

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mimesis in Mobile Legends hero narratives: Recontextualizing Indonesian literary works

Lukman Hakim^{1*}, Yuyun Wahyu Izzati Surya², & Sutinah³¹Doctoral Program in Social Sciences, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia¹Department of Communication Science, Universitas 17 Agustus 1945, Surabaya, Indonesia²Department of Communication, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia³Department of Sociology, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia***Corresponding Author:**lukman.hakim-2022@fisip.unair.ac.id**ABSTRACT**

This study examines *Mobile Legends* as a popular digital medium that recontextualizes Indonesian literary and folkloric narratives through game characters. Previous studies on *Mobile Legends* have mainly focused on visual representation, cultural identity, gender, and player behavior, while the relation between Indonesian literary sources and game narratives through mimetic and narrative analysis remains less explored. This study aims to reveal the mimetic patterns and narrative recontextualization of Gatotkaca and Kadita in *Mobile Legends*. Using a qualitative interpretive method, this study applies Abrams's mimetic perspective and Greimas's narrative analysis to examine character lore, hero descriptions, visual-audiovisual elements, and intertextual relations with the narratives of Gatotkaca, *Nyi Roro Kidul*, *Putri Kandita*, the *Mahabharata*, wayang traditions, and related Indonesian literary-folkloric sources. The findings show that Gatotkaca and Kadita are transformed through three levels of mimesis: idea, sensory-cultural form, and artistic-digital work. Gatotkaca is recontextualized from a wayang heroic figure into a ludic subject oriented toward defense, attack, and competitive gameplay, while Kadita is transformed from a mythic sea queen figure into a mage hero whose sacred maritime power becomes a playable ability. This study contributes by integrating Abrams's mimesis and Greimas's narrative structure to explain how Indonesian literary figures are reshaped into narrative, visual, and ludic functions in mobile game media.

Keywords: mimesis; narrative; recontextualization; *Mobile Legends*; Indonesian literary works.**ARTICLE HISTORY**

Received: January 24, 2026

Accepted: May 1, 2026

Published: July 15, 2026

LICENSE

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) License.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>**How to Cite This Article**

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital culture has contributed to cultural expressions that are disseminated and interpreted by contemporary society. In this context, games are not merely digital cultural products serving as a form of entertainment that represents a lifestyle, but have become an important part of the formation of popular culture that reflects the worldview of contemporary society (Stevanovic, 2019). Games also represent more than just artistic expression; in a broader context, they engage in interaction and intertextuality with literature and narrative texts, such as novels, films, and drama (Wolf & Perron, 2003). This interaction is evident through the processes of adaptation, transformation, and reinterpretation of characters, plots, and narratives previously established in specific literary works or narrative traditions.

The process of reinterpretation in literary narratives can be read through a mimetic perspective, namely the concept of imitation or representation of reality, text, or a particular narrative form that is then presented again in a new medium. Game media is one of the digital media that often adapts literary works by changing the context and meaning, and absorbing literature from various sources such as mythology or film. Then this media rebuilds the narrative through an exploratory space (Hutcheon, 2006). Therefore, from a mimetic perspective, it cannot be denied that there is a process of imitation that occurs from the intertextual interaction between games and literature.

The development of the gaming industry has contributed significantly to various global narrative texts, both historically, socially, politically, and culturally (Jenkins, 2004; Shaw, 2010). For example, many games have been created by adapting or imitating narratives from films and dramas. Video games are often produced with the aim of serving as a gateway to constructing reality. The narratives in video game plots are crafted with a serious approach, resembling cyberdrama, where players are invited to watch a film. For example, the relationship between the film *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and the game *Medal of Honor* (1999) demonstrates how the film medium can inspire game design, through Steven Spielberg's involvement in Electronic Arts projects (Ramsay, 2015).

Within the mimetic framework, the reproduction of meaning in games involves not only imitating narrative elements but also reimagining the story to suit the characteristics of the digital medium. Visual narratives are often constructed through the arrangement of events, information, and visual cues that shape audience understanding (Bordwell, 1985; Bordwell et al., 2005). Therefore, games can be understood as a narrative recontextualization medium that processes knowledge, literature, and cultural memory

through lore, character design, visual attributes, and gameplay functions. However, game studies still focus more on player behavior or the impact of gameplay, visual representation of characters, and gender construction, so reading Mobile Legends hero narratives as a process of mimesis and literary recontextualization in Indonesia still needs to be deepened.

As one of the target markets for the global gaming industry, Indonesia, according to the *Global Web Index* (GWI) and *Data Reportal*, has the second-largest number of video game players in the world (Goodstats, 2024). Meanwhile, the most popular genre in Indonesia is *Multiplayer Online Battle Arena* (MOBA), one of which is the very popular Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) (Kontan.co.id, 2025; Rifkiana & Efrilianda, 2024). In Indonesian society, high media consumption across television, film, and digital popular media such as games contributes to the formation of mass cultural taste within the logic of the culture industry.

High media consumption has consequences for the process of mimesis, or more precisely, society has imitated values and lifestyles through the mechanism of desire. Within the framework of the culture industry, popular media have the capacity to shape taste, imagination, and patterns of reception toward particular cultural signs (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). The MLBB game shows a sign of the development of contemporary popular culture recognized by its very high level of consumption, which shapes the configuration of meaning in mass culture in Indonesia. This condition becomes relevant when Indonesian literary figures and narrative traditions are present in MLBB and are widely consumed as part of global popular culture. In this context, literary figures are not simply transferred into the game but undergo a process of mimesis and recontextualization, namely creative imitation that changes narrative elements, visuals, and cultural meanings according to the logic of interactive mobile game media.

In addition to being a potential market in the global gaming industry, Indonesia also serves as a source of inspiration for the character designs in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) (Ramawati, 2025). The character Kadita, who draws from the myth of *Nyi Roro Kidul*, and Gatotkaca, who originates from the wayang tradition, demonstrate that MLBB adapts the legends, mythology, and cultural memories of the *Nusantara* into digital heroes. A similar pattern is evident in the character Sun, who references Sun Wukong; Zilong, who is associated with Zhao Yun; and Lapu-Lapu, who draws on a historical figure from the Philippines. The presence of these characters indicates a pattern of borrowing, imitating, and reinterpreting cross-cultural narrative sources within popular games. In this context, interpretations of MLBB characters have largely centered on cultural identity, nationalism, the symbolism of figures, or postcolonial readings (Hakim et al., 2024). Research on the

realm of mimesis and the recontextualization of literature within MLBB is crucial, as literary meaning extends beyond the textual realm into a cross-cultural digital popular culture ecosystem.

Studies on Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) have largely focused on character and gender representation. Meanwhile, analyses that specifically employ Abrams's theoretical perspective on mimesis, combined with narrative analysis to examine the recontextualization of Indonesian literary works, have yet to receive adequate attention. Some previous studies, for example, have discussed the character Kadita as a reworking of the myth and symbols of *Nyi Roro Kidul* within the game. In a study (Alfian & Kusumandyoko, 2020), it was shown that Kadita is portrayed through a blend of feminine and masculine symbols, as a beautiful and graceful female figure, yet simultaneously powerful as the ruler of the southern seas.

Another study by Zaharani et al. (2020), conducted through visual ethnography, explains that the adaptation of the character *Nyi Roro Kidul* in Kadita draws from folklore deeply rooted in Javanese culture but undergoes visual adjustments within the game, including aspects such as skin color and body image that differ from traditional depictions. These findings are significant for the portrayal of local characters presented in the game. However, such studies still tend to treat characters as objects of visual representation and cultural identity, without specifically examining the relationship between literary texts as sources of imitation and games as spaces for creative imitation.

Subsequent research discusses the representation of the warrior Gatotkaca in mythology as an implicit meaning of masculinity: muscular, tall, large, strong, and sturdy as depicted in the signifiers and signifieds of Gatotkaca's characterization as the MLBB tank role-play hero (Yudoyono, 2023). Similar research explaining the representation of Gatotkaca notes that the character has successfully reintroduced Indonesian national culture through the medium of gaming, while also offering a critical perspective on the distinction between high and low culture through the spirit and values embodied in the character, such as courage and perseverance (Hartanto et al., 2021).

Ardiyan (2017) examines how cultural identity is reimagined in visual form within the PC game *Boma Naraka Sura*, which draws inspiration from the cultural narrative of *Wayang* for its character designs. The findings reveal that cultural identity is manifested in visual representations that are reinterpreted through diverse media formats, including digital games; this process is known as transmedia narrative. In the field of game studies, research trends linking cultural, media, and literary studies to the mimetic elements of games reveal

three main tendencies. First, studies of avatars and character design position the visual elements of games as cultural constructs tied to their history, ideology, symbols, and original context. Studies on avatars and character design (de Wildt et al., 2020) show that the term “avatar” has its roots in Asian mythology and religious traditions, yet its meaning has been reoriented within games, as it is used to denote a player’s presence in a virtual world governed by game mechanics, the logic of entertainment, and the consumer market.

The second trend in the study of digital cultural space is applied through Ricoeur’s mimetic approach, which demonstrates that the experience of physical space in games can be reconfigured into digital rules, structures, and spatialization (Ferret, 2021). The third trend is that mimesis is increasingly understood as a relevant approach in game studies because it is not limited to classical textual literature but can also be used to analyze the narrative and empirical dimensions of gaming media (Feldman, 2005). Thus, previous research has highlighted the importance of avatars, visibility, digital space, and mimesis in game studies. However, the relationship between mimesis in the context of Indonesian literature and the characters of mobile game heroes, specifically has not yet been extensively discussed. Therefore, there is a need for an analysis that specifically reinterprets elements of Indonesian literature, mythology, and cultural memory.

Several previous studies on Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) have tended to treat game characters as objects of visual analysis, focusing on cultural identity, gender, symbolism, and character representation. While these studies are important, they have not specifically examined the relationship between literary works as sources of creative imitation in game narratives. Therefore, this study employs Abrams’s theory of mimesis to uncover patterns of mimesis and narrative recontextualization between Indonesian literary works and MLBB hero characters. This study explains how literary works, as narrative sources, undergo processes of mimesis, contextual transformation, and the reconfiguration of meaning within the medium of games. This research aims to demonstrate that games are not merely digital entertainment products but also a medium of popular culture where the meanings, values, and narratives of Indonesian literature circulate anew in visual and interactive forms. The contribution offered is the expansion of digital literary studies through an analysis of mimesis and the recontextualization of literary works within mobile game hero characters. Thus, this research demonstrates that Indonesian literature can move beyond the textual realm into the digital popular culture ecosystem.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative method using narrative analysis. The design of this method seeks to interpret the mimetic relationship between Indonesian literary works and Mobile Legends heroes as a process of narrative recontextualization. The units of analysis in this study focus on two heroes, Gatotkaca and Kadita, who are closely linked to Indonesian literature, folklore, and narrative traditions. In this context, narrative analysis is used not only to interpret verbal texts but also to understand images, videos, and moving visual works as sources of cultural data (Denzin, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Data collection was conducted through digital documentation and literature review. Digital documentation involved examining the official narratives of MLBB game characters, hero visuals, ability descriptions, costume designs, attributes, and audiovisual elements related to Gatotkaca and Kadita. The data were then recorded, transcribed, and classified based on narrative and visual elements. Meanwhile, the literature sources for the character Gatotkaca were obtained by examining various sources, including the *Mahabharata* epic in the story of the *Bharatayuddha* and the Javanese wayang encyclopedia. The literature sources for Kadita, on the other hand, include the legend of *Nyi Roro Kidul* or *Putri Kandita* based on Javanese-Sundanese folklore, the *Serat Centhini*, and cultural studies on the figure of the female ruler of the southern sea. This comparison is used to examine the characters' traits, origins, values, symbols, settings, and narrative patterns that undergo mimesis and recontextualization in MLBB.

The theoretical analytical framework draws on Abrams's theory of mimesis, which views literary or artistic works as imitations of reality or the universe. In this interpretation, mimesis is understood through the relationship between the imitable and the imitation, which relates to the levels of the idea, the sensory, and the work (Abrams, 1971; Sobur, 2016). Therefore, the narratives of Gatotkaca and *Nyi Roro Kidul* in Indonesian literature are positioned as "the imitable," while the characters of Gatotkaca and Kadita in MLBB are understood as "the imitation," which undergoes adjustments in meaning, value, and context within digital popular culture.

The narrative analysis technique in this study employs Greimas's actantial model to examine the storytelling structure of the hero character in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB). In Greimas's model, characters are understood through narrative function relationships comprising six actants: subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent (Greimas & Courtes, 1982). This analysis is used to identify the narrative positions of Gatotkaca and Kadita in the game, particularly how the characters' origins, goals, conflicts,

powers, and relationships are constructed within the MLBB narrative. In qualitative research, a narrative is understood as a sequence of real or fictional events communicated through text, visuals, sound, or audiovisual media (Eriyanto, 2013). Therefore, the research data consist not only of narrative text but also of audiovisual artifacts such as character designs, animations, sound effects, skills, costumes, and visual elements within the game.

The analysis process was conducted in two main stages. First, mimetic analysis was used to compare Indonesian literary works or narrative traditions as “the imitable” with MLBB hero characters as “the imitation.” In this stage, the researcher examined the elements of characters, setting, symbols, and narrative that were imitated, altered, or reimagined. Second, Greimas’s narrative analysis was used to map the actantial functions of the characters in the game, namely who acts as the subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent. The results of this mapping are then interpreted to examine how the process of mimesis not only produces similarities with the source text but also shapes a narrative recontextualization in accordance with the logic of mobile gaming media, which is visual, interactive, and gameplay based.

Data validity is ensured through source triangulation and data triangulation. Source triangulation is conducted by comparing the official narratives of MLBB characters with literary texts or narrative traditions used as references. Data triangulation is also conducted by comparing textual, visual, and audiovisual data. In addition, the researcher uses systematic recording in the form of analysis tables that include data sources, quotations or scene descriptions, categories of mimesis, actantial functions, and forms of recontextualization. This step is taken to ensure the traceability of the interpretation process and to strengthen the validity of findings in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Narrative of the Hero Kadita in Folklore, Manuscripts, and Novels

A hero is a character unit that can be played through a player’s avatar or account in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB). In this *Multiplayer Online Battle Arena* (MOBA) game, a hero’s function, which determines the character’s role within the team, is selected based on gameplay mechanics skills, statistics, and functions. Hero roles in MLBB are divided into six categories: Tank, Fighter, Assassin, Mage, Marksman, and Support. The chosen role determines the gameplay strategy, for example acting as a protector, a close-range attacker, or a long-range attacker, which is part of the collective gameplay system in MOBA games. The hero Kadita is a Mage who possesses skills that deal significant damage and typically

include *stun* or *crowd control* effects useful for hindering the movement of opposing heroes. Players usually use Kadita as both an attack initiator and an area controller, especially during clashes or team fights. Kadita's magic-based attacks and area-of-effect abilities effectively disrupt the opposing team's formation and exert psychological pressure on them.

The hero Kadita is initially described in [Figure 1](#) as a beautiful princess from a small royal island who is sincere, intelligent, and kind-hearted, but unfortunately finds herself caught up in internal royal strife. As the king's heir, Kadita became the target of malicious schemes in the power struggle, falling under the influence of a dark magic curse that afflicted her with a skin disease and caused her to lose her beauty. Out of sympathy for Kadita's plight, the kingdom's people attempted to lift the curse in various ways, but none were successful. Desperate and having lost all self-confidence, Kadita eventually threw herself into the stormy southern sea. Instead of meeting a tragic end, Kadita was saved by a sea demon using the power of the Trident of the Sea; the curse was lifted, and she gained powers that transformed her into the legendary Queen of the Southern Sea. With her newfound power to control the ocean's waters and the weather, no one, not even the most skilled sailors, dared to defy the Southern Sea when Kadita was enraged. As stories of Kadita spread, legend held that she possessed seven legendary spears, each with unique powers, which she used to punish invaders who sought to disturb the Southern Sea. The official narrative of the game, shown in [Figure 1](#), describes Kadita as a princess who experiences a curse, is banished, and then gains power to become the ruler of the southern seas. These narrative elements bear similarities to the story patterns of *Nyi Roro Kidul* or Princess *Kandita* in fairy tales, particularly the motifs of noblewomen, suffering from conflict and intrigue, their connection to nature, and their transformation into a ruling entity.

The similarities between game narratives and literary narratives cannot be read as direct copying, but as a process of creative imitation. In this context, Abrams's principle is considered a multi-level mimesis. MLBB takes the core elements of Indonesian mythological narratives and then transforms them to suit the needs of the gaming medium. Figures in literary and folklore traditions possess sacred, cosmic, and mythological dimensions, recontextualized into digital heroes, possessing fighting abilities, attributes, and strategic functions within the game. Thus, the meaning of the *Queen of the South Sea* shifts from a mythological figure within the realm of belief and literature to a popular character operating within a visual, interactive, and competitive system. Hero Kadita does not exist as a literal copy of *Nyi Roro Kidul*, but rather as a form of creative mimesis that reworks Nusantara cultural memory into the logic of a mobile game. This recontextualization demonstrates that

Indonesian literature and mythology are not just textual legacies, but can move into digital popular culture through a process of reshaping meaning.

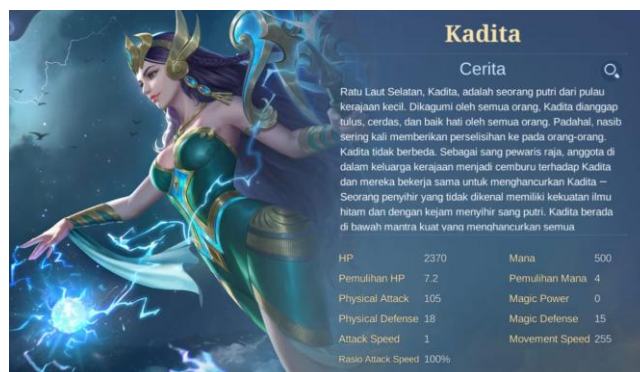


Figure 1. Narrative Kadita in the MLBB Game

Various folklores, novels, and other types of literary works in Indonesia provide a specific narrative to the idea of the characterization of *Nyi Roro Kidul* as the queen of the southern seas, which is more complex. Nyai Roro Kidul is described concisely in the ancient literature *Serat Centhini*, depicting her wearing a green dodot cloth with a golden-white center (Ranggasutrasna, 1991).

...hearing Prabu Siliwangi's wish to make Princess *Kandita* the successor to the throne, the concubines and their children disagreed. They were not willing for Princess *Kandita* to become Queen in the future...without the king's knowledge, the concubines and their children went to the witch and offered a reward...Princess *Kandita* and the empress suffered from leprosy that would not heal...Princess *Kandita* dreamed of hearing a supernatural voice telling her to throw herself into the sea so that her illness would be cured..."throw yourself into the sea, your skin will be smooth as before"... (Megawati et al., 2020).

In Sundanese and Javanese mythology, the myth of *Nyi Roro Kidul* originates from the name "*Kandita*", a noblewoman who was banished from the palace due to slander and jealousy. This banishment initiated a journey of suffering and spiritual transformation that became the core of the mythological narrative (Ekadjati, 1995). Nyai Roro Kidul, as a mythological figure, is linked to the power of the Javanese kingdom during the Islamic Mataram period. The narrative in the *Babad Alas Mentaok* shows the relationship between *Panembahan Senopati* (the founder of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom) and Ratu Kidul as part of the spiritual legitimacy of royal power. In this context, the legend of *Nyi Roro Kidul* is understood as more than just a folktale, but also a narrative reproduction by the palace authorities to strengthen claims of descent, power, and the cosmological relationship between the king and the supernatural, which were used as a tool for Javanese political legitimacy (Purwadi, 2004). The relationship between the Javanese kings and the Queen of the South is often understood as a cosmic alliance symbolizing the balance between land and

sea power, masculinity and femininity, and the human world and the supernatural world (Raffles, 2008; Zoetmulder, 1995). Based on this framework, the following section analyzes various levels of reality through the narratives of Kadita, Princess *Kandita*, *Nyi Roro Kidul*, rooted in the same character, then sequentially shifting mediums from folklore literature and processed into digital game narratives.

As shown in Table 1, Kadita's mimetic structure can be understood through three levels: ideal reality, sensory-cultural reality, and artistic work. At the level of ideal reality, Kadita is understood as an abstract idea of the cosmic power of the sea, the balance of nature, and maritime authority. In Greimas's actantial structure, the cosmic power of the sea acts as the subject, while the object is the balance and power of nature. Cosmic law functions as the sender, the natural-human order as the receiver, natural forces as the helper, and chaos as the opponent.

At the sensory-cultural level, Princess *Kandita* or *Nyi Roro Kidul* appears as a mythological figure in Indonesian folklore who embodies maritime power and legitimacy. Sea creatures and supernatural powers function as helpers, while humans who violate sacred boundaries become opponents. At the level of artistic work, Kadita is recontextualized as an MLBB hero whose narrative goals include victory, damage, and area control in accordance with the logic of MOBA games. The sender is the game's narrative design system, the receiver is the player, the helpers are skills, items, and game mechanics, while the opponents are opposing heroes. Thus, Kadita's mimetic process shifts from a cosmic notion of sea power to the mythological figure of *Nyi Roro Kidul*, and then into a digital hero in MLBB. This shift suggests that Kadita is not a direct copy of the myth, but rather a recontextualization that transforms the meaning of the sacred-mythological narrative into a ludic or procedural function.

Level of Mimesis	Subject	Object	Sender	Receiver	Helper	Opponent
<i>Ideal Reality</i>	Cosmic entity-power of the sea	Balance and the power of nature	Cosmic law-destiny	The order of nature and humanity	Forces of nature	Chaos and violation of harmony
<i>Sensory-Cultural Reality-Folklore</i>	Putri <i>Kandita</i> / <i>Nyi Roro Kidul</i>	Maritime domination - the Southern Sea	Mythological, magical-cosmic, and political-cultural legitimacy	The human and natural worlds	Sea creatures and supernatural powers	Humans who violate sacred boundaries-profane forces
<i>Artistic Work (Game)</i>	Kadita as an MLBB hero	Victory, damage, and area control	Game system narrative design	Players	Skills, items, and game mechanics	Opposing heroes

Table 1. Actantial Mapping of Kadita's Mimesis in MLBB

The narrative analysis of the hero Kadita works through a multi-layered mimetic mechanism, as in the Platonic tradition, which Abrams rereads. Mimesis is not understood as a direct copying of reality, but rather as a multi-level relationship. In the virtual reality of the game, there is a recontextualization of meaning; Kadita no longer functions as a mythological figure who regulates cosmic balance, but rather as a ludic subject directed towards pragmatic goals such as victory, area control, and game performance. This process shows that folklore, drama, and novels as literary works are not simply transferred to the digital space, but are reworked through mechanical, visual, and player interaction systems. From Pierre Lévy's perspective, cyberspace is a space where texts and cultural artifacts are no longer bound to their original context, but instead experience a transfer of function and meaning according to the logic of the digital medium and user practices (Lévy, 1997a). Thus, the analysis table shows that the hero Kadita is the result of the meeting between literary mimesis and Cyberculture.

The Mimetic Narrative of the Hero Gatotkaca in the Adaptation of Ancient Literary Works

Gatotkaca in the MLBB game plays the role of Tank, which has *crowd control* abilities. Mechanically, Gatotkaca has high durability in *health points* (HP) and recovery (lifesteal). This character is designed as a frontline initiator (frontliner) who is able to absorb enemies, then open team battles by jumping into the area to lock the opponent. Tank characters like Gatotkaca are designed to protect the core hero and the team. Gatotkaca's narrative in MLBB describes him as the son of Bima and Arimbi from the Arcadhem universe. Since childhood, he has been a champion of the gods, fighting evil enemies in his homeland. After being defeated and on the verge of death, he emerged as a mighty warrior from the Pandawa clan who possesses supernatural powers obtained from training in the *Cauldron of Heaven-Candradimuka*. With *Antakusuma* armor and twin gloves *Brajamusti-Brajadenta*, he can fly across the sky like lightning hunting enemies like an angry *Asura*. Gatotkaca, the *Pringgadani* knight, is a symbol of courage and loyalty. This characterization is also linked to the comic *Garudayana*, created by Is Yuniarto, which is inspired by traditional Indonesian wayang.

The character of the Gatotkaca hero in MLBB, [Figure 2](#), is depicted as a male hero with a large and strong body posture. Gatotkaca has visual elements of a large body, strong muscles, a firm expression, gold ornaments, and an attacking pose that emphasizes a masculine and heroic image. These visual elements strengthen Gatotkaca's character as a symbol of physical strength, courage, and protection. His role as a warrior from the Pandawa

clan is narrated as having supernatural powers through special training, namely in the *Candradimuka* crater, equipped with unique attributes and skills such as *Antakusuma* armor and *Brajamusti Brajadenta* gloves. These elements indicate a mimetic process towards the Gatotkaca narrative in the Indonesian wayang and literary traditions, especially in the motifs of supernatural powers, courage, loyalty, flying ability, and his position as a knight who defends truth.

Gatotkaca's narrative in wayang and the *Mahabharata* epic can be positioned as the imitable, while Gatotkaca in MLBB becomes the imitation. However, this imitation is not literal. MLBB recontextualizes Gatotkaca by transforming him from a wayang warrior figure into a digital hero functioning in a MOBA battle system. His supernatural powers, which in wayang tradition are associated with the values of heroism, devotion, and Dharma, are transformed in the game into combat strength, endurance, attack, and the ability to fight against opposing heroes. Thus, the meaning of Gatotkaca's role shifts from the traditional narrative space to the narrative space of popular culture.



Figure 2. Narrative Gatotkaca MLBB

The figure of Gatotkaca first appeared in the Indian version of the *Mahabharata* epic by Rishi Vyasa, which existed around 3100 BC, which was compiled gradually until 400 BC, while the Javanese version of the *Mahabharata*, in the form of Kakawin *Bharatayuddha*, was compiled by Mpu Sedah and Mpu Panuluh in the 11th century AD during the Kediri kingdom. The process of the *Mahabharata*'s entry into Java is suspected to be contact between Indian and Southeast Asian cultures, and the role of the Brahmins, Rishis and royal elites who triggered the creative adaptation of the *Mahabharata* epic into local literary works in the form of kakawin and wayang (Ming & Van der Molen, 2018). The depiction of the *Mahabharata* figure in Wayang Purwa as a sacrificial hero who died for the Pandawa's victory in the *Bharatayuddha* war. In the literary narrative, it is said, "Gatotkaca has muscles of iron wire, bones, blood of *gala-gala*, can fly without wings and sit on the clouds that cross," which is described as a figure who has a large body, strong muscles, is immune to sharp weapons

and can fly into the sky (Sudibyo-prono, 1991). The following is a quote from the History of Wayang Purwa.

“Bratasena, Dewi Kunti said, ‘Oh, you are truly a poor, beautiful child.’ Dewi Kunti’s words caused Arimbi to become the most beautiful princess. Raden Bratasena welcomed Arimbi and later gave birth to a knight, Raden Gatotkaca.” (Hardjowirogo, 1982).

In various Indonesian literary works, the interpretation of the figure of Gatotkaca originates from the Javanese version of the *Mahabharata* epic, as a mighty, protective knight, a symbol of a supernatural being who is a typical mythology in Javanese puppetry (Kamajaya, 1981; Zoetmulder, 1974). Gatotkaca plays a strategic role in facing the attacks of the Kaurava army from the air, because of his ability to fly into the sky. Often described as the "sky fortress" of the Pandavas. The peak of his role was when Gatotkaca fell against Karna. A death, on the battlefield, is not interpreted as defeat, but a form of sacred sacrifice for the sake of upholding the truth of Dharma. Literary tradition in Indonesia places the death of Gatotkaca, as a heroic moment, which strengthens the values of loyalty and devotion in the ethics of heroism (Ranggasutrasna, 1991; Supomo, 1993).

From Abrams's mimetic perspective, Kadita and Gatotkaca in Mobile Legends can be read as creative imitations of narrative sources already present in literary works. The myth of *Nyi Roro Kidul*, the narrative of Princess *Kandita*, the *Mahabharata* epic, and the wayang tradition act as the imitable, while Kadita and Gatotkaca in MLBB appear as the imitation that has undergone changes in form and function. At the ideational level, both characters depart from notions of cosmic power, heroism, loyalty, and moral order. Meanwhile, at the sensory level, these ideas are present in mythological and literary figures such as *Nyi Roro Kidul* and Gatotkaca. Then, at the artistic level, these figures are recontextualized into game heroes who work through narrative, visuals, fighting abilities, and game mechanics. Greimas' reading makes it clear that these changes occur not only in visual appearance, but also in the narrative function of the characters as subjects who have goals, helpers, obstacles, and specific roles in the story structure and gameplay of MLBB. The following is an analysis at various levels of reality, based on the narratives found by the character Gatotkaca.

Level of Mimesis	Subject	Object	Sender	Receiver	Helper	Opponent
<i>Ideal Reality</i>	Cosmic hero	Dharma, justice, and protection	Cosmic moral order	The world and humanity	Supernatural power	Adharma, evil, and chaos
<i>Cultural Reality-Epic-Ancient Literature</i>	Gatotkaca in the Javanese <i>Mahabharata</i> , kakawin, and wayang traditions	The victory of Dharma in the <i>Bharatayuddha</i>	Destiny, knightly teachings, and Pandawa legitimacy	The Pandawa and the world order	Magical powers, wire-like muscles and iron-like bones, the	The Kurawa, giants, and enemies of the Pandawa

<i>Artistic Work - Digital Game</i>	Gatotkaca as a tank hero in MLBB	Area control, team protection, and victory	Game system and hero design	Players and team	gods, and the Pandawa Crowd-control skills and defense items	Opposing heroes and the enemy team
-------------------------------------	----------------------------------	--	-----------------------------	------------------	---	------------------------------------

Table 2. Actantial Mapping of Gatotkaca's Mimesis in MLBB

Table 2 explains the first reality in Abrams's Platonic mimesis, the most fundamental imitable. Abstract values such as *Dharma*, cosmic heroism, justice, and the protection of the world order are transcendent ideal realities that cannot be presented directly (Bloom, 1991). The world of ideas serves as the highest reference, although humans can only access it indirectly through the sensory realm. Thus, at this level, imitation does not yet exist, but rather the source of all possible imitations. In **Table 2**, the sensory and cultural level of reality, we find the *Mahabharata* epic and the Javanese wayang tradition, where the process of imitation begins to operate. The figure of Gatotkaca in literature and traditional performances is the "first imitation" of the ideal reality of heroism. However, according to Plato's critique cited by Abrams, this sensory reality is itself an imitation of the world of ideas. Therefore, literary works and myths do not fully present the truth of ideas, but rather present them in the form of narratives, characters, and symbols bound by cultural conventions.

In this context, Gatotkaca is an imitation of the imitable, namely the cosmic values of truth, virtue, heroism, and Dharma. Furthermore, at the level of visual works and digital games, the Gatotkaca hero in Mobile Legends functions as a further imitation, namely a copy of existing literary and mythological representations. In the Platonic terminology discussed by Abrams, this form of representation increasingly moves away from ideal reality because it is an imitation of something that is already an imitation (Abrams, 1971).

The imitable at this stage is no longer the world of ideas directly, but rather a previously mediated representation of literature and culture. Through this mapping, Gatotkaca's analysis shows that the hero in Mobile Legends can be understood as the result of a mimetic chain: the world of (1) ideas - the primary imitable, (2) literature - folklore as the first imitation, and (3) digital games as the next imitation. In line with the Abrams-Plato mimetic perspective, this process emphasizes that literary works, and subsequently digital media, are never neutral, but are always bound to the reality they imitate and to the conventions of the medium in which the space is realized. The transfer of meaning from the context of the original space to the digital space is found in the strategy of cyberculture, where cultural artifacts such as narrative texts, myths, literature and symbols experience a transfer of medium without reducing their original meaning (Lévy, 1997b). Therefore,

recontextualization in the narrative analysis above can be understood as a change in the meaning, value, and function of characters from the literary space to digital popular culture.

Recontextualizing the Meaning of Literary Works in Gaming Culture

This research finds that the concept of recontextualization does not simply stem from general meanings resulting from the process of transferring characters from literature to games. Rather, there is a shift in narrative perspective within the ludic system that occurs when literary sources are transformed into in-game characters. Narrative changes are evident in adjustments to the characters' origins, conflicts, and goals; visual changes are evident in body design, costumes, colors, weapons, and cultural attributes; while ludic changes are evident in the transformation of mythological or heroic values into playability within the MOBA game system. Thus, this analysis goes beyond describing character similarities, but rather explores how literary meaning is reshaped in digital popular culture.

The legend of Gatotkaca and *Nyi Roro Kidul* is a fragment of the rich narrative of literary works in Indonesia. Through repeated mimetic processes, it has appeared in various literary and artistic media such as serat, folklore, novels, paintings, wayang, craft art, and digital games. Through mimetic analysis, it can be seen that figures in literary works have also undergone a recontextualization of the medium that forms the culture of play. According to Huizinga, humans shape the universe through play (*homo ludens*). Play is the result of mental processes and cosmic experiences of society in an imaginative workspace that shapes culture. For example, in Germanic mythology, the game of the gods on a dice board is analogous to the process of creation of the universe. Then, the *Mahabharata* epic tells of Yudhistira's dice game that then sparked the Baratayudha war, and is considered an attempt to reshape civilization (Huizinga, 1949). In this context, the culture of play is represented and recontextualized through various types of literary and artistic works.

Games are presented as symbolic practices, where competitive schemes (*agon*), luck (*alea*), imitation (*mimicry*), and emotion (*ilinx*) are played out, through the figures of the ruler of the Southern Sea and the guardian knight. In this view, a ludic mechanism occurs that is able to expand the meaning of the game (Caillois, 2001). The structure of meaning is represented mimetically in literature and continues to be remediated in contemporary digital culture. Recontextualization of meaning occurs when this game structure moves from myth and classical literature to popular culture and digital media, without losing its ludic logic: *Nyi Roro Kidul* continues to function as the organizer of the cosmic game, while Gatotkaca is a player in the competitive arena.

In the context of the figures of *Nyi Roro Kidul* and Gatotkaca, they are symbols of ancient culture, but also the habits of society in reproducing the idea of power through written and oral methods of culture repeatedly. Recontextualization through cultural space has the potential to reproduce a strong domain of power, even through an architectural work. For example, the ancient Greek and Roman cities by Vitruvius are representations of space and spatial practices that are thick with religiosity, actually storing a manifestation of strength and power that is intended to be shown through the architecture of the building, beyond who the architect or actor who designed it. In space, a superstructural code of power emerges, which is intended to be shown through socio-spatial infrastructure (Lefebvre, 1991).

In literary narratives, *Nyi Roro Kidul* and Gatotkaca can be read as tactical figures who blur the boundaries between the human realm and the supernatural, between domination, negotiation, and ideology that operate mimetically in the text. Understanding space (Certeau, 1984), provides a broader horizon to the system of signs and texts that live in the spatial dimension, resulting in space not just a place, but also a system of knowledge that depends on the daily practices and experiences of the storyteller. Thus, the recontextualization of a narrative, including contemporary literature and culture, can be marked by collective intelligence, where old myths and narratives are collaboratively reinterpreted through new media spaces (Lévy, 2001). When *Nyi Roro Kidul* and Gatotkaca are presented in a digital game, they enter the game arena with rules, mechanics, and strategies, but still carry mythological meaning. This is where mimesis works in layers: from myth to literature, from literature to digital games.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Kadita and Gatotkaca in the Mobile Legends game are more than just ordinary adaptations of local literary narratives, but also the result of a creative adaptation of the multi-layered mimesis of ideal reality toward game logic. Thus, this study confirms that artistic works do not exist autonomously but are always related to the imitable, namely the ideal reality or idea that serves as a reference for imitation. Through Abrams's mimetic framework, these two characters demonstrate the relationship between the source of imitation (the imitable) in the form of legends, myths, and wayang narratives, and the result of imitation (the imitation) in the form of game heroes who have undergone changes in form, function, and context. Greimas' narrative analysis clarifies that these changes occur not only in the visual aspect but also in the actantial function of the characters, when literary figures are reconstructed into ludic subjects oriented toward the game system.

This study contributes by integrating Abrams's mimetic theory and Greimas' narrative analysis to explain the recontextualization of Indonesian literature in digital games. This integration extends the use of mimesis from textual literary studies to digital media and game studies by showing that literary figures are not merely reproduced but transformed through narrative, visual, ludic, and interactive systems. By tracing the movement of literary figures from ideal and cultural realities into game-based narratives, this study shows that mimesis can explain changes in narrative function, visual form, and ludic role across media.

This study is limited to the analysis of Kadita and Gatotkaca. Therefore, the findings cannot represent all Mobile Legends hero characters. Future studies may examine player reception, cultural commodification, and cultural spatialization. They may also explore power relations, hegemony in games, digital communities and user-generated content. These studies can extend the present analysis by examining how Indonesian literary and cultural narratives become embedded in player practices, digital communities, and other forms of game-based cultural production.

DECLARATIONS

The authors provide the following declarations regarding ethical considerations, the use of artificial intelligence, conflicts of interest, and funding. These statements are intended to ensure transparency and accountability in the reporting of this study.

Ethical considerations

This study is a textual and narrative analysis of game characters and Indonesian literary works. The data used in this study were obtained from publicly available sources, including game narratives, hero character descriptions, folklore, *serat*, and literary texts. The study did not involve human participants, animals, clinical intervention, interviews, or the collection of personal data. Nevertheless, the research was conducted in accordance with applicable publication ethics by ensuring proper source attribution, academic integrity, and responsible use of textual data.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any external funding. All research expenses were independently covered by the authors.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M. H. (1971). *The mirror and the lamp: Romantic theory and the critical tradition* (Vol. 360). Oxford University Press.
- Alfian, R. A., & Kusumandyoko, T. C. (2020). *Representasi makna pada karakter Kadita dalam game online Mobile Legends Bang Bang*. *Jurnal Barik*, 1(1), 169–182. <https://doi.org/10.26740/jdkv.v1i1.35657>
- Ardiyan, A. (2017). Identity and gender perspective of Gatotkaca through transmedia narrative in character design for game. *Journal of Games, Game Art, and Gamification*, 2(1), 30–34. <https://doi.org/10.21512/jggag.v2i1.7212>
- Bloom, A. (1991). *The republic of Plato: Second Edition*. Basic Books.
- Bordwell, D. (1985). *Narration in the fiction film*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bordwell, D., Staiger, J., & Thompson, K. (2005). *The classical Hollywood cinema: Film style & mode of production to 1960*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Caillois, R. (2001). *Man, play, and games (translated by Meyer Barash from Roger Caillois, 1958: Les Jeux et les hommes, Gallimard Paris)*. University of Illinois Press.
- Certeau, M. de. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. In Berkeley. University of California Press.
- de Wildt, L., Apperley, T. H., Clemens, J., Fordyce, R., & Mukherjee, S. (2020). (Re-)orienting the video game avatar. *Games and Culture*, 15(8), 962–981. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412019858890>
- Denzin, N. K. (2009). *Qualitative inquiry under fire: Toward a new paradigm dialogue*. Left Coast Press Inc.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. SAGE Publications Inc.
- Ekadjati, E. S. (1995). *Kebudayaan Sunda: Suatu pendekatan sejarah*. Pustaka Jaya.
- Eriyanto. (2013). *Analisis naratif: Dasar-dasar dan penerapannya dalam analisis teks berita media*. Kencana Prenada Media Group.
- Feldman, C. F. (2005). Mimesis: where play and narrative meet. *Cognitive Development*, 20(4), 503–513. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogdev.2005.08.006>
- Ferret, N. (2021). Game is to space as narrative is to time: A Ricoeurian anthropology of play and game as spatial mimesis. *Études Ricœuriennes-Ricœur Studies*, 12(2), 44–56. <https://doi.org/10.5195/errs.2021.561>
- Goodstats. (2024). 95% Pengguna internet Indonesia bermain video games. GoodStats. <https://goodstats.id/article/95-pengguna-internet-indonesia-bermain-video-games-82uYx>
- Greimas, A. J., & Courtes, J. (1982). *Semiotics and language an analytical dictionary*. Indiana University Press.
- Hakim, L., Surya, Y. W. I., & Sutinah, S. (2024). Game media in postcolonial identity perspective sociolinguistic analysis of the language text of hero Mobile Legends: Bang Bang. *International Seminar on Indonesian Language and Literature Education (INSPIRASI)*, 1(1), 343–354. <https://doi.org/10.24176/qc9svd33>

- Hardjowirogo. (1982). *Sejarah wayang purwa*. Balai Pustaka.
- Hartanto, L. C., Teguh, M., & Thie, R. T. (2021). Gatotkaca in mobile legend: bang-bang game as representation of Indonesia culture. *3rd Jogjakarta Communication Conference (JCC 2021)*, 195–198. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211121.046>
- Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (2002). *Dialectic of enlightenment: cultural memory in the present (Dialektik der aufklärung)*. Stanford University Press.
- Huizinga, J. (1949). *Homo ludens: A study of the play-element in culture*. Routledge.
- Hutcheon, L. (2006). *A Theory of adaptation*. Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (2004). *First person: New media as story, performance, and game* (Noah Wardrip-Fruin & Pat Harrigan, Ed, Pp:118-130). MIT Press.
- Kamajaya. (1981). *Pewayangan: Purwa, mahabharata, ramayana*. Pustaka Jaya.
- Kontan.co.id. (2025). *Survei membuktikan, Mobile Legends game online terpopuler di Indonesia*. <https://lifestyle.kontan.co.id/news/survei-membuktikan-mobile-legends-game-online-terpopuler-di-indonesia>
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Lévy, P. (1997a). *Collective intelligence: Mankind's emerging world in cyberspace*. Perseus Books.
- Lévy, P. (1997b). *Cyberculture*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Lévy, P. (2001). *Becoming virtual: Reality in the digital age*. Plenum Trade.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative research design: An Interactive approach*. applied social research methods. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Megawati, P., Andriani, N., & Yulia, W. A. (2020). *Fabel dan legenda*. Guepedia.
- Meij, Dick van der. (2019). Ding Choo Ming and Willem van der Molen (eds), *Traces of the Ramayana and Mahabharata in Javanese and Malay Literature. Wacana: Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia*. 20(3), 583-585. <https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v20i3.791>
- Purwadi. (2004). *Nyai Roro Kidul dan legitimasi politik Jawa*. Media Abadi.
- Raffles, T. S. (2008). *The history of Java*. Narasi.
- Ramawati, D. (2025). *Nasionalisme generasi muda*. Media Nusa Creative (MNC Publishing).
- Ramsay, D. (2015). Brutal Games: Call of duty and the cultural narrative of World War II. *Cinema Journal*, 54(2), 94–113. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.2015.0015>
- Ranggasutrasna, N. (1991). *Centhini: Tambangraras-amongraga: Jilid I*. Balai Pustaka.
- Rifikiana, M., & Efrilianda, D. A. (2024). Effect of social interaction and gamer-game relationships on Mobile Legends gamer retention in Indonesia: Experimental study. *Journal of Advances in Information Systems and Technology*, 6(2), 219–235. <https://doi.org/10.15294/jaist.v6i2.5010>
- Shaw, A. (2010). What is video game culture? Cultural studies and game studies. *Games and Culture*, 5(4), 403–424. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009360414>
- Sobur, A. (2016). *Komunikasi naratif: Paradigma, analisis dan aplikasi*. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Stevanovic, A. (2019). *Video game as a cultural phenomenon*. *Kultura Polisa*, 16(1), 39–51. <https://kpolisa.com/index.php/kp/article/view/377>
- Sudibyoprono, R. M. (1991). *Ensiklopedi wayang purwa*. Balai Pustaka.
- Supomo, S. (1993). *Bharatayuddha: An Old Javanese Poem and Its Indian Sources*. International Academy of Indian Culture.
- Wolf, M. J. P., & Perron, B. (2003). *The video game theory reader*. Routledge.
- Yudoyono, T. B. (2023). *Representasi maskulinitas dalam penokohan hero Gatotkaca pada game online Mobile Legends (analisis semiotika Roland Barthes pada hero gatot kaca)*. Universitas Nasional. <https://repository.unas.ac.id/id/eprint/9430/>
- Zaharani, Y., Pramudita, P., Kurniasih, P., & Sukendro, G. (2020). Karakter Kadita dalam Mobile Legends Bang-Bang: Kajian etnografi visual. *Jurnal Desain*, 8(1), 52–60. <https://doi.org/10.30998/jd.v8i1.7710>

- Zoetmulder, P. J. (1974). *Kalangwan: A Survey of old Javanese literature*. Martinus Nijhoff.
- Zoetmulder, P. J. (1995). *Kalangwan: Sastra Jawa kuno selayang pandang*. Djambatan.