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# Divorce in The Fairy Tale of Jaka Tarub: A Study of Freud's Personal Psychology and Javanese Culture

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**ABSTRACT**
This study aims to describe the divorce conflict in the Jaka Tarub fairy tale through a study of Freud's personality psychology and traditional Javanese culture. The study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a content analysis method on the Jaka Tarub fairy tale text. The research data source comes from the book Cerita Rakyat Nusantara by Feni Andiani, while the research data are in the form of quotations that show the character's personality conflict, anxiety, ego defense mechanisms, and Javanese cultural values in household relations. Data collection techniques are carried out through reading and note-taking techniques and literature studies. Data analysis is carried out by identifying, classifying, interpreting, and concluding data based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory which includes the id, ego, and superego as well as the concept of traditional Javanese culture. The results of the study show that the main conflict in the fairy tale is caused by the dominance of the id in Jaka Tarub which gives rise to manipulative actions, lies, and distrust of Nawang Wulan. Meanwhile, the character of Nawang Wulan is more dominated by the super ego which is reflected in the attitude of responsibility, obedience, and morality as a wife and mother. In addition, the Jaka Tarub fairy tale also represents traditional Javanese culture that places women as managers of the domestic sphere through the concept of kanca wingking. The symbols of the kitchen, rice, and barn in the story demonstrate the importance of trust in maintaining household harmony. The divorce between Jaka Tarub and Nawang Wulan symbolizes the breakdown of family relationships due to violations of moral and cultural values. This research demonstrates that traditional fairy tales can reflect the relationship between human psychology and a society's cultural systems.

**Keyword:**
The Fairy Tale of Jaka Tarub, Literary Psychology, Sigmund Freud, Javanese Culture

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## INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales are a form of oral literature passed down through generations in society. As part of folklore, fairy tales serve not only as a form of entertainment but also as a means of conveying moral values, social norms, and the outlook on life of the community they support (Rukiyah, 2018). Through fairy tales, people pass on life experiences, beliefs, and cultural systems to the next generation. Therefore, fairy tales hold a crucial place in cultural life because they can represent the mindset and character of a society. The existence of fairy tales today demonstrates that oral literature remains relevant in shaping people's understanding of life's values.

One of the fairy tales that is widely known in Indonesian society is the Jaka Tarub fairy tale which originates from Central Java. This fairy tale tells the story of a young man named Jaka Tarub who accidentally saw seven angels descending from heaven to bathe in a lake. Because he was attracted to an angel named Nawang Wulan, Jaka Tarub then stole her shawl so that Nawang Wulan could not return to heaven. This incident caused Nawang Wulan to finally marry Jaka Tarub and live a domestic life on earth. However, the relationship between the two did not last harmoniously because Jaka Tarub's lies were finally revealed. Nawang Wulan, who knew that her shawl was hidden, then decided to return to heaven and leave Jaka Tarub and their child. The storyline shows emotional conflicts, power relations, and moral issues that are interesting to study in more depth.

The Jaka Tarub fairy tale is interesting to study because it contains psychological conflicts between the characters and strong Javanese cultural values. Psychological conflict is evident through Jaka Tarub's actions, which are driven by curiosity, a desire to possess, and dishonesty towards Nawang Wulan. These actions indicate an inner conflict between personal desires and prevailing moral norms in society. On the other hand, the character of Nawang Wulan shows the character of a Javanese woman who is synonymous with obedience, responsibility, patience, and family-oriented. These attitudes are evident in her role in managing the household and fulfilling the family's needs with full devotion. The conflict between the two characters not only depicts domestic problems but also reflects the relationship between human psychological conditions and the cultural value system of Javanese society. Thus, the Jaka Tarub fairy tale can be understood not only as an ordinary folktale but also as a representation of the social and cultural life of traditional society.

Several previous studies have examined the Jaka Tarub fairy tale from various perspectives. The first study examined the story structure and moral values in the Jaka Tarub fairy tale, emphasizing the intrinsic elements and moral of the story (Saputri, 2016). The results of this study indicate that the Jaka Tarub fairy tale contains

moral messages about honesty, responsibility, and the consequences of human actions. The second study examines the position of women in the Jaka Tarub fairy tale through a feminist approach (I. N. Nisa & Andalas, 2021). The study highlights the subordination of women, evident in Jaka Tarub's actions toward Nawang Wulan, and the dominance of men in domestic relationships. Furthermore, other research has examined the Jaka Tarub tale from a literary anthropological perspective, focusing on Javanese cultural values reflected in family relations and the division of domestic roles.

Although previous studies have contributed significantly to understanding the Jaka Tarub fairy tale, several important issues remain insufficiently explored. Structural studies have primarily focused on intrinsic elements and moral messages embedded in the narrative (Saputri, 2016), while feminist studies have emphasized gender inequality and the objectification of women through the relationship between Jaka Tarub and Nawang Wulan (Nisa & Andalas, 2021). Other studies from anthropological perspectives have examined the representation of Javanese cultural values in domestic life but have not explained how these cultural values influence the psychological motives underlying the characters' behaviour.

Consequently, previous research has tended to examine psychological, cultural, and gender dimensions separately rather than as interconnected systems. Little attention has been paid to how the interaction between the id, ego, and superego shapes the characters' decisions and how these psychological dynamics are reinforced by traditional Javanese cultural values, particularly the concept of kanca wingking, domestic authority, and marital trust. As a result, the psychological causes of the marital conflict and eventual divorce between Jaka Tarub and Nawang Wulan remain insufficiently explained.

To address this gap, the present study integrates Freud's psychoanalytic theory with a traditional Javanese cultural perspective. Rather than merely identifying personality traits or describing cultural values, this study investigates how psychological structures and cultural norms interact in producing conflict, distrust, and divorce within the narrative. By combining these two analytical perspectives, this research offers a more comprehensive interpretation of the Jaka Tarub fairy tale and contributes to the development of literary psychology studies on Indonesian folklore. To understand the psychological aspects of the characters in the fairy tale, this study uses literary psychology. Literary psychology is an approach that examines literary works through psychological aspects, both related to the characters, the author, and the readers (Ramadhani & Hambali, 2023). This approach is used to reveal the mental state, inner conflict, motivation, and behavior of characters in literary works. Through literary psychology, literary works are viewed as reflections of human life, which is

full of psychological symptoms (Rama Aditya & Ulpah Nupusiah, 2023). Therefore, a literary psychology approach is considered relevant to examine the inner conflicts and behavior of characters in the Jaka Tarub fairy tale because the story shows various forms of emotional drives and personality conflicts.

This study uses Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory to analyze the personality structure of the characters in the fairy tale Jaka Tarub. Freud divided the human personality structure into three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego (Khairun Nisa et al., 2024; Lailatunnihayah et al., 2023). The id is the aspect of personality associated with instinctive drives and basic, spontaneous human desires (Ishom Fuadi Fikri et al., 2023). The ego functions as a mediator, aligning these id impulses with the realities of life, enabling individuals to act rationally (Lainah et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the superego is linked to moral values, social norms, and the conscience that govern human behavior (Prasetiyo & Febrianty, 2022). These three elements are interconnected in shaping a person's actions and decisions. Through this theory, the behavior of Jaka Tarub and Nawang Wulan can be analyzed more deeply to understand the psychological drives that influence their actions in the story.

In addition to using a literary psychology approach, this study also utilizes a traditional Javanese cultural perspective to understand the cultural values contained in the fairy tale. Javanese culture has a particular view regarding the roles of men and women in domestic life. Women in Javanese culture are generally positioned as managers of the domestic sphere, especially in matters of the kitchen, household, and family care. This cultural view is reflected in the character of Nawang Wulan, who is depicted as responsible for the family's needs and maintaining household harmony. Nawang Wulan's anger when Jaka Tarub violates the prohibition on entering the kitchen shows that the kitchen is viewed as a domestic space that has symbolic and private value in Javanese culture. Thus, the tale of Jaka Tarub not only contains psychological aspects of the character, but also displays Javanese cultural values related to gender relations, morality, and family life.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. This approach is used because the research focuses on interpreting the meaning, psychological conflict, and cultural values contained in the Jaka Tarub fairy tale.

The data source for this study is the text of the Jaka Tarub fairy tale, taken from Feni Andiani's book "Nusantara Folk Tales," published by PT Wahyu Media in 2018. The research data consists of quotations that demonstrate the character's personality conflicts according to Freud's personality psychology and traditional Javanese culture.

Data collection techniques were conducted through reading and note-taking and bibliography. The researcher read the fairy tale text in its entirety and then noted sections relevant to the research focus. The bibliography technique was carried out through a literature search, including books, scientific journals, reports, and other relevant documents.

Data analysis techniques were carried out using the following steps: (1) identifying story quotations related to the character's conflict and Javanese culture, (2) classifying the data based on Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Javanese cultural concepts, (3) interpreting the data according to the context of the story, and (4) drawing conclusions based on the analysis results.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Jaka Tarub fairy tale contains several conflicts analyzed using Freudian personality psychology and traditional Javanese culture. The first conflict occurs when Jaka Tarub spies on seven nymphs bathing in a lake. After spying, he steals one of the nymphs' clothes. It turns out the clothes he stole belonged to Nawang Wulan. After bathing, Nawang Wulan is confused and saddened by the loss of her clothes, preventing her from returning to heaven.

In Freud's personality theory, Jaka Tarub's actions represent an application of the id, the most savage and potentially evil part of the soul, capable of harming oneself and others. Jaka Tarub prioritizes only his own desires, so he steals Nawang Wulan's clothes in the hope that when she is sad, he will help her and ultimately marry her. Jaka Tarub's act of helping is an ego defense mechanism that involves falsifying or distorting (changing) reality to protect himself from feelings of guilt for stealing Nawang Wulan's clothes. Jaka Tarub's id has taken over most of his psychic energy, making him oblivious to the fact that what he's doing is wrong (sacrificing his ego and superego). This is evident in the following excerpt from the story.

*Data 1:*

*Driven by curiosity, Jaka Tarub walked in search of the direction of the voices. Finally, he found a beautiful lake in the middle of the forest, with seven very beautiful women bathing and joking around. Stealthily, Jaka Tarub approached. Then he found the women's clothes scattered around. After choosing, he stole one and hid it.*

*A few moments passed, and the nymphs were about to return to heaven. Six of them put on their clothes and flew into the night sky. Only then did Jaka Tarub understand that the women were heavenly nymphs. However, one nymph was left behind in the lake. Having lost her clothes, she could not return to heaven and then wept bitterly. When Nawang Wulan cried in the lake, Jaka Tarub immediately appeared and comforted her,*

*then he offered Nawang Wulan a place to stay until they finally married.*

Unlike Jaka Tarub, the sadness that befell Nawang Wulan was an application of anxiety. Anxiety is a function of the ego to warn individuals about the possibility of danger so that appropriate adaptive reactions can be prepared. The anxiety that occurred in Nawang Wulan was realistic anxiety or fear of real dangers from the outside world. Nawang Wulan felt anxious about experiencing danger on earth, for example being eaten by wild animals or being raped, so she carried out an adaptive reaction, namely sadness. She felt safe if she returned to her world, namely heaven. This is found in the following story excerpt. Unlike Jaka Tarub, the sadness that befell Nawang Wulan was an application of anxiety. Anxiety is a function of the ego to warn individuals about the possibility of danger so that appropriate adaptive reactions can be prepared. The anxiety that occurred in Nawang Wulan was realistic anxiety or fear of real dangers from the outside world. Nawang Wulan felt anxious about experiencing danger on earth, for example being eaten by wild animals or being raped, so she carried out an adaptive reaction, namely sadness. She felt safe if she returned to her world, namely heaven. This is found in the following story excerpt.

*Data 2:*
*However, an angel was left behind in the lake. Having lost her clothes, she was unable to return to heaven and began to cry bitterly.*

The second conflict occurred when Jaka Tarub and Nawang Wulan married. During their marriage, Jaka Tarub was not allowed to enter the kitchen, let alone open the lid of the rice pot. However, one day, Jaka Tarub became curious because his rice barn never decreased, so he violated Nawang Wulan's prohibition. He was shocked to learn that Nawang Wulan only needed a grain of rice to provide for the family for a day. Upon learning of Jaka Tarub's actions, Nawang Wulan became angry because Jaka Tarub had violated her prohibition. She was saddened by the loss of her supernatural powers, forcing her to cook rice like a normal human.

From the description above, it can be seen that several Javanese cultural elements are present in the Jaka Tarub tale, namely, that Nawang Wulan's scope of work is limited to the kitchen, bed, and well. This reflects the role of the wife in traditional Javanese culture. In traditional Javanese life, the kitchen is the domain and authority of women. Therefore, in Javanese culture, a wife is referred to as kanca wingking, a friend who is in and/or works behind the scenes, in this case, the kitchen (Reni Isnaini Pratiwi & Riski Putriani, 2024; Suhardi, 2012).

According to Freud's theory of personality, Nawang Wulan's actions (a

Javanese wife) represent an application of the ego and superego. Nawang Wulan follows her conscience (superego) and chooses to uphold the teachings of traditional Javanese culture (ego), namely, a wife who works only in the kitchen, the bedroom, and the well. This is evident in the following excerpt from the story.

> *Data 3:*
> *When Nawang Wulan returned from the river, and opened the lid of the pot, there was only one grain of rice in it. Nawang Wulan was angry because her husband had violated her prohibition, and she was sad because from then on she had to cook rice like an ordinary human being. She had to work hard to pound a lot of rice into rice before then cooking it into rice.*

Jaka Tarub violated Nawang Wulan's prohibition against entering the kitchen and opening pots and pans. In traditional Javanese life, a husband who frequently visits the kitchen is considered to lack trust in his wife in managing the kitchen and household finances, which can lead to disharmony between husband and wife (Pratiwi & Putriani, 2024). This is known as "kethuk" or "cupar." Jaka Tarub's violation of Nawang Wulan's prohibition reflects his distrust of Nawang Wulan in managing the family's finances. According to traditional Javanese culture, the kitchen (defined as the place where the family's finances are managed) is the woman's domain and authority, and therefore falls entirely under her control, and the husband is obligated to trust his wife in managing the kitchen and the family's finances (Adawiyah & Pantarel, 2021; Hastuti et al., 2025; Setyawan, 2023).

According to Freud's personality theory, Jaka Tarub's actions reflect reality anxiety, a fear of real dangers. Anxiety is a function of the ego, warning individuals of potential danger so that appropriate adaptive reactions can be prepared (Mushodiq & Andika Ari Saputra, 2021; F. K. Nisa et al., 2024; Sibi, 2020). Jaka Tarub, a husband, is concerned about Nawang Wulan's (his wife) misuse of household finances, prompting him to intervene in women's spheres and authority. This is evident in the story excerpt below.

> *Data 4:*
> *One day, Nawang Wulan was about to go to the river. She told her husband not to go into the kitchen. Jaka Tarub did as his wife asked, but his long-held curiosity eventually led him to disobey the order.*

Nawang Wulan's accepting attitude when she has to cook like a normal human because her supernatural powers are gone is a reflection of the figure of a wife

according to traditional Javanese culture, namely that a wife must always be devoted to her husband. According to Freud in personality theory, what Nawang Wulan (wife) does is an application of the superego. Together with the ego, the superego regulates and directs the behavior of Nawang Wulan (wife figure) in accordance with the teachings of traditional Javanese culture (ego), namely being devoted to Jaka Tarub (husband). This is found in data 5 as follows.

*Data 5:*
*When Nawang Wulan came home and opened the lid of the pot, there was only one grain of rice in it. Nawang Wulan was angry because her husband had violated her prohibition, and she was sad because from then on she had to cook rice like an ordinary person. She had to work hard to pound a lot of rice into rice before then cooking it into rice.*

The third conflict occurs when Nawang Wulan finds her clothes in the rice barn where Jaka Tarub hid them. After finding her clothes, Nawang Wulan is furious and disappointed. She bids Jaka Tarub farewell and returns to heaven. She orders a lake built around the house. Every night, she will return to the lake to breastfeed her daughter, Nawangsih. However, Jaka Tarub forbids her from approaching.

From the description above, it can be seen that Jaka Tarub and Nawang Wulan have divorced. The divorce was actually caused by Jaka Tarub lying to and distrusting his wife, resulting in their economic instability. This is illustrated by the depletion of the rice supply in their barn even though the harvest season has not yet arrived. This is shown in data 6 below.

*Data 6:*
*As a result of continuous use, the rice supply in Jaka Tarub's barn dwindled over time. Slowly but surely, their rice was running out, and harvest season was still in sight.*

The divorce is further evident in Nawang Wulan's statement that she will only come to breastfeed her child, but Jaka Tarub is forbidden from approaching. This indicates that divorced people don't want to see each other again unless it concerns their children. This is evident in the following excerpt from the story.

*Data 7:*
*Nawang Wulan then donned her angelic attire and took her cloth. She then went to Jaka Tarub to say goodbye and ask him to take good care of their child.*
*"Brother, I have to return to heaven. Take care of Nawangsih. Make a lake near the house. Place Nawangsih there every night. I will come and nurse her. But Brother, don't come*

*near me," Nawang Wulan said, then flew away to heaven.*

According to Freud's view in personality theory, what Jaka Tarub did when hiding Nawang Wulan's clothes was an application of the ego that functions to warn individuals about the possibility of danger coming so that an adaptive reaction can be prepared. The adaptive reaction carried out by Jaka Tarub was to hide Nawang Wulan's clothes in the rice barn so that Nawang Wulan could not return to heaven. If Nawang Wulan returned to heaven, it would be dangerous for Jaka Tarub because no one would take care of him and his child in the future. This is found in data 8 as follows

*Data 8:*
*One day, when Nawang Wulan was returning to get some rice to pound, she noticed a piece of cloth sticking out from under the pile. Pulling it out, Nawang Wulan remembered that it was her fairy's clothing. "It turns out Jaka Tarub was the one hiding my clothes all this time.*

Furthermore, Nawang Wulan's return to heaven and abandonment of Jaka Tarub is an application of the ego defense mechanism. This defense mechanism is a mental process aimed at reducing anxiety or protecting oneself from painful emotions or feelings, forcing the ego system to take extreme measures to relieve the pressure (Ramadhani & Hambali, 2023). This extreme action was to leave Jaka Tarub because she felt lied to and distrusted by Jaka Tarub, so she chose to leave/divorce him. This is contained in the story excerpt in data 9 below.

*Data 9:*
*Nawang Wulan then donned her angelic attire and took her cloth. She then went to Jaka Tarub to say goodbye and ask him to take good care of their child.*

Despite being divorced, Nawang Wulan still breastfeeds her child, Nawangsih. This demonstrates that her superego dominates much of her psychic energy, allowing her to act morally, remaining aware of her responsibility as a mother to provide love for her child. This is evident in the following excerpt from the story in data 10.

*Data 10:*
*"Brother, I have to go back to heaven. Take care of Nawangsih. Make a hut around the house. Every night, put Nawangsih there. I will come and breastfeed her. But Brother, don't come near me," said Nawang Wulan, then flew away to heaven.*

The divorce between Jaka Tarub and Nawang Wulan is the culminating conflict in the fairy tale. The separation stems from Jaka Tarub's lies and mistrust from the beginning of their relationship.

From a literary psychology perspective, the divorce stems from an imbalance between the id, ego, and superego. Jaka Tarub's id dominance leads him to act selfishly and manipulatively. Meanwhile, Nawang Wulan is more influenced by the superego, which is concerned with morality and responsibility.

From a Javanese cultural perspective, the divorce demonstrates the failure to maintain marital harmony due to a violation of prevailing cultural values. The husband's distrust of his wife is the primary cause of the breakdown of their relationship.

**Traditional Javanese Culture in the Tale of Jaka Tarub**

The tale of Jaka Tarub also demonstrates the strength of traditional Javanese culture, particularly regarding the position of women in the household. In Javanese culture, women are often associated with the term *kanca wingking*, meaning the figure responsible for domestic affairs such as the kitchen, well, and bed.

Nawang Wulan is portrayed as the ideal wife in Javanese culture because she manages the family's needs and remains devoted to her husband. The kitchen in the story symbolizes the management of the household economy entrusted to women. Conversely, Jaka Tarub's action of entering the kitchen and opening the pots is considered a violation of Javanese cultural norms. In traditional Javanese culture, a husband's interference in kitchen affairs can be interpreted as a sign of distrust of his wife.

Other symbols in the tale are rice and the barn. In Javanese culture, rice and the barn symbolize the family's economic stability. (Ashlah & Karman, 2024; Hanum et al., 2023). When Jaka Tarub still trusted Nawang Wulan, the rice supply was always sufficient. However, after distrust arose, the rice supply began to run out. This situation demonstrates that marital harmony is greatly influenced by trust between husband and wife.

## CONCLUSION

This research shows that the Jaka Tarub fairy tale serves not only as an entertaining folktale but also represents psychological conflicts and cultural values of Javanese society. Based on Freud's study of personality psychology, the main conflict in the story is influenced by the dominance of the id in Jaka Tarub, which drives manipulative behavior, lies, suspicion, and distrust of Nawang Wulan. This id dominance causes an imbalance between the id, ego, and superego, leading to marital

conflict that ultimately leads to divorce. In contrast, Nawang Wulan is more influenced by the superego, reflected in her sense of responsibility, patience, obedience, and awareness as a wife and mother.

Beyond the psychological aspect, the Jaka Tarub fairy tale also demonstrates the strong influence of traditional Javanese culture on domestic relations. Nawang Wulan embodies the concept of *kanca wingking*, which places women in charge of the domestic sphere, particularly the kitchen and the family's needs. The symbols of the kitchen, pot, rice, and barn in the story demonstrate that family harmony in Javanese culture is closely linked to mutual trust between husband and wife. Jaka Tarub's violation of the prohibition against entering the kitchen symbolizes his distrust of his wife, thus triggering the collapse of marital harmony. Therefore, the divorce between Jaka Tarub and Nawang Wulan can be interpreted as a result of a violation of moral values, a loss of honesty, and a breakdown in the balance of family relationships. This research demonstrates that a psychological approach to Javanese literature and culture can provide a deeper understanding of the symbolic meaning and inner conflict of characters in traditional fairy tales.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on a single version of the Jaka Tarub fairy tale, which may not fully represent the diverse regional variations of the narrative found across Indonesia. Second, the interpretation relies primarily on Freud's psychoanalytic theory and the perspective of traditional Javanese culture, thereby limiting the possibility of exploring the tale through other theoretical frameworks such as cognitive literary studies, cultural psychology, or comparative folklore. Finally, as a qualitative content analysis, the findings are interpretative in nature and are therefore influenced by the researcher's analytical perspective.

Future studies are encouraged to examine different regional versions of the Jaka Tarub narrative to investigate how variations in cultural context influence the representation of psychological conflict and marital relationships. Comparative studies involving similar folklore from other Indonesian regions or Southeast Asian countries would also enrich the understanding of shared cultural patterns and local uniqueness. Furthermore, integrating psychoanalytic perspectives with contemporary approaches such as feminist literary criticism, cultural psychology, or digital humanities may provide broader insights into the relationship between literature, culture, and human psychology.

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