

Gigantic Trees as Narrative Actants in Javanese Wayang

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Research Article

Keywords: Javanese wayang, gigantic trees, post-classical narratology, narrative actants, intertextual encounter

Posted Date: June 5th, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-9803003/v1>

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Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Abstract

This article examines the narrative functions of gigantic trees in *perang ampyak* within *Parta Krama*, observed during pedagogical activities at *Pasinaon Dhalang Mangkunegaran* (PDMN), Surakarta. Existing studies on wayang frequently emphasize characters, morality, symbolism, and performance structures, while environmental presences often remain treated as passive settings or decorative background. Drawing on ethnographic observation, dialogue transcription, intertextual reading, and post-classical narratology, this study investigates how gigantic trees actively participate in narrative progression. The findings reveal that gigantic trees interrupt troop movement, generate ethical disagreement, reorganize character relationships, and redirect narrative trajectories. Rather than functioning merely as symbolic elements or environmental scenery, gigantic trees emerge as narrative actants capable of intervening in movement and reshaping social action. The narrative further transforms warrior identity from military actors into participants in environmental stewardship and collective restoration through *mutual cooperation*. Intertextual encounters with broader cultural narratives, including *Sycamore Gap* and other arboreal memory sites, demonstrate how gigantic trees emerge as repositories of memory and collective attachment. These encounters further extend the narrative significance of trees beyond the internal world of *wayang*. The study contributes theoretically by extending post-classical narratology toward arboreal narrative intervention and contributes pragmatically by demonstrating how Javanese wayang imagines ecological restoration through collective action and environmental care.

INTRODUCTION

In September 2023, public grief spread rapidly across social and news media following the destruction of the Sycamore Gap Tree in northern England. For nearly two centuries, the tree had stood beside Hadrian's Wall and gradually became more than a biological presence. It functioned as a landmark of memory, emotional attachment, and collective imagination. Public reactions following its destruction repeatedly described the event not merely as the loss of a tree but as the disappearance of history itself. Such responses raise a broader question concerning why gigantic trees repeatedly exceed environmental functionality and become entangled with collective life. Similar narrative configurations unexpectedly emerged during pedagogical observations of *perang ampyak* in Javanese wayang traditions.

Narrative studies have increasingly moved beyond human-centered interpretation and expanded toward encounters involving environments, material presences, and non-human entities. Recent developments in post-classical narratology no longer treat narrative worlds merely as structures populated by human characters and linear plots. Instead, narratives are increasingly understood as relational configurations in which landscapes, objects, and environmental presences actively participate in shaping events and reorganizing social meaning (Alber & Fludernik, 2010; Herman, 1999; Ryan, 2014). Such developments have generated growing scholarly interest in how material entities intervene in narrative progression and alter the relationship between humans and their surrounding worlds.

Within broader environmental humanities, trees have attracted increasing attention not solely as ecological resources but also as sites of memory, social attachment, and cultural continuity. Studies

increasingly suggest that gigantic trees frequently exceed biological functions and become embedded within collective narratives and public experience (Ingold, 2011; Tsing, 2015). In many societies, gigantic trees function as landmarks of memory, repositories of historical imagination, and material presences through which communities organize social worlds. Public responses surrounding the destruction of major trees in different cultural contexts further suggest that trees frequently become associated with broader experiences of historical loss and collective grief.

Contemporary environmental scholarship increasingly argues that human-tree relations cannot be reduced to ecological functionality alone. Urban forestry studies have shown that trees are embedded within social questions of access, value, and environmental justice, prompting critical inquiries concerning "the right tree, right place, for whom?" (Breyer & Mohr, 2023). Within Javanese cultural traditions, relationships between humans and trees likewise extend beyond environmental utility alone. Trees frequently appear within myths, ritual practices, literary narratives, and performative traditions. Yet in many literary interpretations, arboreal presences continue to occupy secondary positions as symbolic decoration, cosmological markers, or passive environmental settings. Similar tendencies also appear within studies of Javanese wayang, where environmental elements often remain subordinated to human actors and heroic action. Existing scholarship frequently prioritizes characters, morality, performance structure, and symbolic dimensions of wayang narratives, while the narrative capacities of environmental presences remain relatively underexamined. Recent developments in narrative studies increasingly challenge assumptions that narrative agency belongs exclusively to human characters. Discussions surrounding material participation and non-human presence have generated renewed interest in entities capable of influencing narrative progression without necessarily occupying conventional subject positions. Within broader narrative and relational perspectives, actants may include human and non-human presences whose capacities emerge through relationships and narrative effects rather than through intentional agency alone (Bennett, 2010; Latour, 2005). Such perspectives allow environmental entities to participate actively in the unfolding of narrative worlds.

This issue becomes particularly visible in *perang ampyak*, a recurring wayang sequence depicting the movement and temporary obstruction of royal troops, within *Parta Krama*, a Javanese shadow puppet narrative cycle, observed during pedagogical activities at Pasinaon Dhalang Mangkunegaran (PDMN), a traditional puppetry training institution in Surakarta. Conventionally, *perang ampyak* is frequently understood as a transitional sequence depicting troop movement or temporary interruption within narrative progression. However, ethnographic observation unexpectedly revealed a different configuration. The interruption experienced by the advancing warriors does not culminate in military confrontation but instead develops into environmental deliberation centered around gigantic trees. The presence of these trees interrupts movement, generates disagreement, redirects ethical reasoning, and ultimately reorganizes collective action, suggesting a narrative role extending beyond passive environmental background.

This unexpected narrative configuration became the primary motivation for the present study. Rather than examining gigantic trees as symbolic objects or environmental background, this article investigates how

gigantic trees participate within narrative progression itself. Through post-classical narratology and intertextual reading, the study examines how gigantic trees function as narrative actants that intervene in movement, reorganize character relations, and reshape the trajectory of *perang ampyak*. Such inquiry also seeks to contribute to broader discussions concerning narrative intervention, environmental storytelling, and relationships between human and non-human presences within literary worlds.

Despite growing scholarly interest in narrative environments, material presences, and post-classical approaches, existing studies continue to demonstrate several limitations. Previous scholarship has expanded narrative inquiry beyond human-centered structures and increasingly recognizes the importance of environments and non-human relations. However, these studies frequently focus on modern literary narratives, theoretical discussions, or broader environmental configurations. Relatively limited attention has been directed toward performative literary traditions such as Javanese wayang, particularly regarding how arboreal presences actively participate in narrative progression. To clarify the position of the present study within existing scholarship, Table 1 summarizes selected previous studies and identifies remaining research gaps.

Table 1
Previous studies and research gap

Author(s)	Year	Focus of Study	Method/ Theory	Key Findings	Research Gap
Hilson	(2022)	Narrative and environmental relations	Narrative approach in environmental studies	Narrative functions as a medium connecting environmental experience, emotion, and social understanding. Environmental narratives shape how ecological realities become socially meaningful.	Does not examine gigantic trees as active narrative entities within literary performance traditions
Velu & Rajasekaran	(2024)	Environmental injustice and narrative ecology	<i>Eco-narratology</i>	Narrative techniques shape ecological understanding and collective responses toward environmental crises.	Does not discuss gigantic trees as active narrative entities in narrative progression
Caracciolo et al.	(2021)	Narrative experience beyond anthropocentrism	Narrative theory and non-human spatiality	Literary narratives may destabilize anthropocentric assumptions and foreground non-human spaces as active experiential formations.	Focuses on narrative environments and spatiality rather than gigantic trees as specific narrative actants
Rumbay et al.	(2024)	Ethical and religious functions of wayang	Theological and cultural interpretation	Wayang functions not merely as spectacle but as a medium of ethical guidance and social formation.	Focuses on religious and moral dimensions without examining environmental presences as active narrative participants
Rosina & Mattioli	(2025)	More-than-human relations in learning ecosystems	More-than-human-centered design	Self-narration involving non-human entities may foster interconnectedness and shared agency between humans and non-humans.	Focuses on sustainable learning ecosystems rather than literary narrative intervention

Author(s)	Year	Focus of Study	Method/Theory	Key Findings	Research Gap
Schoene	(2022)	Arboreal presences in literary narratives	Arboreal criticism and literary analysis	Trees increasingly exceed decorative and symbolic functions and may reorganize literary relationships and narrative configurations.	Does not examine gigantic trees as narrative actants in performative literary traditions such as Javanese wayang
Yu et al.	(2025)	Environmental storytelling through AI visualization	Creative AI and environmental storytelling	Environmental narratives increasingly extend beyond conventional textual forms and democratize public engagement with ecological issues.	Focuses on technological mediation rather than literary narratives and non-human narrative intervention
Mohamad Ali et al.	(2025)	Environmental storytelling and digital puppet interaction	Storytelling and audience response analysis	Puppet-based environmental storytelling shapes emotional engagement and environmental perception among audiences.	Focuses on audience response and digital media rather than environmental entities as active narrative participants
Ingold	(2011)	Human-environment relations and material life	Relational anthropology	Human worlds emerge through continuous entanglements with environmental presences	Does not examine gigantic trees as active narrative entities within performative literary traditions

Recent scholarship increasingly demonstrates a shift from human-centered narrative analysis toward broader configurations involving environments, material presences, and non-human relations. Studies in post-classical narratology and *econarratology* have begun to examine how environments shape narrative worlds and reader experience. However, previous scholarship remains largely concentrated on modern fiction, planning narratives, or theoretical discussions of environmental narrative structures. Limited attention has been given to performative literary traditions such as Javanese wayang, particularly regarding how gigantic trees participate directly within narrative progression.

This article addresses this gap by proposing gigantic trees not as symbolic representations or passive environmental settings but as narrative actants actively intervening in movement, ethical reasoning, and social interaction. Theoretically, the study extends post-classical narratology toward arboreal narrative intervention. Pragmatically, it demonstrates how Javanese wayang offers narrative models of ecological restoration grounded in collective action and *mutual cooperation*. Through this perspective, *perang ampyak* emerges not merely as a transitional battle sequence but as a narrative space where relationships between humans and environments are continuously negotiated.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative design combining ethnographic observation, textual transcription, translation, intertextual reading, and post-classical narratological analysis. Such approaches are particularly useful for examining cultural meaning as situated experience and interpretive practice rather than isolated textual content (Geertz, 1973; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Qualitative approaches are particularly suitable for examining meaning-making processes, narrative structures, and cultural interpretation embedded within social practices and literary forms. Following ethnographic perspectives emphasizing situated cultural experience and interpretive understanding, this study approached *perang ampyak* not merely as a performative event but as a site of narrative and cultural transmission (Geertz, 1973; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Fieldwork was conducted at *Pasinaon Dhalang Mangkunegaran* (PDMN), Surakarta, from 17 to 21 May 2026. PDMN is a non-formal educational institution specializing in Javanese wayang pedagogy and transmission. Data collection consisted of direct observation of classroom activities, visual documentation, and ethnographic conversations with teachers and participants involved in the learning process. Particular attention was given to instructional sessions involving *perang ampyak* in *Parta Krama*, since this episode unexpectedly revealed intensive interactions between troop movement, environmental obstacles, and narrative negotiation.

The *perang ampyak* dialogue was transcribed from instructional performance and subsequently translated into English for analytical purposes. Transcription was not treated merely as a linguistic conversion process but as a means of preserving narrative sequence, interactional dynamics, and performative context. Selected excerpts from the dialogue were incorporated into the analysis as narrative evidence, while complete transcription was retained as supplementary material.

Analysis employed post-classical narratology, which expands narrative inquiry beyond structural plot arrangements and increasingly attends to dynamic relations among material entities, environments, and narrative worlds (Alber & Fludernik, 2010; Herman, 1999). This perspective allows narrative entities beyond human characters to participate actively in narrative progression and enables examination of how environmental presences intervene through their relational effects. Rather than treating landscape elements as passive background settings, post-classical narratology allows examination of how non-human presences actively intervene in narrative progression. To support this approach, intertextual reading was also employed following the view that texts continuously intersect with other narratives and

cultural experiences (Kristeva, 1980). Through this procedure, *perang ampyak* was read alongside broader literary and cultural narratives concerning gigantic trees, enabling analysis of recurring encounters between humans and arboreal presences across different contexts. Particular attention was given to identifying narrative actants, understood as entities whose presence actively reorganizes movement, relationships, and narrative progression. Rather than limiting analysis to human characters, the study examined how environmental presences may intervene in story development through their relational effects and narrative capacities (Latour, 2005).

RESULTS

Gigantic Trees as Narrative Actants in Perang Ampyak

Field observations conducted at *Pasinaon Dhalang Mangkunegaran* (PDMN), Surakarta, revealed that *perang ampyak* in *Parta Krama* differs substantially from conventional battle sequences in Javanese wayang. Previous studies frequently position wayang performance as a dynamic cultural system where movement, performance, and ethical reflection remain inseparable (Keeler, 1987). Rather than depicting direct military confrontation between opposing forces, the episode presents a large troop movement that suddenly encounters an interruption within the landscape itself. The advancing warriors are suddenly forced to halt as the road ahead becomes impassable, transforming movement into uncertainty and redirecting attention toward the surrounding landscape. Stones, deep hollows, and environmental obstacles disrupt their movement and create uncertainty among the troops.

As shown in Fig. 1, *perang ampyak* visually stages an encounter between *gunungan* and *ampyak*. Conventionally, such scenes are often interpreted merely as transitional sequences intended to depict troop movement. However, the dialogue observed during the instructional process indicates that the interruption is not purely logistical. The narrative gradually shifts from troop mobility toward environmental deliberation.

One warrior proposes a direct and instrumental solution:

"Why not just chop those big trees down?"

This statement positions gigantic trees as physical obstacles requiring removal in order to restore movement. Yet the narrative unexpectedly redirects the conversation. Another warrior rejects the proposal and initiates a counterargument concerning the importance of gigantic trees. Rather than functioning merely as landscape elements, gigantic trees become the center of ethical reasoning and narrative conflict.

The dialogue explains that gigantic trees serve as providers of water, stabilizers of soil, protectors against environmental damage, filters of polluted air, and habitats for animals. More importantly, trees are associated with collective continuity and historical memory.

One warrior further states:

"There are many accounts of people in distant countries who have felt the loss of their history after such great trees were cut down."

These opposing statements establish the first explicit narrative tension between instrumental logic and environmental ethics. Interestingly, this narrative statement extends beyond the internal world of *Parta Krama* and resonates with empirical events in broader cultural contexts. This observation resonates with wider empirical events such as the public response following the destruction of the *Sycamore Gap Tree* in the United Kingdom. For nearly two centuries, the tree functioned as an iconic cultural landmark and one of the most photographed trees in the United Kingdom. Following its destruction in 2023, public reactions demonstrated how gigantic trees may exceed ecological presence and become repositories of memory, emotional attachment, and collective continuity. Adapted from National Trust documentation (Trust, 2023).

Photograph of the *Sycamore Gap Tree* near Hadrian's Wall, Northumberland, England. The tree became one of the most recognized landscape icons in the United Kingdom and later generated widespread public grief following its destruction in 2023. *Adapted from National Trust (2023).*

Figure 3 presents the Freetown Cotton Tree before and after its collapse. The left panel depicts the historic Cotton Tree as a monumental urban landmark and civic presence in Freetown, while the right panel shows its surviving remains following the 2023 collapse, while the right panel presents the memorialized remains of the Cotton Tree following its 2023 collapse, wrapped with the Sierra Leonean national flag and continuing to function as a site of public memory (Trede, 2007; Tyre, 2025). Together, the images illustrate not merely ecological transformation but a material transition through which collective memory persists despite biological rupture.

Figure 3, together with Fig. 2, provides comparative contexts illustrating how gigantic trees may exceed biological existence and emerge as material anchors of historical continuity and social attachment. Their significance extends beyond environmental utility or landscape presence alone. Gigantic trees can reorganize narrative relationships, shape spatial attachment, and redirect the internal logic through which communities interpret place and history. In this sense, the narrative reference found in *perang ampyak* intersects with broader intertextual experiences in which large trees function as symbolic centers of continuity, civic orientation, and collective attachment.

Gigantic Trees and Narrative Reorganization

The findings further demonstrate that gigantic trees in *perang ampyak* do not function merely as passive background settings. Their presence actively reorganizes narrative progression and alters the direction of events. Initially, troop movement proceeds according to the conventional logic of military advancement. Yet the appearance of gigantic trees interrupts this progression and transforms what initially appears as a logistical problem into an ethical encounter.

The interruption created by gigantic trees produces disagreement among the warriors. One character adopts an instrumental perspective by proposing that the trees be cut down to facilitate movement. However, this proposal immediately generates opposition. The dialogue subsequently shifts away from military strategy toward environmental reflection. The trees are gradually articulated as providers of water, protectors of land stability, filters of polluted air, habitats for animals, and repositories of historical continuity.

The presence of gigantic trees therefore initiates a transformation in the narrative itself. Rather than merely obstructing movement, they redirect the trajectory of action and reorganize social interaction among characters. This redirection becomes particularly visible through the changing definition of warrior identity. Initially, warriors are narrowly associated with combat responsibilities. Yet the dialogue eventually repositions them as participants in environmental repair and collective action.

The narrative concludes not through conquest over nature but through the restoration of damaged space. Instead of destroying the trees, the warriors choose to repair the road collectively through *mutual cooperation*. Gigantic trees therefore cease to function merely as environmental scenery. Their presence actively intervenes in narrative progression, redirects ethical reasoning, and reorganizes the relationship between movement, conflict, and collective action.

DISCUSSION

From Landscape to Narrative Intervention

Conventional readings of *perang ampyak* often position the episode merely as a transitional sequence depicting troop movement or temporary interruption within a journey. Such interpretations tend to treat landscape as passive background scenery accompanying narrative progression. However, the findings of this study suggest a substantially different configuration. Within *Parta Krama*, landscape does not remain inert. Recent developments in post-classical narratology increasingly recognize environments not merely as passive scenery but as active narrative configurations capable of shaping events and character relations (Herman, 2002; Ryan, 2014). Instead, environmental elements actively participate in directing the narrative itself.

The interruption initially appears as a logistical problem. The warriors encounter damaged roads, large stones, deep hollows, and dense vegetation that obstruct movement. Yet among these environmental elements, gigantic trees emerge as the most decisive presence. Their appearance alters the trajectory of interaction among characters and redirects the story away from military advancement toward ethical negotiation. Rather than functioning as decorative scenery, gigantic trees actively interfere with movement and reorganize narrative progression.

This finding departs from conventional assumptions in literary interpretation where landscape frequently remains subordinate to human action. Post-classical narratology increasingly recognizes that narrative worlds consist not only of human actors but also of dynamic relations involving environments, objects,

and material presences (Alber & Fludernik, 2010; Herman, 1999). Within this perspective, gigantic trees in *perang ampyak* cannot be reduced to symbolic decoration. In this sense, gigantic trees function less as symbolic objects than as actants whose presence generates consequences within networks of narrative relations (Latour, 2005). Such a shift resonates with broader discussions concerning material participation in social worlds where non-human presences possess capacities to reorganize human action and perception (Bennett, 2010). Their presence interrupts movement, generates disagreement, initiates reflection, and transforms decision-making processes.

The interruption generated by gigantic trees therefore exceeds spatial obstruction alone. It initiates narrative intervention. Movement is suspended, conflict emerges, and ethical deliberation becomes possible precisely because gigantic trees enter the narrative field. The transition from military progression toward environmental reflection suggests that landscapes in Javanese wayang may possess a more active narrative status than commonly assumed.

Intertextual Encounters with Gigantic Trees

The narrative significance of gigantic trees in *perang ampyak* extends beyond the internal structure of *Parta Krama*. The dialogue unexpectedly projects its concerns outward and intersects with broader narrative and cultural experiences. This movement suggests that gigantic trees do not remain confined within a single textual world. Instead, they travel across stories, memories, and cultural contexts, repeatedly emerging as material presences capable of reorganizing collective meaning.

One particularly striking moment in the dialogue appears when a warrior warns against the destruction of gigantic trees by referring to experiences from other countries. He states that many communities have suffered historical loss after large trees were cut down. Although articulated within the fictional world of *perang ampyak*, this statement establishes a narrative opening toward broader cultural realities. Rather than functioning merely as environmental concern, gigantic trees become associated with memory, continuity, and shared historical attachment.

This intertextual movement becomes visible through comparison with narratives beyond Javanese wayang. In a Javanese short story published in *Jaya Baya*, village residents protest plans to cut down a large tree located at the edge of their settlement because the tree functions as a center of village memory and communal identity (Budianto, 2020). Here, the tree exceeds environmental utility and emerges as a node through which collective history is organized.

Comparable patterns can also be observed in wider cultural contexts. Public reactions following the destruction of the *Sycamore Gap Tree* and the collapse of the historic kapok tree in Freetown demonstrate that gigantic trees frequently become repositories of emotional attachment and historical continuity. The loss experienced in these contexts was not limited to ecological damage alone. Communities frequently articulated the event as the disappearance of memory itself. Similar observations have emerged in studies emphasizing how human worlds continually unfold through entanglements with environmental presences rather than through isolated human agency (Ingold, 2011; Tsing, 2015).

Taken together, these encounters suggest that gigantic trees repeatedly appear across narratives as more than symbolic objects or environmental resources. They emerge as recurring material presences capable of interrupting human action and reorganizing social meaning. Through such intertextual circulation, gigantic trees move across literary texts, empirical experiences, and collective memory systems, generating a narrative continuity that exceeds the boundaries of individual stories. This movement resembles broader understandings of material continuity in which objects and environments exceed symbolic status and become relational centers through which social worlds are organized (Miller, 2008).

Reimagining Warriors Beyond Warfare

One of the most unexpected findings emerging from *perang ampyak* concerns the transformation of warrior identity itself. At the beginning of the dialogue, warfare is narrowly defined through a conventional military framework. One character explicitly states:

"Are we not warriors? The duty of warriors is but to fight."

This statement initially establishes a familiar understanding of warriors as actors whose primary function lies in combat and confrontation. Such a perspective positions military identity within a narrowly instrumental logic centered upon conflict and physical engagement. Within conventional battle narratives, environmental obstacles frequently become secondary concerns that must simply be overcome.

However, the dialogue unexpectedly destabilizes this assumption. Another warrior immediately challenges the reduction of military identity solely to warfare by pointing toward carts following the troops, filled with practical tools such as crowbars, hoes, sickles, and other implements. Rather than functioning merely as combat equipment, these objects indicate a broader orientation toward maintenance, repair, and collective labor.

This shift significantly reorganizes the narrative meaning of warriorhood. The warriors in *perang ampyak* are no longer represented solely as agents of conquest or destruction. Instead, they gradually emerge as participants in environmental stewardship and practical problem-solving. Their response to environmental disruption does not culminate in domination over landscape but in the repair of damaged space. This reorientation suggests forms of care and maintenance extending beyond military logic and toward sustaining collective conditions of life (Haraway, 2016).

The narrative resolution further reinforces this transformation. Instead of cutting down gigantic trees to restore mobility, the warriors collectively decide to repair the damaged road through shared labor and *mutual cooperation*. The proposed solution redirects narrative energy away from extraction and toward restoration.

This finding suggests a broader reimagination of warfare itself. Within *perang ampyak*, warrior identity exceeds military confrontation and becomes associated with care, environmental responsibility, and collective action. Rather than producing victory through destruction, the narrative envisions social order

through maintenance and repair. Warriors therefore cease to function merely as instruments of battle and instead emerge as actors engaged in sustaining the conditions of collective life.

Mutual Cooperation and Ecological Restoration

The concluding movement of *perang ampyak* reveals a striking shift in narrative orientation. After prolonged disagreement concerning environmental obstacles and the possible destruction of gigantic trees, the story ultimately rejects extraction as a solution. Rather than removing the trees to facilitate movement, the warriors collectively decide to repair the damaged road. This decision significantly redirects the narrative trajectory from environmental domination toward ecological restoration.

The proposed solution is particularly important because the narrative does not resolve conflict through individual heroism or military force. Instead, restoration emerges through collective labor. The warriors agree to level uneven surfaces, fill deep hollows, and repair damaged pathways together. Environmental disruption therefore becomes not a justification for destruction but an opportunity for shared action and responsibility.

This orientation becomes even more visible through the humorous exchanges occurring at the conclusion of the episode. Expressions such as *sewidak tumindak* and subsequent playful dialogue involving cooperation and collective work initially appear merely as comic relief. However, rather than interrupting the ethical direction of the narrative, humor functions as a mechanism through which values are transmitted and socially internalized. The comedic sequence gradually redirects tension away from disagreement and toward participation in collective action.

The movement toward *mutual cooperation* therefore exceeds practical problem-solving alone. It reorganizes the ethical logic of the narrative itself. Rather than framing restoration as technical labor, *perang ampyak* presents repair as a collective social practice grounded in shared responsibility. Environmental care emerges not through abstract moral instruction but through embodied action performed together. Restoration therefore appears less as technical activity and more as a collaborative practice through which shared worlds are continuously maintained (Ingold, 2011).

Seen from this perspective, *perang ampyak* concludes not with victory over enemies but with restoration of damaged relationships between movement, landscape, and collective life. Ecological order is achieved not through conquest but through repair. The narrative thus reimagines environmental responsibility as a cooperative process through which damaged worlds become habitable again.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that gigantic trees in *perang ampyak* cannot be understood merely as symbolic elements or passive environmental scenery within Javanese wayang narratives. Through ethnographic observation, dialogue transcription, and post-classical narratological analysis, the findings reveal that gigantic trees actively intervene in narrative progression. Their presence interrupts movement, generates

conflict, redirects ethical reasoning, and reorganizes relationships among characters. Rather than functioning as background settings, gigantic trees emerge as narrative actants whose presence reshapes the unfolding structure of the story.

The findings further indicate that *perang ampyak* extends beyond its conventional interpretation as a transitional battle sequence. Instead of presenting warfare as direct confrontation, the narrative transforms environmental interruption into a space of deliberation and negotiation. Through intertextual encounters involving broader literary and cultural experiences, gigantic trees repeatedly appear as repositories of memory, continuity, and collective attachment. Simultaneously, warrior identity undergoes substantial reconfiguration, shifting from narrowly defined military roles toward environmental maintenance and collective responsibility.

This article contributes to post-classical narratological discussions by proposing that narrative encounters with gigantic trees may function as forms of narrative intervention rather than decorative landscape representation. The study also contributes to broader discussions concerning environmental storytelling by demonstrating how Javanese wayang imagines ecological restoration not through domination over nature but through *mutual cooperation*, repair, and collective action. Future studies may further explore how arboreal presences travel across narratives and cultural traditions, generating new configurations of relationships between humans, environments, and narrative worlds.

Declarations

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Funding

This research was supported by the Institute for Research and Community Service, Universitas Sebelas Maret, through the Research Group Capacity Strengthening scheme (PKGR-UNS B 2026) under contract number 462/UN27.22/PT.01.03/2026.

Author Contribution

A.I. and W.A. contributed to the conceptualization and design of the study. A.I., W.A., P.A.W.W., and M. conducted field observations and data collection. A.I. and W.A. performed data analysis and interpretation. W.A. developed the methodological framework and supervised the research process. M. and S.M. conducted literature review and assisted in manuscript preparation. S.E.W. and S.T.W. contributed to theoretical refinement, critical revision, and supervision. A.I. and W.A. prepared the main manuscript text and figures. All authors reviewed, revised, and approved the final manuscript.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the Institute for Research and Community Service, Universitas Sebelas Maret, for supporting this research program.

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Figures



Figure 1

Perang ampyak learning session at *Pasinaon Dhalang Mangkunegaran* (PDMN), Surakarta. The image shows the encounter between *gunungan* and *ampyak* during pedagogical transmission in a classroom setting. Photo by researcher, May 2026.



Figure 2

Sycamore Gap Tree as a Site of Collective Memory and Cultural Attachment.

Photograph of the *Sycamore Gap Tree* near Hadrian's Wall, Northumberland, England. The tree became one of the most recognized landscape icons in the United Kingdom and later generated widespread public grief following its destruction in 2023. *Adapted from National Trust (2023).*



BEFORE

The Cotton Tree, Freetown, Sierra Leone
(photograph by Christian Trede, 2007;
CC BY-SA 2.0) (Trede, 2007)



AFTER

Remains of the Cotton Tree after its collapse
in 2023, Freetown, Sierra Leone (photograph
by Smoking Tyre, 2025; CC BY-SA 4.0) (Tyre,
2025)

Figure 3

Before and after the Freetown Cotton Tree, Sierra Leone.

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- [SupplementaryFile1.EnglishTranslationofPerangAmpyakDialoguefromPartaKrama.docx](#)