traditional	_____	_____
ketawang	Megatruh	Nartosabdo	1970s	_____
srepeg	"Madiun"	regional	_____	_____
ketawang	Kasimpar	Nartosabdo	1970s	_____
andhegan	Brangta Mentul	traditional	_____	_____
srepeg	Tlutur	traditional	_____	_____
sampak	Tlutur	traditional	_____	_____
ladrang	Panjang Ilang	traditional	_____	_____
srepeg	"Klathènan"	traditional	_____	_____
jineman	Klambi Lurik	traditional	_____	_____
ayak-ayak	Sanga	traditional	_____	_____
ayak-ayak	Mijil Layu	Nartosabdo	1970s	
ladrang	Jangkrik Génggong	traditional	_____	_____
garap balungan	"VI"	Lumbini	2007	ditumpangi
jineman	Lédung-lédung	traditional	_____	_____
pathetan	Jugag	traditional	_____	_____
pathetan	Anglut	ASKI	1970s	gérong chorus
ada-ada	Greget Saut	traditional	_____	_____
lancaran	Bubaran Nyutra	traditional	_____	_____
palaran	Megatruh	traditional	_____	_____
srepeg	Grandhèl	Supanggah	1970s	_____
sampak	Ngracik	Lumbini	2007	_____
garap balungan	"VII"	Lumbini	2007	
pathetan	lima ngelik	traditional	_____	gérong chorus

### *Movement Techniques*

Purbo Asmoro's prologues feature the expressive movement techniques from *pakeliran padat* performance practice, known as *sabet tématik* or *sabet tématis*, which were described in Chapter 3. While in classical practice each movement of the opening court scenes is highly stylized, in *garapan* performances the "blank slate" premise, and freedom that applies to scene structure, character development, musical accompaniment, and literary techniques, also applies to movement sequences in the prologues.

One important point that Purbo Asmoro has spoken about often in public however, is his belief that the movement expressions in *padat* practice, and particularly in the prologues, tend to be too highly *tématik*, obscure, and abstract. Bambang Suwarno's *Ciptaning* and Sukardi's *Kunthi Pilih* are both examples of *padat*

scripts in which the first few pages are full of detailed movement sequences, before the dhalang speaks a single word. Characters emerge without introduction and engage in mime-like sequences that are embedded with symbolic meaning. Most *padat* performance prologues, from the early days through to the present, are single scene, movement-based tableaux, and quite hard to interpret. Understanding these prologues requires background knowledge of the lakon, an ability to identify characters with no help from the dhalang, and an ability to interpret obscure and symbolic movements. Purbo Asmoro makes it a point in his all-night performance prologues to be more up front with his audiences. Before an informal gathering of artists and fans in Kemang (May 2013) he described how his prologues differ from those of the *padat* days:

We need to be performers, communicators, and artists. Not just “artists.” We need to always remember that this is a performance. If [the new style] goes the way of “pure art” we are going to lose our audience. The presentation will be too complex, too abstract, too much into the dhalang’s head and just for him. Sometimes a dhalang [creating a prologue visual] can lose control, and lose sight of his audience. He can just seem to be mesmerized by his own beautiful moves and expressive techniques. Just making himself happy. Forgetting that there is an audience. Those prologues that—you know what I’m talking about, from the days of *padat*, like *Ciptaning* and *Déwa Ruci*—are all movement and nothing else. For a quarter of an hour no one knows what’s going on! A *kayon* just gesticulating around to no end, and no one knows what it means! Sure, for people who have background knowledge may be able to say to themselves, ‘Oh, this symbolizes the process of Arjuna becoming Ciptaning.’ Fine, they get it. But for others, they’re thinking, “What?!” ... It’s really very—well to be vulgar, masturbatory. [The guests laugh.] Well, it is. It’s masturbatory. Just the dhalang indulging in himself with no regard for anyone else. Art for art’s sake no matter how opaque, not caring whether your audience gets anything out of it.

While Purbo Asmoro utilizes expressive *sabet tematik* to the full in his prologues, he also connects the symbolism with meaning, without being condescending to his audience (interview, Feb 2015):

I always find small ways to help the audience during a movement sequence in the prologue. Maybe through the vocal text, maybe via one single word, maybe through a short narration. It has to be subtle. But I make sure I don’t just leave the audience in the dark, impressed by my depth while completely lost as to what’s happening.

Now that we have examined two of Purbo Asmoro's prologues in particular (*Rama’s Crown* and *The Grand Offering of the Kings*) from the standpoint of scene structure,

message, characterization, narration, musical accompaniment, and movement techniques, we will move on to the variety of types of prologues in his wider repertory.

### Constructing Prologues: Small-Scale Scenes

**PÉTRUK (Purbo Asmoro):** Creating a prologue is difficult. Very difficult. To squeeze out the essence of the lakon, and provide background to important events to come—this is difficult. To connect what is presented in the prologue and the rest of the scenes. The red thread that needs to run through the plot all night. This starts in the prologue. This needs to be planned out. The gamelan accompaniment has to have variety; the language has to have variety [*Iringané ora éntuk tumbuk; sastrané ora éntuk tumbuk*].

(March 2014, Pekalongan)

From the comments quoted so far in this chapter, we can see that Purbo Asmoro crafts his prologues to all-night performances with a mind to providing the audience early on in the evening with:

- exposure to his chosen theme and focus for the lakon (*esènsi, fokus, gagasan pokok*)
- plot movement, both main storyline and a subplot
- variety in types of scenes presented
- variety in musical accompaniment
- variety in language (dialogue, narration; poetic, everyday)
- a connection to real-life, current events and issues

Since the prologue is a blank slate and the dhalang starts with minimal historical precedent as to form or content, I was interested to see if there was a structure or template in the prologues to Purbo Asmoro's all-night *garapan* performances. Over time, had he developed a system or any sort of consistent format for his prologues? He has clear aspirations for what he wishes to achieve in the prologue, but does a common organization emerge from his performances, either consciously or unconsciously? The first step was to ask him about this directly (interview, June 2014):

There is no structure that I apply to each lakon. The important thing is that meaning, focus, theme, and variety is all there, and that the prologue serves to represent what the lakon is about and serves as a taster for what is in store all evening. I have no structure. Blank. And then it comes to me as I prepare.

The next step was to determine whether in fact structures were there even if not consciously. From among the 386 recordings by Purbo Asmoro I have collected over 11 years (2004–2015) I took out all the multi-episode (*banjaran*) constructions, since these are examined separately in Chapter 8, and disregarded any *padat* or classical style performances. There were 103 single-episode recordings remaining, all in *garapan* style, such as Lontar's *Rama's Crown* and *The Grand Offering of the Kings*. These 103 recordings covered 40 different lakon. I then chose one touchstone recording for each lakon—the one recording that represented the most intensely thought-out *garapan*, the most ideal performance situation of the choices available, and preferably one accompanied by Mayangkara, ISI, or at least one of the highly capable Jakarta troupes that make it their business to substitute for Solonese troupes when necessary. From these 40 exemplar recordings of 40 different lakon in *garapan* style, I then had 40 different prologues to use as data (see Appendix 4 for a list of the recordings used).

I then examined these prologues, one by one, to see if some categories emerged, which they did, confirming a suspicion I had developed from observing performances. It turns out that Purbo Asmoro's single-lakon all-night *garapan* performance prologues, 2004–2015, primarily use nine different types of small-scale scenes, in various configurations:

1. *Gara-gara Kayon* Narration
2. A Protagonist's Troubled Introspection
3. A Protagonist and His or Her Adviser
4. An Ogre Antagonist
5. A Love Scene
6. Two Perspectives Juxtaposed
7. A Battle
8. A Flashback
9. Plot Moving Forward

During an interview in September 2014, I presented these categories to Purbo Asmoro. His reaction was complex. When I first read off the categories, he nodded in vigorous affirmation at each one, as they seemed required little or no explanation. But when I finished reading the nine categories he was silent for a bit, characteristically contemplative, and then said:



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Hmm. Well ... hmm. I don't ... hmm. The thing is ... [Pause. More thought.] I can see that this is accurate. I can't think offhand of a scene from a prologue that doesn't fit one of these categories. [Pause.] And the titles reflect the essences of the scenes. But I don't go about planning a prologue consciously thinking about such categories. I want meaning. I want variety. I want a fast-paced dramatic presentation of plotline and theme, focused on the main characters and main messages. I want short scenes lasting no more than 10 or so minutes each. I want to grab the audience's attention but I won't entice the audience through cheap attractions in a prologue. I'm searching for meaning in the prologue. And variety. I guess these just end up being the types of scenes naturally occurring through the process. And of course it all depends highly on the lakon. [One last subtle nod of distant affirmation in my direction—distant in the sense that these categories, while they may be accurate, are not his own.]

We will now take a brief look at each category, interspersed with some of Purbo's comments specific to each scene type. Every category except 6 is represented in the two *garapan* recordings used throughout this work: *Rama's Crown* and *The Grand Offering of the Kings*. In the 38-minute prologue to *Rama's Crown*:

- The Opening (*Gara-gara Kayon* Narration, category 1)
- Semar advising Arjuna (A Protagonist and His Adviser, category 3)
- Dasamuka and Kumbakarna (An Ogre Antagonist, category 4)
- Kumbakarna and his wife, Kiswani (A Love Scene, category 5)

In the extensive 56-minute prologue to *The Grand Offering of the Kings*:

- Puntadéwa's Troubled Introspection (category 2)
- Kresna advising Puntadéwa (Protagonist and His Advisor, category 3)
- Flashback (category 8):
  - Love Scene (Brihadrata and his wives, category 5)
  - The God Naradha Advising King Brihadrata (category 3)
  - Ogress Antagonist Nyai Jara (category 4)
  - Plot Moving Forward (category 9)
  - Battle Scene (Jarasandha and Brihadrata, category 7)

The other 38 prologues I analyzed presented an even mix of each category, as can be seen in the pages that follow.

### 1. Gara-gara Kayon Narration

Purbo Asmoro often opens a performance, and hence, a prologue, with what Sunardi (2012) has referred to as "gara-gara kayon narration." It features the dramatic flurry of three *kayon*, accompanied by a narration reminiscent of the classical *gara-gara*, chaos narration.

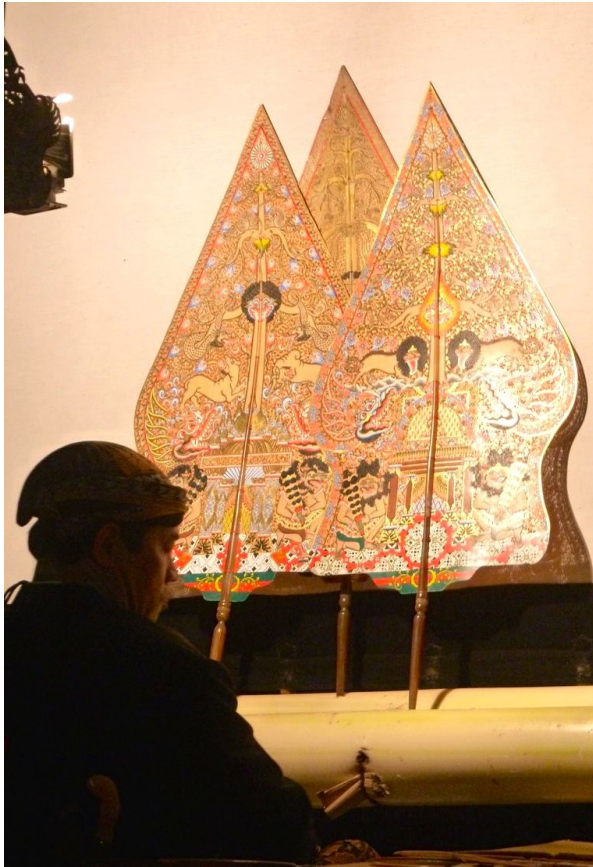


Figure 6-5: Three-kayon set up that opens most all-night *garapan* performances.

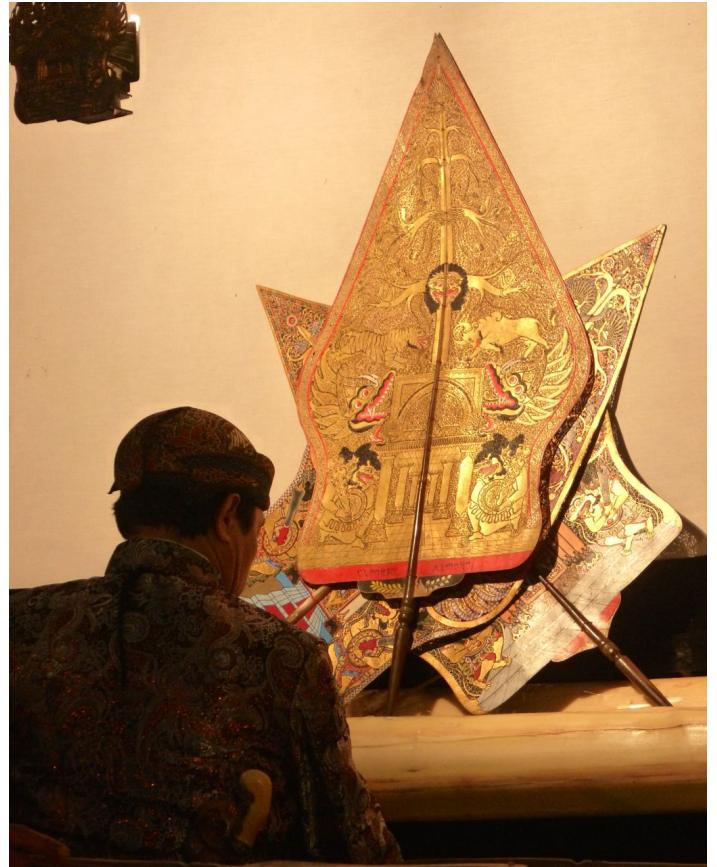


Figure 6-6: Sometimes there is a figure hidden behind the opening set-up, as in the Priest Bisma on his deathbed in *The Fall of Astina*.

Purbo Asmoro sets up his *garapan* performance stage with various configurations of three *kayon* in the center of the screen, rather than the classical single *kayon* (see Figures 6-5 and 6-6). His wayang begin, about 70 percent of the time, with Mayangkara's signature opening piece: *Ayak-ayak Anglaèng*, composed for the group by Dedek Wahyudi around 1990, with its vocal text:

As a sacred and powerful mantra says,  
"Om ... may there be no obstacles to our entreaty,"  
Wellbeing to all before us,  
As the powers that heal come forth,  
Maladies among us are snuffed out,  
The death of all maladies leads to wellbeing,  
Wellbeing for all the living.

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The other 30 percent of the time, Purbo Asmoro begins with something more startling, such as: *Pathet Manyura Wantah* sung by the male chorus, *Ldr Maskentar* from a *rebab* introduction, a male solo such as *Bawa Palugon*, an eerie *garap balungan* fragment straight away, a male-female chorus with minimal or no accompaniment, a ceremonial *kemanak* vocal introduction, the *gendèr* introduction to *Ldr Gadhung Mlathi*, the lengthy, grandiose *bonang* introduction to a *sekatèn* piece, or *Ayak-ayak Singgah-singgah*, another meditative well-wishing chorus, by Jungkung Darmoyo. During these various opening selections, the three *kayon* are removed from the banana log, twirled around, and then often stuck to the far left and right so that the story may begin, just as is the practice with the single *kayon* in classical tradition during the initial *Ayak-ayak* in *sléndro manyura*.

When using a "Gara-gara Kayon Narration" prologue scene, instead of the three *kayon* being set to the sidelines, two of them are flipped to the fire side and vigorously placed at angles into the banana log forming a large V-shape, while the third *kayon* is brought down, still vertical, near the dhalang's lap. Purbo Asmoro then delivers a narration that he composed, usually describing some sort of chaos in the universe. In 12 years of following and recording his performances, I have never heard the same *gara-gara kayon* narration twice. These short, never more than three-minute, poetic openings are constructed with a mind to efficiency, beauty, and dramatic power at the level of the individual word (interview with Purbo Asmoro, June 2014).

I may only write an opening *pocapan* at the last minute in the car on the way to a performance, or on the flip side of something I find lying around in the back of the stage, but I craft each word with care. Each word matters. How it sounds, how it feels, the image it brings up, how it relates to the words before and after. This is a matter of working at the word level. Short. Powerful. Meaningful.

The performance of *Rama's Crown* begins with a *gara-gara kayon* narration (see p. 192 for the English translation and p. 207 for the Javanese text) [MK-CInt 1, 02:45]. In fact, it was in preparation for his debut performance of *Makutharama garapan*, in July 2007 in Triyagan, Karanganyar that Purbo Asmoro first created this type of prologue opening. Besides describing natural disasters, Purbo Asmoro's *gara-gara kayon* opening narrations have addressed corruption, civil violence, an imposing foreign

threat to peace in a kingdom, the beginning of time, an imbalance from the underworld, a restless soul in the afterworld, or trouble in the heavens. Ten of the 40 single-episode lakon performances analyzed began with this type of scene, in every case the narration taking three to four minutes. The entire vignette sometimes involves additional elements like, in the case of the Lontar recording, an enactment of the suffering surrounding the natural disasters.

## 2. A Protagonist's Troubled Introspection

In *Rama's Crown*, following the *gara-gara kayon* narration and enactment of natural disasters, the focus moves to Arjuna, who is deeply disturbed about the destruction which has hit those in poverty the most. His troubled state is illustrated through sorrowful music (*Ktw Durma Rangsang* by Nartosabdo) and the expressive juxtaposition of the *kayon* over his figure [MK-CInt 1, 08:45]. Similarly, after the signature Mayangkara opening, *The Grand Offering of the Kings* performance opens with King Puntadéwa of the Pandhawa, alone and introspective [SRS-CInt 1, 01:45]. He is troubled, thinking about the state of the world and the threat Jarasandha poses.

In both of these cases, Purbo Asmoro thus highlights, within the first nine minutes, an lone individual who will ultimately make a difference. Arjuna, feeling weak and helpless, will eventually find the strength he needs through the wisdom handed down from King Rama. A confused Puntadéwa will eventually come to understand the nature of the threat he is facing in Jarasandha and the ceremony the Pandhawa will stage in response. Purbo Asmoro makes these troubled introspections more poignant by composing or choosing special texts to deepen the moment. The newly composed narration illustrating Arjuna's inner state, spoken over *Durma Rangsang*, was translated on page 192. Puntadéwa's weighty sense of lone responsibility is underscored by the use of the classical *dhandhanggula* text below. The Pandhawa brothers enter one by one to support their older brother, but he seems not to notice them as the following is being sung:

The village drum strikes three yet I am still unable to sleep,  
The moonlight lights up the yard,  
I sit alone staring blankly,  
The wind blows to the south,

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My heart aching and chilled to the bone,  
Feeling all alone in the world like an orphan,  
Ah my body and soul,  
With neither children nor siblings,  
Living a life with no home of my own,  
Oh my, just take my life away.

Half of the 40 prologues studied feature a small-scale scene in which a protagonist of the lakon is seen in troubled introspection, with some sort of newly composed narration or vocal text presented to enhance meaning and give the moment weight: Bima contemplating his lofty ideals for knowledge in *The God Ruci*, Kunthi unable to keep her mind off her love for Pandhu in *Kunthi's Choice*, Rama distressed over the kidnapping of his wife Sinta in *Rama Bridges the Waters*, Kresna overwhelmed by his massive responsibility to forge peace in *Kresna as Emissary*, Abimanyu looking for meaning in life in *The Cakraningrat Boon*, to name a few. While focus on the individual, particularly this early in a performance, is not typical of classical treatment, it is a hallmark of Purbo Asmoro's *garapan* style.

### 3. A Protagonist and His or Her Adviser

Often the central scene in a prologue by Purbo Asmoro, and the most cited by wayang critics as well as most admired by fellow dhalang, will be the moment a protagonist meets with an elder adviser about the inner struggles he or she is facing. This is when the hero or heroine of the lakon will receive the inspiration to act, and this is where Purbo Asmoro chooses from his literally hundreds of tidbits of *wejangan* (philosophical teachings), communicated to the audience through the words of the adviser. In the 40 lakon studied, Semar is the elder adviser figure to appear most often in this scene: inspiring Arjuna to act in *Rama's Crown* [MK-CInt 1, 10:30], directing Sumantri in *Sumantri's Apprentice*, making Arjuna's wife Sembadra see the other side of issues in *Arjuna Jelur*, guiding Bima in both *Pandhu's Afterlife* and *The God Ruci*, encouraging Rama in *Semar Enlisted*, or Kresna in *Kresna As Emissary*. Kresna is often placed in this role as well, such as in *The Grand Offering of the Kings*, when he reassures Puntadéwa that he will find the answer to his troubles [SRS-CInt 1, 05:00].

Often the adviser will be the protagonist's parent or grandparent, such as Dhanapati receiving marriage advice from his mother in *Sukèsi's Hand in Marriage Contested*, Abiyasa advising his great-great-grandchild Parikesit on leadership in *The Coronation of Parikesit*, Sudarsana learning about the depth of thought of his Pandhawa ancestors from his grandfather Sidikara in *Sudarsana Amputated*, and Rama coming to terms with the inevitability of his exile through the wise words of his mother Kekayi in the flashback scenes of various *Ramayana* lakon. Sometimes a god appears as a result of a protagonist's deep meditation, granting wisdom through a *wejangan* and perhaps the granting of an heirloom or boon, such as Naradha granting Brihadrata the special mango in *The Grand Offering of the Kings* [SRS-CInt 1, 24:30] or the antagonist Durga receiving a visit from Bethara Guru in *Sudamala*.

#### 4. An Ogre Antagonist

The audience gets a chance to breathe a bit during one of the most popular prologue scenes among the general public: an ogre or other aggressive figure holding court with his or her servants, usually Togog and Bilung. As Purbo Asmoro explained in an interview (March 2015):

I need *vulgar* characters like Togog, Bilung, the ogre figures, and even Semar, in order to add color, variety, and a different perspective. Since we want to bring all the subplots into the fold during the prologue, this kind of scene is almost a certainty.

Of the 40 prologues analyzed, 23 included this type of scene. Whether the antagonist represented is Dasamuka, Dasakumara (Dasamuka from the afterlife), Niwatakawaca, Kalasrenggi, Maésasura, Kangsa, Déwa Srani, Durga, Boma, Pracona, or even the ogre protagonists Tremboko or Kumbakarna, their "vulgar" nature allows Purbo Asmoro to use a different kind of language, gamelan accompaniment, and movement repertory than the categories above. The dialogue between the antagonist and the servants Togog and Bilung is enlivened with humor and recklessness not allowed in the other scenes. The appearance of ogress Nyai Jara in the forest [SRS-CInt 1, 38:45] or Dasamuka and Kumbakarna from the afterlife [MK-CInt 1, 20:20] allows the audience to experience the kind of energy that in a

classical performance is often not felt until *Adegan Sabrang*. These scenes often include their own departures of the troops, featuring various ogre and spirit-like characters taking off into battle.

### 5. *A Love Scene*

A thoughtful narration on the state of the world, a protagonist's troubled introspection, philosophical advice from a respected adviser, and a rousing ogre scene reflect the main elements of any lakon save one, romance. Purbo Asmoro is renowned for his love scenes, as he gives equal time to both the male and female perspective. Be it Kunthi and Pandhu, Rama and Sinta, Kumbakarna and Kiswani [MK-CInt 1, 28:30], Brihadrata and his wives [SRS-CInt 1, 15:30], or any of the other 12 couples who are featured in the prologues analyzed, the female characters are given at least as much voice as the male. The *iringan* and poetry crafted by Purbo Asmoro and the expressive movement between the lovers, create a sweetness, poignancy, and depth to these scenes different from the other types of scenes.

### 6. *Two Perspectives Juxtaposed*

As described at the opening of Chapter 5, Purbo Asmoro constructed a new prologue to *Kresna as Emissary* on the eve of the performance, in which he envisioned Kresna in the middle of the screen while Drupada advised him from the left and then Kunthi from the right. This is the least common category in 40 performances, and does not occur in the two Lontar recordings. It is strikingly different, and is the one construction that cannot be categorized as an already existing prototype. Purbo Asmoro does not recall when he first used the "Two Perspectives Juxtaposed" scene in a prologue, but it is evident as far back as Tristuti's 1995 use of the technique in the script *Sumantri Apprentices*, developed for Purbo Asmoro. Sumantri, trying to decide what is the best path for his future development, is goaded by two gods, one from the left and one from the right:

**THE GOD OF WEALTH (KUWÉRA):** Sumantri, what is making you so conflicted? Why are you so sad? You needn't think so hard about dedication to your people and your nation and the likes. It should be enough that I will bestow upon you great riches, in the form of jewels, cash, and treasures. You will be able to use your great wealth to go any direction you please in life.

**THE GOD OF PROSPERITY (RAHASPATI):** Hey, Bambang Sumantri! No need to be sad or despairing. I grant you great status, command, and authority in life. Use it to its full! With your combination of status and authority, you will be able to do anything, including controlling the universe, Sumantri.

Sumantri, however, rejects both and decides to take off in search of knowledge. Each time Purbo Asmoro has performed this lakon since 2004, the source, content and timing of the left and right temptations has been different, as has Sumantri's precise reaction.

Another early example is in the opening of the *padat* script *Salya Bégal* (*Salya is Intercepted*, 1997, Budiarjo), where the focus is Salya's torn loyalties. The performance opens with Salya in the middle, recalling when Kresna's (from the right) reminded Duryudana of his promise to give Astina back to the Pandhawa. Then Salya hears Duryudana, from the left, vowing only to do this over his dead body. Purbo Asmoro performed this script in 2001 for a recording at STSI, and since then has used the construction in other battle tales. In *Building a Temple in Saptaarga* (2013) a rectangular figure symbolizing the troops (*rampogon*) comes in from the left, issuing mass complaints about the current governance in Amarta, followed by another *rampogon* from the right with a whole different set of complaints. In *Semar Boyong* (*Semar Enlisted*, 2011) monkey troops on the left decry the corrupt kingdom of Rama, while troops on the right defend him. In *Karna Becomes King* (2013) ogre figures on the right and left goad the young Karna, much like in the Sumantri example, with suggestions of paths to glory much easier than his planned path of asceticism and discipline.

#### 7-8-9. A Battle, A Flashback, Plot Moves Forward

Some of Purbo Asmoro's prologues include small battle scenes, and other scenes that cannot be categorized in any special way but simply move the plot forward. Sometimes these take the form of flashbacks. For example, in *The Grand Offering of the Kings*, the entire flashback concerning the birth of Jarasandha includes a number of small scenes: Brihadrata brings the mango back to be eaten by one of his wives, the deformed babies are born and discarded, and Jarasandha battles his way through the palace to find his father.



### *Pathet Sanga Moved to the Forefront*

I had often felt that *Pathet Sanga* was somewhat slighted in Purbo Asmoro's new all-night *garapan* style, as shown in Figure 6-7 from the two representative performances.

Figure 6-7: Time spent on story content in each *pathet* (excluding *Limbukan* and *Gara-gara*).

	Prologue	Pathet Nem	Pathet Sanga	Pathet Manyura
<i>Rama's Crown</i>	38 minutes	144 minutes	51 minutes	73 minutes
<i>The Grand Offering of the Kings</i>	56 minutes	104 minutes	25 minutes	74 minutes

Yet it turns out that the types of scenes found in *Pathet Sanga* are not missing but rather moved up to a more prominent position, into the prologues. To quote from Chapter 2 (p. 50): "*Pathet Sanga* ... takes place mostly in the forest and concerns journeys, meditation, introspection, personal suffering, and individual trials or sacrifice." Purbo Asmoro wants the essence of the lakon, both in theme and character development, to be at the forefront of his performances, hence hermitage, meditation, and highly philosophical scenes are moved to this more prominent position.

All of the prologue scene-type categories proposed, resemble scenes from the *Pathet Sanga* section of a classical wayang, except for 4, An Ogre Antagonist, which resembles the *Adegan Sabrang* scene in *Pathet Nem*. These *Pathet Sanga*-esque scenes (such as A Protagonist's Troubled Introspection, A Protagonist and His Adviser) are focused, specific, and meaningful to the lakon. Rather than generic, required scenes in *Pathet Sanga*, in the wee hours of the morning, they now serve as essential introductions to the issues central to the lakon.

The old-style *gara-gara* narration that reflected chaos in the universe only occurred in certain lakon (p. 51), and has been considered long-gone by many observers. It is now back in the *Gara-gara Kayon* Narration prologue scene. The entire seven-hour wayang performance now in fact often starts off with this short narration, re-crafted into a literary form, expanded in scope, and written anew to fit each individual lakon. If we consider these scenes, as well as the small battles, love

scenes, and flashbacks of the prologues, as *Pathet Sanga*-like material, we can see that Purbo Asmoro does not slight *Pathet Sanga*. Rather, he moves half of its material up to a more prominent position in the Prologue. This is also indicated by the musical accompaniment, in that 34 of the 40 prologues analyzed were either entirely in *pélog nem* (30 lakon) or *sléndro sanga* (4 lakon), thus aligning musically with *Pathet Sanga*. Only six of the prologues were in *sléndro manyura* and none were in *pélog barang*.

While analyzing Purbo Asmoro's prologues along the lines of these categories seems to "work" in that it is an accurate reflection of the essence of his small-scale scenes, his performances are in no way formulaic. No two love scenes are alike in poetry or feel, no two ogre antagonist scenes follow the same scenario, no two protagonist and adviser scenes contains the same philosophy delivered in the same way for the same purpose. The richness lies in the details. Going into a Purbo Asmoro performance with the idea that these categories exist in his prologues only informs the viewer on a superficial level. Every scene will still come across as fresh, new, and original because of the newly constructed poetry, accompaniment, interpretive story details, unique characterizations and, mostly, the very nature of the blank slate that is a prologue. At the center of Purbo Asmoro's planning is his intent to create meaning before Pak Camat and Pak Lurah go home. In the following chapter, we will look at what is in store for the audience who stays on beyond the prologue in Purbo Asmoro's all-night *garapan* performances.