

## Conference Paper

# Novel Covers as Literary Art

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### Abstract

Literary art is a translation, interpretation, transmutation of literary text from language system to another signs system. It is a perception product, interpretation and translation of its original works, not to be duplication but as a form of work of art. This research is intended to reveal Novel covers system of representation. The aim is to find out whether it represents the novel values or not as a literary art. In doing so, this research used qualitative method with *Negeri van Oranje* and *Ayah* covers as primary data. The data are chosen using purposive sampling with two basic standards: popularity and Myers design standards. Using representation theory and semiotic as tools of analysis, the research then finds that *Negeri van Oranje* and *Ayah* covers have two aspects of presentation: novel content values or theme and marketing aspect. It is presented using two elements: textual and visual. The marketing aspect mostly uses texts elements and the novel content uses visual elements. They are using symbolic signs to build future reader impression and perception of the novel. The symbolic signs and concept are constructed to represent the novel content messages or values. Text features explain the visual features, and the visual features express the text features. Covers have different representation system from the novel but it is not an independent system. In conclusion, not every novel cover can be literary art but *Negeri van Oranje* and *Ayah* novel covers can be included as literary art.

**Keywords:** Literary arts, Novel Cover, Representation

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## 1. Introduction

As introduction, the terminology of literature in this paper is referred into two definitions; first, literature in language etymology and second, literature as concepts. Etymologically in *bahasa* literature or *Sastra* is defined as language style, words in books or literary works (KBBI, 2008: 1230). Literary works or *Susastra* in *bahasa* is defined as work that consists of literature, which have serious content and form, an expression of individual experience mediated through beautiful language structure, writings with high aesthetic values (KBBI, 2008: 1363).

In concepts, literature had many definitions. In ([11]: 15), stated literature as written text base, which is presented, produced and re-produced as written text. Eagleton (1996: 10) explains literature as high valued writing which does not have constant entity because it is based on valued judgment with various variables. Eagleton's definition is based on the assumption, what makes common works (written text) different from literature is in the society value judgment. A work can be aging but it always

consists of certain values from the society in its time. Others, Wolfreys (2006: 62) stated that the discussion of literature concepts is not in the form of the works, but on its content. In terms of form of the works, they firmly referred to imaginative, creative and fictional writings. But concerning the content, it is still debatable whether literature should be measured from its aesthetical language structure or from its whole values.

The above arguments perhaps can be neutralized by ([4]: 22) who stated that literature as cultural text which belongs to literature. In other word, a work can be a literary work when the society culture admits it as a literature. A judgment on works to be literature is depending on the cultural civilization. Literature is tied up with human as individual and society. As ([1]: 4) stated that literature is combination of language artistic values with human interest. Therefore, literature cannot be limited as language studies but also the development of the human cultural civilization. These ideas then deliver us to the understanding that literature text can also be understood as an art and a cultural product. So, it also can be represented in many forms of structure, as what we may call literary arts.

In short, literary arts can be understood as translation, interpretation, transmutation of literary text from one sign/language system to another. In translation context, Jakobson (Munday, 2001: 5) explains it as inter-semiotic translation. Meanings in literary text are represented using other sign or language system different from its original, such as written language signs become visual or verbal language signs.

The idea then, literary works by changing (verbal) written text into other form is adapted with the society taste in reading and enjoying literature. The question lays, is it the society taste that affects popularity ways in enjoying and reading literature? Or the popular arts that affect the society taste in how to enjoy and reading literature? Either way, the answer will end up to the basic that culture and technology development of the society are factors that determine literature to become literary arts itself. Literary arts as concept shows the way how values from literary works can survive through time that is not bounded through one language sign and code. It must not be tied up in single presentation perspective, and maintain the essences but be flexible in representation.

The question arises from the above idea that whether this connectivity between literature and other art forms reduce or even colliding the essence, the beautifulness and values of the literary works itself? According to ([7]: 83), the Russian formalist stated;

*Literary art devotes itself to the making strange (the de-familiarizing, or estranging) of our accustomed perceptions. At the same time, art exposes its own formal devices, estranging the techniques of representation. The purpose is to make life newly interesting as, or through, art: to get us to experience it as if the first time.*

Mikics' statement is understandable, that literary arts concept ideally is a matter of representation of structure, forms, and techniques of the original literary works

meanings. Even so there is no doubt in process that there will be reduction. The reduction occurs when there are limitations whether on the process or in the target signs/language system. There are details that cannot be represented into other form. It happened because the novel is limited by words to construct the reader's imagination. Words stimulate imagination but do not build on precise images that the author meant to be. On the other hand, for example novel cover is the opposite. The covers limited the audience imagination for the content of the novel. Covers only presented title, image clues and symbolic signs within the story plot visually. The future reader is forced to accept that what is presented in the cover as representation of the novel content perfectly. Because covers are made by cover designer and publisher, their perspectives on the novel and things that concerned production aspects such as printing expenses, marketing, and etc determine the cover creation. In other word cover is limited on how far the publisher could express his or her perspectives on the novel values and how the productions aspects to support it.

This limitation then followed by question, if there is limitation on transmutation from literary work becoming literary arts, so what is the 'red line' for it can be called literary arts? Is it all transmutation from literary work into other work of art can be considered form of literary art or duplication of literary work? Answering these questions, Fowler ([3]: 15) quoted from Wellek and Warren; literary arts are centered on the traditional genre from the lyrics, epic (specialty, beauty), and drama as fiction from an imagination. Referring on this statement, it is important to first placed literary arts not as compilation, structure of facts or the reality. Even when it is "bring up" from historical facts or consisted information based on true events, literary art must be placed on the art orientation, for its focus is emotive aspects not science. Bertens said ([2]: 17) literary art is to help us evaluate our own experiences, to judge our personal life. Like literature, who actually conveys certain knowledge that is not scientific or factual. It conveys values and meanings through languages to express and manipulate emotions. In other word the 'red line' of literary arts is the normative and aesthetic quality. In order to be called as a trans-semiotic translation of a literary works, a literary art should have similar quality values from its original. As a perception product, interpretation and translation of its original works, not to be duplication but form of work art.

The discussions then bring us to the research question, are all literary work covers literary arts? How about novel cover? Is it a part of literary arts or only marketing product? Does novel cover represent the novel values? In order to answer these questions, therefore the paper discussion will focus on novel cover as representation system of the novel.

## 2. Method

The research used *Ayah* and *Negeri van Oranje* novel covers as primary data. The data are chosen using purposive sampling method with two basic standards; first is for its



Figure 1: *Ayah* Novel Cover.

popularity. Second, the data fulfill Myers' ([6]: 369) designs standard; script, illustration, and lay out. The data in this study then are treated as system of representation. The aim is to find out whether it represents the novel values or not. In doing so, the study used qualitative method. Because according to Strauss and Corbin (1990: 19) qualitative method is able to reveal and understand meanings beneath a phenomena or sign. As a tool of analysis, the research used Stuart Hall representation theory and semiotic. Representation theory is used to analyze the relation between signifying systems, research object and the cultural concept. Semiotic is used to analyze the signifying systems on the research object. The discussion and findings of this research then are presented descriptively.

### 3. Findings and Discussions

The discussion starts with Andrea Hirata recent work *Ayah* the novel. *Ayah* is published in 2015 and listed as one of 2015 Indonesian popular novel by exceeding more than 7 times printed copies during the year. This achievement influenced not only for it is an excellent writing, but also other elements; such as an effective cover design.

In *Ayah* Cover design, we see two elements, written text and visual illustration. Please see figure 1.

The cover used texts *Ayah sebuah novel* as headline, *Andrea Hirata* the author, and words of endorsement from two reputable media *The Economist* and *The Guardian*. On

the cover text, we see that the publisher placed Andrea Hirata name on the top of with 'big' font size. Meanwhile the title is placed under the main visual icon of the cover. This position shows that the publisher is using Andrea's name as main text feature of the cover. It is uncommon, because usually on the middle top position on cover layout is placed by headline (the title). In other word, the publisher prefers to present the novel as work of a reputable writer rather than to promote the title. The text 'Andrea Hirata' is used as marketing features. Other cover texts that can be included as marketing feature are endorsements from The Economist and The Guardian, UK. Foreign institutional acknowledgment is used to construct future reader assumptions that the novel is well-acknowledged internationally and worth to read. The cover text elements signify marketing function not the content of the novel.

In ([5]: 22) stated that meaning depends on the connection between signs and concept that formed by codes. Therefore, to understand the cover representation meaning, we must also discuss the visual element of the cover. The visual element used adult and child figures illustration as the main visual features. The visual illustrates an adult with a bike pointing, like guiding the child that holding lollipop candy to see certain direction. Meanwhile the background shows busy surrounding in a sunset afternoon. From adult and child figure combination, the publisher seems want to construct the illustration of father and son. The use of the antique bike with balloon tied up with it, the lollipop that the child holding and the adult gesture pointing to a direction explains a lot. Antique bike denote that the novel used not recent story time frame. It connotatively expresses past childhood activity "a father takes his son to afternoon walk", assumed on the 1960-70 timeframe where the type of the bike is still popular to use. The visual illustration is constructed to build impressions of 'father and son' relationship values.

Barker (2004: 172-173) explains an object of representation is the image that presented as they really are to have reality effect. In other word, the value of representation depends on the relationship construction between the images as representation with the object of representation. Meaning the visual features, with father and son relationship in frame of childhood activity both connect to the text title and depict the theme content of the novel. The visual cover functioned as system of representation of the novel.

The second novel cover that we discussed is *Negeri van Oranje* (NVO). Please see Figures 2 and 3.

Figures 2 and 3 are *Negeri van Oranje* (NVO) novel covers. As novel, NVO published in April 2009 (see; Figure 2) and second edition in June 2014 (see; Figure 3) by Bentang Pustaka publisher. The authors are Wahyuningrat, Adept Widiarsa, Nisa Riyadi, and Rizki P.Permana. If we see the figures, we see NVO used different designs with similar elements one another. In the first edition of novel covers, NVO used darker orange color as background and bright orange for the title. The second edition used bright orange color as background and white for title. Orange color is the similarity. Using



Figure 2

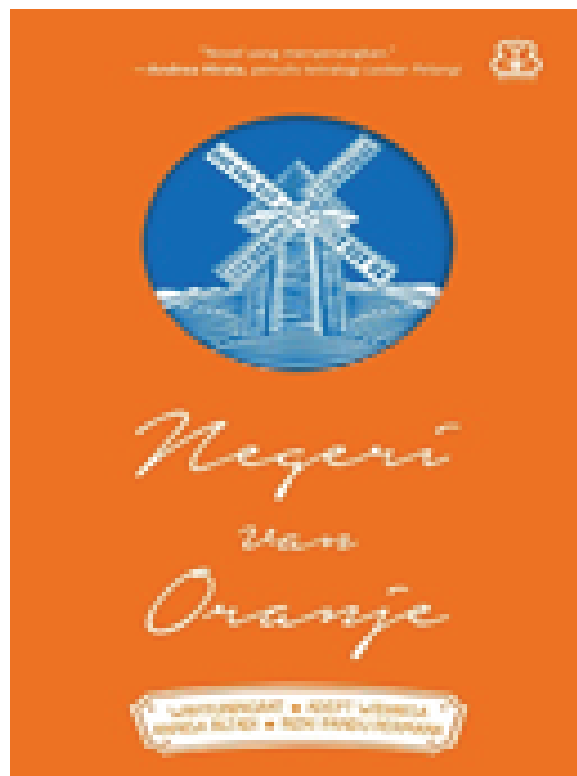


Figure 3

color is one way to represent NVO, because as we know that Netherland is the plot

background of the novel and orange is the common color identity for them. In ([5]: 226) explains ethnical terminology is related to history, language, and culture that subjectively put on contextual signs, which then possibly presented through codes depending on discursive formation of time and space. In this case, Netherland with their philosophy and cultural reasons used orange color as national identity. Their national flag included orange color; football national team used orange, and many others. Therefore, orange color on the covers instantly offers the reader, or future reader that NVO relates to Netherland. Orange color strengthens the title *Negeri van Oranje*. *Oranje* is old *bahasa* diction which means orange therefore the title semantically refers to "Land of the Netherland". Orange color denotatively signifies the title, and the title signifies the content of the novel.

The covers' other element is the use of symbolic signs. The first edition used figures sitting together as symbolic element. Meanwhile the second edition, used windmill to symbolize the novel. These differences showed each cover takes different angle in presenting the novel values. The first emphasize is on five figures, it delivers message that the content is concerning experience facing Land of the Netherland. Five figures as signifier to the connotation "friendship values". Different from the first, second edition emphasizes on the cultural background. Windmill as one of Netherland famous landmark signifies the novel values that the story is about "cross cultural" Indonesian and Netherland background. Both cover images are important to correlate, because understanding meaning depends on how we understand the constructive relation between individual, object, and concept that are articulated through signs ([5]: 25). In other word, the relation between these images represents the actual message values from the publisher which is "friendship values" and "cross cultural" exposure. So, does NVO cover visually deliver the novel values? Connotatively yes. Can it be included as literary art? Aesthetically sure, by using symbolic signs, it is successful in representing the normative quality of the novel theme.

### 3.1. Covers as System of Representation

The above discussion shows that publishers tend to include two aspects; marketing, and theme values of the novel. The cover designs are intended to fulfill both aspects. The marketing aspect is presented through text, by using; endorsement, the author name, and giving information of the novel achievements. While the content, or the values of the novel are presented visually. In both research data, the covers delivered the novel values by using figures images, color, and landmark. They used symbolic signs in presenting the values. It shows that cover emphasizes on the visual concept to relate between the novel content values with the future reader. The visual features are constructed to be understandable.

In ([5]: 15) stated representation is a delivering messages process, a production of meaning on conceptual map in our minds through language and signs to another, a

'mental representations'. Therefore, they used symbolic signs to build future reader impression and perception toward the novel. Symbolic signs and illustration used in visual features are something that we are already familiar with as concepts. The use of signs and concept then constructed to represent the novel content messages or values. Text features explained the visual features, and so do the visual features express the text features.

## 4. Conclusions and Suggestions

The research aim is to find out whether novel covers represent the novel values or not. It is intended to see whether covers can be a representation system. Cover as inter-semiotic translation of the novel, a literary art. The research findings show that covers have two aspects of presentation; novel content values or theme and marketing aspect. These aspects are presented using two elements; textual and visual. Marketing aspect mostly use texts elements and novel content use visual elements. In other word, covers have different representation system from the novel but it cannot be an independent system. From this point of view, if we take emotive and aesthetically aspects as standard of what called as literary art, NVO and *Ayah* covers will not be included as literary art. But if we referred for its similar quality, as a perception product, an interpretation of the novel, then it can be called an art work, a literary art. Therefore determining whether a novel cover is literary art or not cannot be decided instantly. It must be through deep observation and consideration. In conclusion, not every novel covers can be literary art but *Negeri van Oranje* and *Ayah* novel covers can be included as literary art.

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