The poetry of minor characters and everyday life in the *Sĕrat Cĕnthini*

**Tony Day**

**ABSTRACT**

The 722 cantos and 247,766 lines of poetry in the *Sĕrat Cĕnthini*, composed in Surakarta by Ki Ng. Ronggasutrasna, R.Ng. Yasadipura II, and Ki Ng. Sastradipura under the direction of the Crown Prince of Surakarta (later Pakubuwana V, r.1820-1823) in 1815 during the British occupation of Java (1811-1816), are arguably the greatest expression of literary art ever written in Javanese. The earliest version of the *Sĕrat Cĕnthini* comes from Cirebon at the beginning of the seventeenth century. When the poem reached Surakarta in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, court poets rewrote it, greatly expanding the number of episodes and characters, as well as the kinds of information and literary style to be found in the text. My interest in the excerpt I have translated from Canto 364 focuses on two aspects of this process of literary revision: characterization and the representation of everyday life.

**KEYWORDS**

Surakarta; *Kadipaten*; *santri lĕlana*; encyclopaedia; characterization; everyday life; gamelan; *gĕndhing*; Islam; translation; poetry; aesthetics.

**Tony Day** is an independent scholar living in Graz, Austria. He is interested in studying the literatures and histories of Southeast Asian from early times to the contemporary moment in a comparative, global framework. He is currently working on a collection of translations and interpretations of the *Sĕrat Cĕnthini* with Nancy Florida. His publications include *Fluid iron; State formation in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), “Polycentric cosmopolitans; Writing world literature in Indonesia and Vietnam, 1920s to 1950s and beyond”, in: Amelia M. Glaser and Steven S. Lee (eds), *Comintern Aesthetics* (University of Toronto Press, 2020, pp. 199-223), and “Cold War violence, nationalism and structures of feeling in the literatures of Southeast Asia”, in: Andrew Hammond (ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of Cold War literature* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 633-650). Tony Day can be contacted at: samdayweiss@gmail.com.

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INTRODUCTION

Arguably, the 722 cantos and 247,766 lines of poetry in the Sĕrat Cĕnthini, composed in Surakarta by Ki Ng. Ronggasutrasna, R.Ng. Yasadipura II, and Ki Ng. Sastradipura under the direction of the Crown Prince of Surakarta (later Pakubuwana V, r. 1820-1823) in 1815 during the British occupation of Java (1811-1816), are the greatest expression of literary art ever written in Javanese. The eminent philologist R.M.Ng. Dr. Poerbatjaraka called the poem “de onwolprezen Tjĕntini” (the unsurpassed Cĕnthini) (Poerbatjaraka 1940: 361, note 3)! But what kind of inimitable literary work is it? C.F. Winter Sr.’s mid-nineteenth-century fictional informant, Parakawi, called the Sĕrat Cĕnthini a “pĕrlambang ngelmi” (revelation of sciences), an enigmatic phrase that points to both the work’s encyclopaedic character and its interest in esoteric thought and techniques of all kinds (Winter 1862: 193). More than a hundred years later, Theodore Pigeaud classified the Sĕrat Cĕnthini as a “romance of vagrant students containing encyclopaedic passages”, grouping it with three other works (Pigeaud 1967: 227-229). Nancy Florida (2012) coined the phrase “santri lĕlana story” to expand the family of texts to which the Cĕnthini belongs and Tim Behrend adopted and refined Florida’s definition of the santri lĕlana (wandering student of Islam) genre in order to clarify its common characteristics. According to Behrend, all santri lĕlana stories have: (1) At least one santri (pious Muslim, student of religion) as protagonist (2) who wanders (lĕlana) in search of a lost relative as well as religious knowledge, through forests and populated countryside far from courts and cities, a landscape that may or may not be identifiable as “Java”, (3) enacting a story of adventure which is told by means of recurring episodes that are combined or omitted in various configurations, (4) ending when the protagonist, who holds heterodox religious ideas, gets into trouble because of them and either escapes punishment or is killed (Behrend 1987: 325-326). The Cĕnthini certainly fits that definition but also exceeds its criteria in an astonishing, encyclopaedically complex way.

The earliest version of the Sĕrat Cĕnthini comes from Cirebon at the beginning of the seventeenth century. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the poem was recopied and read in religious schools (pĕsantren) in West and East Java. When the poem reached Surakarta in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, court poets rewrote it, greatly expanding the number of episodes and characters, as well as the kinds of information and literary style to be found in the text. The version I am discussing, the so-called Major Cĕnthini or Cĕnthini Kadipaten, which was written in the household of the Crown Prince of Surakarta in 1815, is forty times longer than the original version from Cirebon (Behrend n.d.).

My interest in the excerpt translated below focuses on two aspects of this process of literary expansion: characterization and the representation of everyday life. As Behrend notes in his discussion of the Sĕrat Jatiswara, the expanded versions of poems from the early nineteenth-century Kadipaten
Surakarta (household of the Crown Prince of Surakarta) exhibit a marked interest in introducing minor characters to old stories. These new characters are often “given odd traits or speeches to make them stand out” (Behrend 1987: 261). In addition, descriptions of locations, food, plants, emotions, and so forth become more detailed and “exuberant” (Behrend 1987: 314). It seems as if the Surakarta authors of the expanded Sĕrat Čenthini wanted to turn an ancient santri lĕlana tale focused on the exposition of religious ideas into a gigantic, meandering, poetic encyclopaedia of all aspects of early nineteenth-century Javanese culture. Or a modern novel perhaps!? 

Be that as it may, the excerpt below comes from the very detailed, exuberant, and character-rich section of the Sĕrat Centhini set in the fictional East Javanese village of Wanamarta, renowned for its wealth, cultural sophistication, and Islamic piety due to the sawab (holy influence) of the learned and pious Ki Bayi Panurta, who studied religion in Cirebon. Ki Panurta has three children: Tambangraras, Jayengwesthi, and Jayengraga. The main protagonist of the poem, Seh Amongraga, formerly known as Jayengrĕsmi, has arrived in the village in search of his own younger siblings after they flee Giri, which has been attacked by Sultan Agung. Amongraga and Tambangraras share a devotion to Islam. After Amongraga has demonstrated the superiority of his religious learning, Ki Panurta implores him to marry his pious daughter. Amongraga (‘He who practices self-control’) agrees. The episode below takes place at the

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1 My interest in the role of “minor characters” in the Sĕrat Čenthini, and fiction generally, was sparked by reading Woloch (2003).

2 Compare this thought with Behrend’s suggestive remarks about the influence of nineteenth-century Dutch print culture on the manuscript-writing traditions of mid- to late-nineteenth-century Surakarta (Behrend 1987: 287-288). If Behrend is right, the “novelistic” characteristics of the Sĕrat Čenthini may already have been intrinsic to Javanese literature even before the advent of printing in Java.

3 For the opening description of Wanamarta, Ki Panurta and his children, and the “problem” Ki Panurta faces in finding a suitable husband for his daughter, see Kamajaya (1988a: 84, v. 11-22).

4 There are seven sets of santri lĕlana in the poem that appear in the following order: (1) Jayengrĕsmi (later named Amongraga) and his two servants from Karang in Bantĕn, Gathak and Gothuk (later named Jamil and Jamal); (2) Amongraga’s siblings, Jayengsari and Rancangkapti; (3) Cabolang, the son of the village head of Sokayasa, who later marries Rancangkapti, and various followers; (4) the two brothers of Amongraga’s wife (Tambangraras), Jayengwesthi and Jayengraga, together with their uncle, Kulawirya, and Nuripin, a santri who is the first to welcome Amongraga to the santri village of Wanamarta; (5) Tambangraras and her servant Cĕnthini; (6) Ki Panurta and his wife Malarsih; (7) and Amongraga and Tambangraras. To see how the wanderings of these groups of santri lĕlana map onto the structure of the Sĕrat Čenthini, consult the detailed synopsis of the poem in Pigeaud (1933). I follow Kamajaya, Behrend, and Florida in treating the differently named texts synopsized in sequence by Pigeaud (1933) as all belonging to the Čenthini Kadipaten.

5 The entire section of the poem from canto 349, when Amongraga is welcomed in Wanamarta, to canto 385, when he leaves the village to continue searching for his siblings, is really just a creative elaboration of four set scenes that are generic to santri lĕlana stories, what Behrend (1987: 96-97) calls: the adĕgan tĕtamuwan (welcoming a visitor scene); the adĕgan rĕrasan ngelmi (discussion of esoteric knowledge scene, accompanied by musical performances and recitations of various kinds); the adĕgan tilamwangi (bedroom scene, involving not much sleep but a lot of sex); and the adĕgan pamitan (the departure scene, after morning prayers and respectful goodbyes
beginning of a canto in the metre Sinom. In the preceding canto in Pucung, Tambangraras’s little brother Jayengraga has spent the morning organizing his wives and retainers to prepare for a feast in honour of the bridal pair to be held at his house. During a break in the afternoon, he and his friends relax by playing some music on gamelan instruments in the slendro scale that happen to be at hand. After a few pieces and some spirited banter between the musicians Widiguna and Crèmesana (who are also dhalang and topeng dancers) and Jayengraga and his uncle Kulawirya, Jayengraga proposes bringing the heirloom pelog gamelan “Ocean waves” (Alun Jaladri) out of storage for some further music making. For an impression of the extraordinary musical properties of this ensemble, as well as some details about the characters Jayengraga, Kulawirya, Widiguna, and Crèmesana and an introduction to the poetic virtuosity to be found in the Sĕrat Cĕnthini, let us turn to our passage.

CANTO 364

Sinom (8a-8i-8a-8i-7i-8u-7a-8i-12a)

1. Mangkana Ki Jayengraga
dennira amangku kardi
katongton wibawanira
tan ana ingkang yom-yomi
sor suting bupati
dhasar ki putra ingugung
datan sinungan rĕngat
sakarsane denlilani
mring kang rama kalangkung sangĕt sihira

Thus it was Ki Jayengraga supervised the preparations. On display his authority, no one cast him in the shade, besting sons of bupati. In fact milord was a spoiled child, not given cause for grief, every desire was indulged by his father, so exceeding his devotion

2. Yen putra Ki Jayengraga
yen kadang Kulawiryeki
pan ingugung alit mila
mila ladake ngebĕki
mung ladak tingkahneki
labĕte ugunganipun
nanging putus piyambak
dhasar landhĕp tyasireki
ngelmu bantas ing kukum yudanagara
to his son, Ki Jayengraga.
As for kinsman Kulawirya, he too was spoiled from childhood, so he was completely stuck up, nose in the air whatever he did because of having been spoiled, yet accomplished in everything, deeply clever in his sense of things, highly skilled in the rules of administration.

to the pious host, with dejected, deflowered daughters left behind in tears). It is fascinating how the expansion of these standard santri lĕlana scenes in the Sĕrat Cĕnthini makes the poem read almost like a modern novel, peopled by realistic characters in situations of everyday village life, albeit “everyday village life” as imagined by court writers living in Surakarta.

6 The Javanese text is taken from volume 6 of the twelve-volume edition of the Sĕrat Cĕnthini prepared by Kamajaya (1988b: 141-142, v. 1-14). This edition can be read and searched online at the wonderful website of the Yayasan Sastra Lestari, sastra.org or downloaded from the Internet Archive, archive.org. My warm thanks to Els Bogaerts, Nancy Florida, and Edwin Wieringa for their valuable suggestions for improving the translation and commentary.
3. **Andĕle ing Wanamarta**
   pan amung awirya kalih
   Jayengraga Kulawiry
   keringan ing kanan kering
   pataren angrampungi
   pakevĕde ada dhuisun
   nadyan murading kitab
   gathak-gathuk amĕdhoti
   watak kĕras krawusan nanging wĕlasan

   Most trusted in Wanamarta
   the both of them were valiant,
   Jayengraga Kulawiry,
   respected right and left,
   as advisors they settled
   the problems from village disputes,
   even meanings of scripture,
   they made connections, brought closure,
   harsh of manner, scolding and yet
   empathetic.

4. **Yen kalĕrĕsan tyasira**
   kĕcondhong lĕga kang galih
   paring sih tan sita-sita
   mila sadaya jrih asih
   maring sang Jayengragi
   mtiwah mring Kulawiryeku
   mangkana wayahira
   waktu Luhur pĕcak kalih
   samya kendĕl rener marang masjid salat

   If it happened that their moods
   were in agreement and both good,
   they bestowed favour without stint.
   Thus all felt awe and affection
   for the noble Jayengragi
   as well as for Kulawiry.
   It had now become the time
   for midday prayers, two o’clock,
   all stopped work, took a break for prayer
   in the mosque.

5. **Sadaya samya sĕmbahyang**
   jalu estri tan na keri
   namung niyaga kewala
   ingkang kantun neng pandhapi
   wus antara kang sami
   asalat luhur bakda wus
   wangsu sewang-sewangan
   punapa garaping kardi
   kang mring pawon mring kĕbon kang mring
   pĕndhapa

   Everyone worshipped together
   men, women, no one was absent
   except for musicians, just those
   who remained in the pavilion.
   After a while those who had all
   prayed at midday finished doing so
   returning each separately
   depending on the job they handled
   to kitchen or garden. To the pavilion
   went

6. **Jengraga lan ingkang paman**
   Kulawiry lingira ris
   kowe mau Widiguna
   apa salat maring mĕsjid
   matur kasupen yĕkti
   ki Crĕmasana anjagur
   dhasar wong kĕneng lara
   latine wiwit dhek cilik
   dinangu mring bĕndara (n)dadak sĕmbrana

   Jengraga and his uncle.
   Kulawiry asked casually:
   Widiguna, just now, did you
   go to the mosque for your prayers?
   With respect, I forgot in fact!
   Ki Crĕmasana rapped his skull.
   For sure you’re asking for it!
   Forgetting your place since childhood,
   how dare you answer your betters so
   rudely!

7. **Jengraga mesĕm ngandika**
   ya Widiguna sireki
   jumungahamu kewala
   aja pot lyan sukĕr sakit
   kang kĕrĕng lehnu mrĕdi

   Jengraga smiled and remarked
   Yeah, Widiguna my fellow,
   Fridays for you would suffice.
   Don’t omit them unless you’re ill.
   Be firm in your instructions
kabeh wong rerehanamu
matur inggih sandika
Crĕmasana anudingi
o ngĕburi babon dimene andhĕndha
to all those under your command.
Sir, with respect, I obey!
Crĕmasana pointed at him:
Okay, to wipe away the sin just pay the fine!

8. Ngandika mara unekna
lirihan wae kang gĕndhing
lima rĕbab kombangmara
kĕmbangmara daradasih
muntap lawan pĕngrawit
limang gĕndhingan bae wus
kang sinung ling sandika
Crĕmasana angrĕbabi
asĕsĕndhonan pathĕt lima rum araras
Jengraga said: Come let it sound,
ever so softly, the gĕndhing
in lima for rĕbab, Kombang Mara,
Kĕmbang Mara, Daradasih,
Muntap, and Pengrawit,
five pieces, that will be enough.
Those spoken to did as commanded.
Crĕmasana played the rĕbab,
a mood song in pathĕt lima sweetly in
tune.

9. Nulya mungĕl kĕmbangmara
alun-jaladri ngrĕrangin
sakathahe kang miyarsa
jalwestri tyase mong brangti
rĕmpĕg panabuhneki
ukur jawil ngĕnut-ĕnut
ungĕle kang anglola
rĕbab gambang lawan suling
sarancak ungĕle kamot jroning kawat
Then resounded Kĕmbang Mara,
Ocean Waves ringing soft and sweet.
Everyone who was listening,
men, women, was deeply lovestruck.
The notes struck right together:
measured touches one by one;
sounds that were left abandoned:
rĕbab gambang and the suling;
ensemble of sounds: contained in a single
string.

10. Nganyut-anyut langkung raras
kasmaran ingkang miyarsi
lir mamrĕsing karasikan
ĕngĕse ngĕkĕsi ati
weh wilĕting malatsih
lir winulang ing wulangun
raosing tyas mangkana
saking ngĕnyĕting kang gĕndhing
nguyu-uyu ngrĕrantĕg demnya gamĕlan.
Swept along by sweetest music
smitten were those who heard it.
As if squeezing out pure pleasure,
moving, it caused hearts to tremble;
enhancing romantic desires,
like being taught sexual longing.
The feeling was just like that
from the stillness of the gĕndhing.
On and on the gamĕlan played without
a pause.

11. Mangkana ing wanci ngasar
Jayengraga ngandika ris
suwukĕn gamĕlanira
muni ladrangan nuli wis
singgalna kang meranti
ladrang pĕlayon den gupuh
nulya buka ladrangan
pĕlayon lima angrangin
dangu nĕsĕg ngandĕlong alon suwuknya.
When time for afternoon prayer
Jayengraga quietly spoke up:
Let’s bring the playing to a close
sound a ladrang then quickly end,
put away the instruments.
Quickly now Ladrang Pĕlayon!
Right away it opened
Ladrang Pĕlayon Lima sounded.
At length the quick tempo slackened
slowed and ended.
12. **Wusnya kendel kang gamelan**
   Kulawirya ngandika ris
   lah wis padha singgahena
   panganan brĕkatĕn mulih
   para niyaga nul
   angusung gamelaniipun
   mring dăem pasimpĕnan
   wus tĕlas samya neng ngarsi
   ngandika rum wis padha muliha dandan.

   After the gamelan had stopped
   Kulawirya quietly spoke up:
   So, that’s it, let’s put it away,
   with your ritual meals go home.
   Forthwith the musicians
   transported all the instruments
to where they were being stored.
   Finished, they waited before him.
   Quietly Jengraga ordered: Go home now
   and change.

13. **Kang liningan tur sandika**
   nĕmbah mundur samya mulih
   Jengraga malih ngandika
   kabeh sanak-sanakmami
   padha dandana mulih
   nganggoa kang saroa luhung
   saduwæk-dewekirá
   kurmat panganten kang prapti

   **kang liningan matur sandika sadaya**

   Those addressed agreed with respect
   paid homage, withdrew, all went home.
   Jengraga once more gave commands:
   All of you my relations and friends
   All go home and change your clothes,
   put on your very finest dress
   whatever you may possess,
   honour bride and groom when they
   come.
   Those addressed all murmured their
   respectful assent.

14. **Mangkana bubar sadaya**
   sudagar myang magĕrsari
   miwah santri ingundhangan
   badhe sĕlawatan dhikir
   Kulawirya wus mulih
   Jayĕngraga maring tajug
   asalat waktu ngasar
   lan para santri kang bumi
   wusnya bakda kundur malĕbeng ing wisma.

   And so it was that all dispersed,
   all the merchants and their tenants,
   as well as *santri* invited
   to sing holy songs and prayers.
   Kulawirya had gone home,
   Jengraga to the house of prayer
   to worship during Ngasar
   with the *santri* who were local.
   He finished praying, went home and
   entered his house.

**COMMENTARY**

In the 196 stanzas of *Pucung* (12u, 6a, 8i, 8a) in canto 363, a four-line form that lends itself to rapid shifts of descriptive focus and light-hearted narrative (Arps 1992: 423), Jayengraga’s leadership style has been on full display as he directs his household to prepare a feast in honour of the newlyweds. The first 14 stanzas of canto 364 in *Sinom*, a nine-line metre well suited for introductory, friendly, and “instructional” passages (Arps 1992: 422), serve as a transitional passage that connects the lively descriptions of everyday life as the village of Wanamarta celebrates the marriage of Tambangraras and Amongraga in *Pucung* to the main subject of the *Sinom* canto, beginning in stanza 16: long, richly detailed and instructive descriptions of the beautiful ceremonial attire donned by Jayengraga and other members of his household before they process to Jayengwesthi’s house to fetch Amongraga and bring him back to Jayengraga’s place, accompanied by a group of singing, praying *santri*. Jayengraga’s sense of authority (if not of entitlement due to a spoiled youngest son) has been illustrated best in
Pucung when he takes it upon himself to play on the sacred gamelan Alun Jaladri without asking the permission of either his father or the bridegroom, his brother-in-law Amongraga. The opening stanzas of our excerpt sketch Jayengraga’s character – his authority, his musicality, his attractiveness as a man and as a leader, his zest for life, but also his modest, everyday religiosity. All of this and more (including his insatiable sex drive!) has already been amply described in many preceding cantos, but the succinct depiction of him here focuses and adds further depth to the reader’s sense of this character as a real person. Jayengraga and Kulawirya are two of the most important “minor characters” in the Sĕrat Čenthini, appearing often as musicians, dancers, discussants, and sexual adventurers as they wander through later episodes of the poem looking for Amongraga after he disappears from the village, since married or not, Amongraga must continue his own quest in search of deeper knowledge and his lost siblings.

The two minor characters Widiguna and Crĕmasana also appear in Pucung during the long musical performance that takes up 125 out of 196 stanzas in that canto. These men have names that allude to their profession as dhalang topeng (mask dance performers and narrators) and they display their multiple skills in several scenes both before and after their appearance here.

“Crĕma Widi kalok pasisir, niyaga Wanamarta, kang komuk mumuruk” (Crĕma Widi, famous on the coast, Wanamarta musicians, renowned for their teaching) is how they are described in a Dhandhanggula stanza in canto 356 as they play the gĕndhing Pĕtungwulung during celebrations following Amongraga’s betrothal to Tambangraras (Kamajaya 1988a: 218, v. 291). In the Pucung canto 363, Crĕmasana, as in our excerpt, plays the rĕbab, and three stanzas are devoted to the skill and beauty with which he plays that instrument (stanzas 76-78). The brief exchange between the two musicians here on the subject of

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7 Jayengraga’s name, jaya (victory) -ing (of) - raga (the body), alludes to his orientation toward and prowess in the physical and material realm rather than in the spiritual aspects of life. In verse 138 of stanza 350 (Sinom), his straight-laced older brother sums up what makes him exceptional in the santri world of Wanamarta: “Kang raka aris ngandika, nring kang rayi Jayengragi, para iki norajamak, akeh kang sirajhĕmĕni, tan mambu trah ngulama, lir wong nagara angkuhmu, sabarang rinĕmĕnan, gĕgaman gamĕlan muni, iku rada sathithik cĕgahing sarak” [The older sweetly instructed, his little brother Jengraga, it’s out of the ordinary, everything you take pleasure in, not proper for a santri, you’re arrogant like a courtier, everything you hold dear, weapons, the sound of gamĕlan, are rather forbidden by religious law.] (Kamajaya 1988a: 109).

8 Nancy Florida pointed out to me the obvious giveaway in Crĕmasana’s name: cĕrma means ‘leather’. Widiguna’s name has an ancient pedigree linking it to topeng. According to the Kawruh Topeng, a Javanese text about topeng history, masks, and plays based on Panji stories written in 1882 to accompany a collection of masks that was sent by the Patih of Surakarta, R.Ad. Sasranegara, to the Colonial Exposition of Amsterdam of 1883, Widiguna was the name of one of the two dhalang who came from Sela and lived in Palar, and who were instructed by Sunan Kalijaga how to perform topeng stories about the adventures of Panji and introduce topeng dance to Java (Pigeaud 1938: 39-42; Brakel-Papenhuyzen 2020: 6). Jayengraga recites briefly from a Panji poem in the Pucung canto preceding our excerpt (Kamajaya 1988b: 134-135, v.125-127) and performs topeng in various scenes in the Čenthini, most notably in the passage discussed in Brakel-Papenhuyzen (2020: 5-6). Three times in the Čenthini Jayengraga is said to be as handsome as Wirun (see Illustrations 1 and 2), a character belonging to Panji’s entourage and associated with strong drink and womanizing (Pigeaud 1938: 378).
mosque attendance echoes and briefly recapitulates their much longer light-hearted banter on the same subject in *Pucung*. Widiguna and Crĕmasana are mentioned again in the poem two cantos later, where they make a spectacular appearance during festivities in Jayengraga’s house as identically costumed, unmasked dancers performing the *Klana Kasmaran* (*Klana in love*) dance, which is magically and terrifyingly choreographed by Jamil and Jamal, Amongraga’s two servants from Karang in West Java, where they have acquired astounding magical skills known as *ilmu ripangi* (Pigeaud 1938: 234, 260, 264).

What is the role of Widiguna and Crĕmasana exactly in the poem? They are both good examples of the kind of colourful minor character that was introduced into the early nineteenth-century versions of the *Sĕrat Jatiswara* and *Sĕrat Cĕnthini* by authors working in the Kadipaten Surakarta. The little vignettes in which their personalities, conversations, and performances are described add vividly to the everyday feel of the poem as well as provide the authors of the *Cĕnthini* with opportunities for displaying their knowledge about musicians, music, and performance.

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9 Klana is Panji’s demonic adversary.

10 Pigeaud (1938: 234) says that the origin of these magical practices was the teaching of Seh Rifa’i (Ahmed ar-Rifa‘i, 1106-1182), a contemporary of Seh Jilani (Abd al-Qadir Jilani, 1077-1166), the founder of the Qadiriyya religious order (*tarekat*). Jamil and Jamal are members of Seh Rifa’i’s mystical brotherhood, the Rifa‘iyyah; the name of their magic, *ilmu ripangi*, derives from its founder’s name. See Trimmingham (1998) for general background on the Rifa‘iyyah and other Sufi brotherhoods and Drewes and Poerbatjaraka (1938) for a discussion and extensive paraphrase of an early seventeenth-century West Javanese *macapat* poem about the life and miraculous deeds of Seh Jilani.
Apart from the representation of character and everyday life, interest in this opening section of Sinom centres on the playing of the pelog gamelan ensemble Alun Jaladri. Just as there are short reprises about the characters Jayengraga, Kulawirya, Widiguna, and Crĕmasana, so Alun Jaladri and its powerful, magical effect on those who hear it are briefly invoked before the instruments are put away and removed from the world of the poem. In Pucung the history of Alun Jaladri is told (it was a gift from the Adipati of Wirasaba, a fascinating minor character who has a steamy sexual encounter with Mas Cabolang, an important wanderer in the early part of the Cĕnthini and the chief protagonist of that section of the poem). Its special magical power on the listener is described as villagers, inspired by the sound of Alun Jaladri, put on their finery and troop to Jayengraga’s house with small cash donations to the wedding preparations. Here their enrapturement, illustrated at length in Pucung, is succinctly recalled in two stanzas of poetry that also evoke the aesthetics of playing and listening to gamelan.

The reader will notice how the prayer times of Luhur and Ngasar give chronological structure to the verses and organize the social world they describe. Every day in the Sĕrat Cĕnthini is punctuated by the times of prayer, which are also occasions for quoting from religious texts and describing ritual practices, which either precede or follow other kinds of noteworthy activity, that is, discussions about the many secular areas of “encyclopaedic” interest in the poem as well as vigorous scenes of sex, musical performance, and dance. Even the naughty, worldly Jayengraga regularly attends prayers at the mosque where his beautifully sung prayers instil piety (and perhaps other sentiments) in the ears of his fellow worshipers. Islam, in all of its various early nineteenth-century modalities, pervades and structures the social world of the poem, notwithstanding the many secular topics that are also examined. Even the banter between Widiguna and Crĕmasana in both the Pucung and Sinom cantos draws attention to religious practice and devotion, as does the playing of gamelan, the sound of which in this excerpt is compared to a kind of religious instruction (lir winulang ing wulangun).

The famous Surakarta musician and gamelan historian R.T. Warsadiningrat noted in 1929 in his “Rĕringkĕsan sĕjarah gamelan,” which forms part of the Koleksi Warsadiningrat held by the Yayasan Sastra Lestari and available online, that this pelog gamelan set dates from the late fifteenth century: “In 1489, Sinuhun Ratu Tunggul of Giri, acting on behalf of the karaton of Dĕmak, commissioned the making of a large pelog gamelan set, one that was tuned to the pitch of a Sĕkaten gamelan [that is, the special set that is played during the Garĕbĕg Mulud in the courts of Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and Cirebon]. This is Gong Kiyai Alun Jĕladri” (Koleksi Warsadiningrat 1929: 15, my translation). Whatever the historical accuracy of this dating may be, the fact that Kyai Alun Jaladri was traditionally thought to come from Giri connects it thematically to the historical/fictional world of the poem. Warsadiningrat provides more details about Kyai Alun Jaladri, without naming the gamelan set, in Warsadiningrat (1987: 59-60), as well as a fascinating account of the roles of Sunan Giri and Sunan Kalijaga in the “Islamization” of gamelan after the fall of Majapahit (Warsadiningrat 1987: 54-62). See also Sumarsam (2014). Sumarsam summarizes the verses in Pucung from canto 363 on Alun Jaladri and remarks: “Here, the supremacy of East Javanese art is revealed” (2014: 338).

I say “kind of religious instruction” because throughout the Cĕnthini there are descriptions of ecstatic religious experiences that involve sexual as well as spiritual arousal. The line in v.10
In the preceding Pucung canto, however, the significance of Alun Jaladri’s melodiousness is portrayed as magical in an older, pre-Islamic way: hearing the sounds of Alun Jaladri, an “heirloom from pagan times” (bintuwah\textsuperscript{13} Buda), is said to restore a “pagan energy” to the actions of the listeners (angrungu gamĕlan muni, sasolahe mulih tĕnaganing Buda).\textsuperscript{14} Clearly the Muslims in the world of the Sĕrat Cĕnthini are as culturally Javanese in a deep historical sense as they are religiously Islamic in a way that is still recognizable in Java today.

Gamĕlan is one of the several musical ensembles described in the Sĕrat Cĕnthini, along with different kinds of dance performance.\textsuperscript{15} Why is musical playing mentioned at all in the poem, let alone receive the kind of attentive, poetic treatment it does in Pucung and in our excerpt in Sinom? The first reason, as I have suggested, is the connection that the poem makes between listening to music and both sexual and spiritual ecstasy. In verse 114 of canto 363 in Pucung the musicians themselves become birai, sexually and spiritually aroused, from the experience of playing music together.\textsuperscript{16}

A second reason is that music making is an everyday practice in early nineteenth-century Java, especially in the context of the kind of well-funded wedding celebrations being held for Amongraga and Tambangraras. The kind of relaxed klĕnengan (jamming) by Jayengraga, Kulawirya, and their musician friends that is described in Pucung and Sinom also provides an opportunity for character development and the introduction of minor characters that add to the everyday realism that can be found in many other passages in the Cĕnthini. As John Pemberton observes in his witty and insightful essay on “how not to listen to Javanese gamelan”, playing and listening to gamĕlan at ceremonial events like weddings used to be similar to the experiences described in the Pucung and Sinom cantos of the Cĕnthini that I am discussing: relaxed, sprawling, enjoyable social occasions rather than the highly formal, scripted events that alludes to this kind of sexual-spiritual ecstasy, brought about by listening to gamĕlan music.

\textsuperscript{13} This word is spelled bituwah in all the dictionaries I have consulted.
\textsuperscript{14} Kamajaya (1988b: 140, v. 189-190). Just a few stanzas earlier (89-103), while he is sitting playing the rĕbab, Jayengraga asks Crĕmasana to fetch his Sĕrat Bratayuda Kawi, the late eighteenth-century copy of the epic poem in Old Javanese about the final battle between the Pandawas and the Korawas, originally written in East Java in 1157 (Supomo 1993: 8). Jayengraga puts down his instrument and recites a stanza from his Sĕrat Bratayuda in the “Sardula Wikidhriya” (Śārdulawikriditha) metre. The corrupt version of the Old Javanese in Jayengraga’s manuscript is incomprehensible, but the verse he recites is still traceable to the first stanza of canto 11 of the Old Javanese kakawin (Supomo 1993: 74). Widiguna comments that the Bratayuda is the dalil (Quran) of Javanese puppeteers (Kamajaya 1988b: 132, v.94)!
\textsuperscript{15} For discussions and translations of the passages in which gamĕlan playing is described in the Sĕrat Cĕnthini, see Kunst (1973: 177-277) and Sumarsam (2013). The most extended examination of the playing of different gamĕlan instruments in the poem occurs in the Pucung passage I have mentioned above.
\textsuperscript{16} Kamajaya (1988b: 133, v.114): “Tan adangu saya gulĕt wilĕtipun, rĕbut ngĕs kĕsaman, nabuhe samya birai, rahab berag rasa-rasa yen uwisa” (Soon the interweaving sounds brought greater pleasure: They seized satisfaction! The players were aroused, eager and randy, feeling as if they would burst!).
some readers of this commentary may have endured, involving interminable solemnity and uncomfortable straight-back chairs!  

A third reason for passages about gamèlan playing in the poem, including information about the history of a specific gamèlan ensemble, Alun Jaladri, a famous pelog ensemble known to the authors of the poem, has to do with the “encyclopaedic” interest in all matters relating to Javanese culture for which the Sèrat Cènthini is famous and which has made it of great value to scholars of Javanese religion, music, theatre, and so forth. The kind of sexual-spiritual ecstasy brought about by both playing and listening to gamèlan music in Pucung and Sinom adds another variant of kinds of religious knowledge and practice stored for posterity within the poem. In the Pucung canto, the musical accomplishments of the various musicians are also put on display, adding emphasis placed throughout the poem on the exemplary nature, to use Benedict Anderson’s word, of “professional” know-how, be it of musicians, dancers, thieves, or lovers.  

Our passage in Sinom contains another example of this encyclopaedism in the form of the list of five gèndhing in the pelog lima scale. 

There may be several reasons why these five pieces have been chosen for playing on Alun Jaladri at precisely this point in the story. According to Nancy Florida, the famous Yogyakarta musician and teacher K.R.T. Wasitodiningrat, known affectionately as Pak Cokro, often spoke to her of the spiritual power of gèndhing in pelog lima; pieces in this pathêt are also appropriate for the time of day in which they are played in the poem. The five gèndhing listed in the poem have the same names as pieces that are still known and, in the case of Kombang Mara, Kèmbang Mara, and Daradasih, frequently played in klènengan in Java today.  

One final interesting puzzle concerning the choice of music to be played in our excerpt is suggested by a conversation between two pèsindhen (female singers) that can be overheard at the start of a performance of Kèmbang Mara by the Surakarta ensemble Pujangga Laras on 5 May 2006.  

On the recording of the klènengan, one pèsindhen asks the other (in Javanese):
"Kombang or Kĕmbang Mara"? "Kĕm" comes the answer with a chuckle.22 In checking the Kamajaya version of our excerpt against the edition of the Romanized Sĕrat Cĕnthini published in Batavia in 1912, I discovered that the piece named in the first line of verse 9 in that text is Kombang not Kĕmbang Mara: "noelya moengel kombang mara" (Sĕrat Tjenthini 1912: 252). As it turns out, the manuscript of the section of the full Cĕnthini Kadipaten that was copied in 1846 and sent to the Netherlands as a gift, Or. 1814 (now kept in the manuscript collection of the Leiden University Library), and which was used to make the transcription published in Batavia also has Kombang not Kĕmbang Mara in this same line of verse 9 (see the beginning of the last stanza at the bottom of p. 913 of Or. 1814 in Illustration 3). Was it Kamajaya’s copyist or the copyist of Or. 1814 who, possibly transported for a moment by a musical memory of his own, wrote a pĕpĕt (ĕ) rather than a taling tarung (o), or vice versa? Without looking at the original manuscripts involved, I can’t say at this point. But irrespective of what was written down, might the description of the audience reaction in verse 10 help us decide which of the two gĕndhing is the one we are meant to hear in verses 9 and 10? According to the famous contemporary Surakarta musician and composer Supanggah, who discussed the Javanese aesthetic concept of rasa with Marc Benamou in 1992, Kombang Mara can be described as wingit (‘eerie, supernatural, awe-inspiring’) and rĕgu (‘stately, dignified, majestic; quiet, taciturn; serious, staid; calm’), qualities we can readily associate with the austerely religious bridegroom Amongraga (Benamou 2010: 163, 198, 245). But does this characterization of Kombang rather than Kĕmbang Mara help us understand the reaction of those who heard Alun Jaladri on that afternoon,

’Swept along by sweetest music
smitten were those who heard it.
As if squeezing out pure pleasure,
moving, it caused hearts to tremble;
enhancing romantic desires,
like being taught sexual longing?’

22 According to Kitsie Emerson, gamĕlan musician, translator, and researcher on Central Javanese wayang, this is a standard joke among pĕsindhen. She informs me as well that in Java today, “Kombang Mara is played for a midadareni, the vigil for a bride the night before her wedding, at the reception hosted by the bride’s family. The groom comes to the bride’s family, hence kombang [bee, that is, the groom] mara [approaches]. Kĕmbang Mara is played for a midadareni that is hosted by the groom, therefore kĕmbang [the flower, that is, the bride] mara (personal communication, 28-5-2020). Here the music is being played at the house of Jayengraga, a member of the bride’s family, so if something like the custom described by Emerson was already being observed in early nineteenth-century Java, Kombang Mara was an appropriate gĕndhing to be played in anticipation of Amongraga’s arrival for more feasting and celebration. This time, however, the wedding between Tambangraras and Amongraga has already taken place, in canto 357, and both are expected to mara, arrive, together, so perhaps it was fitting that both gĕndhing were played that afternoon, along with three others in the same pathĕt (mode). Warsadiningrat (1987: 78) says that both Kombang Mara and Kĕmbang Mara were composed during the reign of Pakubuwana IV (1788-1820). On the evidence of our excerpt, these gĕndhing were being played in 1815.
The reader might want to click on the links that I’ve provided in the footnote 23 and listen to contemporary performances of both gêndhing to form her own opinion on this question. Both of these recordings allow the listener to hear the beautiful interplay between the three layers of musical experience described in verse 9.23 Speaking for myself, the insistent, repeated flirtation between high 6 and 7 in Kêmbang Mara is what causes my own heart to tremble!

23 Kombang Mara [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpcPQBUQ-hU]; Kêmbang Mara [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gz_eV6GUFD0&t=0s&list=PLkl6GZGvK0p_eTcjVFi1rM5xZFVvU16yZG&index=12&app=desktop]. The notation for the balungan played by the saron (‘The notes struck right together’) in each gêndhing can be found in Illustrations 4 and 5.
Illustration 4. *Balungan* notation for *gĕndhing Kombang Mara*, in: “Gendhing Jawa – Javanese gamelan notation”. [Retrieved from: http://www.gamelanbvg.com/gendhing/gendhing.html].

Illustration 5. *Balungan* notation for *gĕndhing Kĕmbang Mara*, in: “Gendhing Jawa – Javanese gamelan notation”. [Retrieved from: http://www.gamelanbvg.com/gendhing/gendhing.html].
I want to end my commentary by making a few remarks about the poetry and how I have tried to render it into English. One of the most obvious differences between an encyclopaedic work like Raffles’s *History of Java* (1817) and the *Kadipaten* version of the *Sĕrat Cĕnthini* (1815) is that the latter was written in verse and intended to be sung, an episode or two at a sitting, one imagines, never from start to finish in its entirety (a recitation that would require weeks!), whether in private to oneself or before an audience. Let’s recall how the authors state their purpose at the beginning of the poem.24

The opening stanza of the *Sĕrat Cĕnthini* is explicit, therefore, in emphasizing the fashioned, poetic nature of the work. It is poetic form that shapes both the “story” and the way in which “Javanese know-how” is presented to the reader/listener. This fact has implications for how we interpret the poem and how we attempt to translate it into another language.

From the very first stanza of the selection the reader/listener can enjoy the poetic effects that make the verse anything but boring. For example, the sounds of *mangkana ki* in the first line are echoed by *amangku kardi* in the second, binding the lines together, anticipating the “u” in *amangku* and other semantic resonances to come, which do indeed occur, once the words *bupati* (regent), *ingugung* (spoiled), and *kalangkung* (exceedingly) in later lines have been voiced and their resonances with Jayengraga’s self-confidence and authority in the lap of his loving family become clear. The word *amangku*, ‘to take on one’s lap’, is the dominant semantic element in the titles of Javanese kings, such as Mangkunagara (‘He who holds the kingdom on his lap’) and Hamĕngkubuwana (‘He who holds the world on his lap’), conveying the total control of a benevolent paternalism. The same kind of knitting together of sound and sense occurs between lines 2 and 3: *dennira amangku kardi, katongton wibawanira*. This is not the only place in the *Sĕrat Cĕnthini* where alliteration and assonance suggest thematic connections and powerful cultural themes. Throughout the excerpt, the mainly eight-syllable lines, most of which are completed grammatical utterances, slot into one another to form a continuous and pleasing narrative line, the narrative varying between succinct assessments of the characters Jayengraga and Kulawirya, to a rapid overview of unfolding events, to colloquial banter, to a highly poetic evocation

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24 Kamajaya 1985: 1, v.1 (Sinom).
of the experience of listening to gamelan music, back to a plain, economical description of packing up and going home.

In crafting my translation, I have been guided by Nancy Florida’s practice of making the English singable in Sinom metre by sticking to the syllable count, in English, for each line. This constraint, I found, helped me pay close attention to each word in Javanese and so encouraged me to look for what I hope are creative as well as accurate English translations. I have also avoided supplying subjects to verbs where these are omitted in Javanese unless absolutely necessary to make the meaning clear, in order to give the reader the experience of having to identify the agents of actions and of having to make narrative connections between the line-units herself, a kind of participatory-performative sense-making and world-imagining that makes the experience of reading/listening to the best macapat poetry an energizing rather than a soporific intellectual experience. One way in which I have intervened, as translator, and introduced an element not found in the original, however, is in supplying punctuation marks. I have done so in order to clarify, as best as I can, the sense units that extend across line endings and occasionally across stanzas, so that the reader may appreciate the coherence of the narrative and the artistry with which it has been fashioned.

The most difficult stanza to translate is the most beautiful: the one describing the aesthetics of playing/hearing the gendhing Kĕm- (or Kom-)bang Mara played on Alun Jaladri. The focus of the first four lines in the stanza is the village listeners. The last five lines of the stanza shift the focus back to the musicians and attempt, in the succinct manner of the whole excerpt, to capture the musical interplay between different instruments of the gamelan ensemble. In trying to understand these last five lines I have sought guidance from Sumarsam and John Pemberton. “The point about gamelan’s musical processes,” writes Sumarsam, “is not so much that one part dictates another, but rather that one part interacts with and affects the other” (Sumarsam 2013: 132). “There are, for example,” explains Pemberton,

points in certain gamelan compositions where everyday melodic patterns are replaced by an idiosyncratic melody or a direct musical quotation; this gives the composition its character. Then again, there are melodic impasses, blind spots built into the very structure of gamelan music: points which require the sudden transformation of a two and one-half octave melody into one and one-half octaves; sudden modal shifts within a single composition; broad melodic leaps which, for the detailed workings of the gamelan’s elaborating instruments, can create the sense that there is no way to get “there” from “here.” [...] It is the solving, or better yet, the playing out of these musical riddles that forms a musician’s esoteric know-how: the crystallization from gamelan experience of all that does not fit the rules (Pemberton 1987: 26-27).

Pemberton comments in his own footnote to this passage that “The notion ‘know-how’ refers, in part, to the old sense of kawruh: acquired knowledge; lore; the specifics of a trade (before kawruh developed a rationalized feel in
Western scientific texts which appeared in Javanese at the beginning of this [20th] century). Kawruh is the word the authors of the Cĕnthini use for the “know-how” they are seeking and collecting in the opening stanza to the poem and to which the descriptions of musical performance in Pucung and Sinom, as well as the list of gĕndhing in pelog lima, attest.

Returning to the last five lines of our verse about music, the first two lines of the section describe the moments when notes being played on the metallic instruments that sound the basic melody perfectly and beautifully coincide. In contrast, in the next two lines, the haunting elaborating variations of the three non-metallic instruments, the stringed rĕbab, the wooden gambang, and the wooden flute or suling, that can always be heard rising above, and wandering away from, “simultaneously in-synchrony while out-of-phase”\textsuperscript{25} with, the unified metallophones, are mentioned, described as “abandoned, orphaned” (anglola), a beautiful metaphor that resonates with the theme of parents and children, brothers and sisters, mankind and God, separated, searching for one another, and then reunited, that runs through the whole Sĕrat Cĕnthini. And finally, in the final, twelve-syllable line of the stanza, the sounds of the entire ensemble are imaged, in a way that is mystically in keeping with the frequent speculations in the poem about the indwelling of God, who Himself encompasses all of creation, in man, as being concentrated within and then sounded by a single, bowed string of the rĕbab, the instrument that is thought of as the “soul” of the gamĕlan.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25} The phrase is Stephen Feld’s. For a discussion of Feld’s concept and the nature and role of “coincidence” in gamĕlan performance, see Sumarsam (2013: 133-138).

\textsuperscript{26} See Sumarsam’s discussion of the rĕbab in Sumarsam (2013: 129-130). I was dubious about my understanding of the image of the sound of the entire ensemble being contained within a single rĕbab string until I read Sumarsam’s translation, from a description of music-making from a later section of the Sĕrat Cĕnthini, of an almost identical formulation. Sumarsam’s rendition of the first six lines of a stanza in Dhandhanggula reads: “Intensely clear as the flute fills with essence; Intertwining is the ornament in accompanying the rĕbab; Hence significantly appealing as all meticulous embellishing [their playing]. As sliced rattan in a half, the sounds are encompassed in the string [swara mot jroning kawut]” (Sumarsam 2013: 130). Sarah Weiss, who is a gamĕlan musician, explained to me that the two strings of the rĕbab consist of the two halves of a single wire attached to the bottom of the instrument and then strung as two strands up along the body of the rĕbab and attached to pegs on either side at the top of the neck. The two halves of wire are then tuned to two different pitches. The comparison of the string(s) of the rĕbab to a piece of rattan sliced in two (later to be woven together as part of a mat) and the image of a single string “containing” and emitting different pitches at the same time thus make perfect sense! For the full context of this second rĕbab performance, see Kamajaya (1989: 237-238). Kulawirya is playing rĕbab on this occasion.
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