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Intersemiotic Translation: Mat Dollah's Batik Paintings of the Malay Folktale "Puteri Gunung Ledang"

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ABSTRACT

In translation studies, intersemiotic translation, which is the transference of a verbal sign system to a non-verbal sign, vice-versa or between two non-verbal modes, is a dynamically creative form of translation often involving literary works. Intersemiotic translations make it possible for written source texts to be brought to life in various artistic ways; they can usurp the power of the written word to transfer sense and meaning through unforgettable images from one culture to another. Folktales, documented in writings, have been translated into many different forms, such as in performing arts, animations, paintings, and illustrated books. This article examines the intersemiotic translation of the evergreen Malay folktale, "Puteri Gunung Ledang" or "The Princess of Mount Ledang" recreated in the form of batik paintings by the batik artist, Mat Dollah. The first specific objective of this study is to identify the variant and invariant features in Mat Dollah's representation of the folktale by comparing his batik paintings to its original written account. The second objective is to investigate Mat Dollah's skopos or purpose for recreating the folktale in his batik paintings in the ways that he has represented it. Six selected batik paintings of the folktale are analysed using multimodality approaches by Kress and van Leeuwen, including visual grammar, viewer networks, and modality (2006), social actor representations (van Leeuwen, 2008), and colour (van Leeuwen, 2011), to fulfil the first objective. Transcripts from an email interview with the painter are analysed to fulfil the second objective. In this study, Vermeer's Skopos Theory underpins the overall discussion. The findings show that one invariant core links the batik paintings to the written source text. Next, the skopos or purpose of the artist in producing these recreations in his own unique ways is strongly influenced by his personal experience, his work as an artist, and his perspectives of the world. Two key insights can be surmised about intersemiotic translations from these findings. Firstly, it is the translators' intent that determines the translation strategies used, ultimately shaping the final translated product. Secondly, this makes the translator's presence highly visible in intersemiotic translations.

Keywords: intersemiotic translation, Mat Dollah's batik painting, "Puteri Gunung Ledang", Skopos Theory, multimodality

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Introduction

A surge in research is currently evident in the once-understudied area of intersemiotic translation. Among the scholars who have been making significant contributions to studies in this area in the last decade are Dusi (2015), Kourdis (2015), O'Halloran et al. (2016), Gottlieb (2017), Vidal and Campbell (2018), Giannakopoulou (2019), Pârlog (2019) Kaźmierczak (2018, 2020), Sütiste (2021), and Loddo et al. (2022).

The term "intersemiotic translation" was originally introduced by Roman Jakobson in 1959. In his seminal paper, *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, Jakobson categorises intersemiotic translation or transmutation as a third dimension of translation, after intralingual translation (translation within the same language) and interlingual translation (translation into other languages) and defines it as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (Venuti, 2012, p. 127). When Jakobson introduced his triadic definition of translation, the focus was primarily on the written word. In addition, while Jakobson introduced and provided the first definition of intersemiotic translation, he provided no further elaboration regarding a methodology or a specific analysis framework. This led to limited research being attempted in this area as it was "virtually unexplored in terms of its conceptual modelling, especially from a semiotic perspective" (Aguiar & Queiroz, 2009, p. 1). However, the technological advancements of the 21st century changed this situation as there was an expansion in non-verbal forms of communication, creating a shift where there was a "broad move from the centuries-long dominance of writing to the new dominance of the medium of the image" (Kress, 2003, p. 1). Images became powerful communication tools, and Jakobson's definition, albeit being narrow at the time of conception, swiftly became the means to study multimodal texts, thus widening the scope of translation studies.

Today, the "definition of intersemiotic translation has been broadened to include translations across non-linguistic semiotic resources" (O'Halloran et al., 2016, p. 199). Kourdis (2015) maintains that "semiotic resources (e.g., language, image, and sound resources) "coexist, cooperate, and get translated" (p. 311) on a regular basis". O'Halloran et al. (2016) further concludes that this "constant translation of signs into other signs, forms the basis of cultural communication" (p. 199), echoing Eco's (1979) perspective of intersemiotic translation as the foundation of cultural communication. Subsequently, the fluid nature of intersemiotic translation has made it an area of translation studies feasible for multidisciplinary research. This is evident in the works of Jeha (1997) as well as Aguiar and Queiroz (2009) who have combined it with Peirce's semiotic theory and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodality framework. Additionally, Vidal and Campbell (2018) have reconceptualised intersemiotic translation based on Lars Elleström's (2010) theory of modes and mediums. The concept of intersemiotic translation is further expanded by Gottlieb in his book, *Semiotics and Translation* (2017), where he introduces a systematic categorisation for multifaceted texts found in contemporary setting. The categories are as follows:

diasemiotic (using different channel(s) than in the original e.g., written into played music categorized as monosemiotic or silent movie into a radio play characterized as polysemiotic),
ultrasemiotic (using more channels than in the original, e.g., novel translated into film) and
infrasemiotic (using fewer channels than in the original e.g., a mime performing a drama which initially had spoken lines). (p. 51)

To date, the trend of research in this area has taken two pathways. In the first pathway, intersemiotic translation has been studied within the framework of the different modes used i.e., the translation of a source text from one medium to another medium. This research approach is exemplified by Zanettin (2008) who reviewed comics in translation, Ketola (2016) who studied three different illustrations of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter using a multimodal comparative analysis approach, and Sohár (2019) who used a descriptive approach to examine book covers and illustrations of two

contemporary versions of *Snow White*. Simões (2019), who analysed three multimedia, advertisement campaigns which are categorised as special instances of intersemiotic translations and Loddo et al. (2022) examined the intersemiotic legal translation of contracts in digital environments.

The other pathway taken by scholars in the research area for intersemiotic translations discusses various issues such as establishing parameters, forging theories based on current research and creating a suitable framework that can be used to study all forms of intersemiotic translations. One point of contention that has recently emerged and broadened Jakobson's definition and discussed by scholars, including Mossop (2019), is that the source text need not always be in written form. Furthermore, scholars such as Kourdis and Yoka (2014) discuss intersemiotic translations as being iconic and linguistic, making them powerful tools in cultural communication today. Dusi (2015) advocates the usage of the term transposition as an umbrella term for all forms of non-verbal translations after presenting an overview on intersemiotic translation in terms of theories and problems. Both Queiroz and Aguiar (2015) and Zhang (2023) focus their research on creating an analytical model for intersemiotic translation. The former bases it on C.S. Peirce's (1931-1935) system of signs while the latter proposes a methodology which combines various models, fusing frameworks from both translation studies and film studies to analyse audio-video translations. Overall, these papers are more introspective in nature and question the grey areas of intersemiotic translation. Often, there are no straightforward answers to the queries presented, showing that this translation area is a viable source for future research.

While intersemiotic translations of aesthetic works have been actively researched in the Western scene in the last decade, it has been otherwise in the Asian region. An extensive library search has revealed that in Malaysia, intersemiotic studies on local or foreign literary works are glaringly scarce. Folktales form an essential part of the cultural and literary heritage of a nation. They are often recreated in various forms through comics, films, songs, etc., to preserve them for future generations. Regarding research on written folktales represented in other semiotic forms in Malaysia, the legendary Malay folktale, "Puteri Gunung Ledang" or "Princess of Mount Ledang" has been researched to an extent, especially after the release of the locally produced 2004 movie version of the folktale titled "Puteri Gunung Ledang". Multiple elements of the movie have been analysed by researchers such as Razali and Marzelan (2020) who focused on the musical composition used in the movie, Muhammad (2018) who analysed the concept of heroism, Azmy (2017) who studied the dialogues in relation to metaphors, and Mulaika (2010) who conducted a contrastive analysis on two versions of the movie. Other researchers, namely Ahmad et al. (2018) used the tale and created a mobile game, Musa and Ramli (2014) as well as Noh et al. (2018) studied the artwork of Datuk Syed Jamal based on Gunung Ledang. However, none of these studies has analysed this folktale from a strictly translation angle, namely as intersemiotic translation, or used the multimodal approach and Skopos theory as applied in the present study to identify how the intersemiotic translator has recreated the work similarly or differently from the original tale and what the translator's aim is in reshaping it in the way he or she has done it. Thus, there is a gap to be filled with regard to the study of "Puteri Gunung Ledang" as an intersemiotic translation given the fact that this folktale has been constantly recreated in many different semiotic forms in Malaysia.

In this study, the authors aim to explore the intersemiotic translation of the timeless Malay folktale, "Puteri Gunung Ledang" or "The Princess of Mount Ledang" (also known as "The Princess of Mount Ophir") in the form of batik paintings by the renowned painter Mohamed Abdullah @ Mat Dollah (n.d). The two specific objectives of this study are to identify the variant and invariant features in Mat Dollah's representation of the folktale by comparing his batik paintings to its original written account and investigate Mat Dollah's skopos or purpose for recreating the folktale in his batik paintings in the ways that he has represented it. Six selected batik paintings of the folktale are analysed using multimodality approaches by Kress and van Leeuwen, including visual grammar, viewer networks, and modality (2006), social actor representations (van Leeuwen, 2008), and colour (van Leeuwen, 2011), to fulfil the first objective. Transcripts from an email interview with the painter are analysed to fulfil the second objective, and Vermeer's Skopos Theory, first introduced in 1978 (as cited in Vermeer, 1989b), will be used to discuss the overall findings of this study.

The Tale of "Puteri Gunung Ledang"

Amongst the heritage of Malaysia's folktales, the tale of "Puteri Gunung Ledang", also known as the "Princess of Mount Ophir" remains the most iconic in the present day. Immortalised in numerous retellings and adaptations, movies, artwork, poems and stories, the mythical princess was even featured on miniature stamp sheets to commemorate the richness of Malaysia's folk stories in 2014. In all oral renditions and written texts, never has a name been attached to her. Thus, she is synonymously identified with the mountain that she lives on, that is, Gunung Ledang (Mount Ledang or Ophir), which rises 1276 metres high in the southern state of Johor, bordering closely to the historical city, Malacca. Forever linked to the golden era of the Malacca dynasty, she is commonly depicted in literature as the ethereal fairy princess who refused the marriage proposal of a king by setting impossible conditions for him to fulfil; these conditions included building a golden and silver bridge from Malacca to Gunung Ledang, seven trays filled with hearts of mosquitoes, seven trays filled with hearts of fleas, seven jars filled with maidens' tears, seven jars filled with betel nut juice and a bowl each of the blood of the Sultan and his young son. Her tale is also believed to foreshadow the fall of the Malacca Sultanate in the 16th century.

The earliest documentation of the princess can be found in *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, a travelogue written between 1512 and 1515 (Pires, 1944). The author mentions an "enchanted queen in the hill of Malacca called Gunong Ledang (Gulom Leydam)" (p. 162). In the footnotes, Pires further states that "according to the Malay fable, that Queen Putry, companion of Permicuri, who founded Malacca, withdrew into retirement, and there by magic art remained immortal to the present day" (p. 162). In Godinho de Eredia's book, *Description of Malacca*, originally written in 1613 and reprinted in 1997, Gunung Ledang is referred to as 'Gunoledam' (de Eredia, 1997). De Eredia compares it to Mount Sibilla in Italy, and the Sibyl cave lies at the peak of the mountain. Legend has it that the cave, covered by thick foliage, was home to a Sibyl (a prophetess) who is deemed to be either a sorceress or queen of the underworld and, in a positive light, a fairy or skilled person in medicine. He likens the Putry to Erichtho, a Thessalian witch in Roman literature who is believed to be a character created by Ovid in the classical Greek period.

The location of the cave where the princess abides is hidden by thick bamboo thickets which produce melodious sounds, and a grove nearby where the trees bear all types of delicious fruits, and here, the birds sing harmonious songs. The surrounding forest is occupied by tigers, which are said to be the guardian of the princess. The princess herself is said to have the power to transform herself at will into a young or old woman and even take animal forms. De Eredia writes that this "must be a fairytale. but the natives regard it as true: ...where the wild Banuas learn the magic arts...and they hear voices which reveal the medicinal virtues of plants and herbs...for this communication, they drink a potion that allows them to communicate with the Putry (Princess) who is a magician and sorceress ...who can change from the form of a woman to that of animals and birds..." (p. 40).

Winstedt (1982) in *The Malay Magician being Shaman, Saiva and Sufi* writes that the princess has the ability to change her appearance according to the time of the day; in the morning, she appears as a girl, in the afternoon as a woman and at night as an old lady. Another version of the legend tells how the princess, disguised as an old hag, carries a cat and a bag of saffron and asks boatmen for a ride. If her request is denied, the boat gets stranded, and if she is taken aboard, it moves smoothly. As payment, the boatman is given a piece of saffron that turns to gold in his hands.

One other version of this popular folktale involves the legendary figure of Nakhoda Ragam, a dashing seafarer with a talent for singing. Although historically, there is very little documentation about him, his persona appears in folktales across Asia, even linking him to be Sultan Bolikiah, the fifth Sultan of Brunei. Maxwell (1997), in *Notes and Queries*, provides an anecdote of Nakhoda Ragam and the princess who is supposedly his wife. One day, while they were in his ship's cabin, he playfully tickled her ribs while she was sewing. Taken by surprise, she accidentally pricked him, and he bled to death on the cabin floor. The princess then takes a cloth and covers his body for one night and two days, fearful of being caught by Nakhoda Ragam's crew members. When the crew members realised that their captain was dead, each of the men wanted to take the beautiful princess as his wife. Fearing for her safety, the princess donned her fairy garments and flew to Mount Ophir, vowing never to marry anyone again.

In the translated version of *The Epic of Hang Tuah*, written between 1641 and 1739, the princess is depicted as the child of the king of Malacca and Raden Emas (as cited in Muhammad Haji Salleh, 2011). Puteri Gunung Ledang was the name that the king bestowed upon his child. Towards the end of the text, the king abdicated the throne to pursue a spiritual life, and the princess became the ruler of Malacca. Under her rule, Malacca reached the height of its golden age; there was much peace, and trading thrived as she ruled with “justice and generosity towards all her subjects, and likewise towards all the foreign merchants and scholars” (Muhammad Haji Salleh, 2011, p. 527). All this came to an end with the invasion of the Portuguese. The author narrates that the princess fled with her maids in the middle of the night, may have gotten lost in the forest and eventually became the Queen of the Batak people, a tribe of indigenous people in the Philippines.

Despite the numerous versions of this story, scholars believe that the documentation of this tale in *Sejarah Melayu* or *The Malay Annals* (1612) is the oldest account of "Puteri Gunung Ledang". Winstedt (1938) states in the preface of his article, *The Malay Annals of Sejarah Melayu*, that “Raffles MS 18 is in fact the Goa history and was written before 1536 AD”, thus making it the oldest and the most original copy of the *Sejarah Melayu* (*Malay Annals*). He cites evidence pertaining to dates, authorship and historical events and concludes that Raffles MS 18 was rewritten and compiled from an older manuscript written by a Malacca man who lived in the court of Sultan Mahmud but managed to evade being captured by the Portuguese in 1511 and therefore was able to continue writing till 1535. Muhammad Haji Salleh (as cited in Tun, 2009) also cites Blagden (1925) who concurs with Winstedt that Raffles MS 18 is the oldest copy of the annals, “It looks therefore as if this variant is genuine document, not far removed in date from the time when the main body of the work was composed” (p. xix). After transcribing and completing a new romanisation of Raffles MS 18, based on his research, Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail similarly concluded that Winstedt was correct in stating that Raffles MS 18 is the oldest copy of the *Sejarah Melayu* (*Malay Annals*) (Cheah, 2009, p. x).

There are only 2 English translations of the annals; the first translation was written by John Leyden and published posthumously in 1821 by Raffles (as cited in Bastin, 2002). A Malay scribe named Ibrahim copied it and explained the meaning to Leyden who then "wrote down what he seems to have considered as worthy of notice" (Low, 1849, p. 20). The other translation by Brown (1952) is a direct translation from Raffles MS 18 which has been established as the oldest copy of the annals. Although Leyden's translation predates Brown's (1952), it is generally considered by scholars as “a very free translation of the Malay text” (Roolvink, 1967, p. 302). Therefore, Brown's English version of the folktale is used as the source text (ST) for this study.

Below is Brown's faithful English translation of the Malay folktale "Puteri Gunung Ledang" in the *Malay Annals* (1952):

MBRAS Reprint 28 *Malay Annals*, translated by C.C. Brown (2009) from MS Raffles No. 18, Vol. 1

One day when Sultan Mansur Shah was seated in the hall of audience in the presence of his chiefs, ministers, courtiers and war-chiefs, he **said to the chiefs**, “We give thanks to the Almighty God that He has graciously vouchsafed to us a great kingdom, but there is one thing we still would fain have: **if we may ask it of God, we desire to have a wife who shall surpass the wife of any prince in the world.**” And the chiefs replied, “Is there one to be found such as your Highness desires? Your Highness already has wedded a princess of Java and a princess of China. Could there be better than that? For in the days of yore it was only Raja Iskandar Dzul'l-Karnain that had a daughter of the Raja of China for consort, and now it is none but your Highness that has such a consort.” **Then said Sultan Mansur Shah**, “**For one prince to marry the daughter of another prince – even other Rajas do that: what I desire is a bride such as no other Raja possesses: that is the girl we wish to marry.**” And the chiefs replied, “May it please your Highness to give the command that we may carry it out.” “**We desire,**” **said Sultan Mansur Shah**, “**to ask for the hand of the Princess of Gunong Ledang,** and we appoint the Laksamana and Sang Stia to go on our behalf.” And the Laksamana and Sang Stia said, “Very well, your Highness.” Tun Mamad was commanded to accompany them, taking with him men of Indragiri to clear the path, as Tun Mamad was headman of the people of Indragiri. The Laksamana and Sang Stia then set on the journey accompanied by Tun Mamad. And after some days, they reached

the foot of Gunong Ledang and began the ascent of the mountain. And when they were about half way up, a wind arose so strong that they could climb no further and the path itself became exceedingly difficult. And Tun Mamad said to the Laksamana and Sang Stia. "Stay here, sir, all of you, while I go up." And when the Laksamana had agreed Tun Mamad went ahead with two or three men who were good walkers and continued the ascent with them. And when they approached the 'singing bamboos', the climbers felt as though they were going to be blown away, so strong was the wind: the clouds seemed so close as to be within their reach: and so sweet was the music of the 'singing bamboos' that birds on the wing stopped to listen to it and every creature that heard it was enchanted. Tun Mamad came upon a garden. He entered it and found four women there. One of them, who was old but still handsome and wore round her shoulders a cloth for carrying asked Tun Mamad who he was and of what country. ***And Tun Mamad answered, "I am a man of Malaka and I have been sent here by Sultan Mansur Shah to ask for the hand of the Princess of Gunong Ledang in marriage.*** But you, lady, what is your name?" And she replied, "My name is Dang Raya Rani, and I am the guardian of the Princess of Gunong Ledang. Wait here for me while I acquaint the Princess with what you have told me." After saying this Dang Raya Rani and the women with her vanished from sight. Presently there appeared an old woman, bent double with age and she said to Tun Mamad, ***"All that you have said, sir, has been related by Dang Raya to the Princess of Gunong Ledang, who says, "If the Raja of Malaka desire me, let him make for me a bridge of gold and a bridge of silver from Malaka to Gunong Ledang: and for a betrothal gift let there be seven trays of mosquitos' hearts, seven trays of mites' hearts, a vat of young areca-nut water, a vat of tears, a cup of the Raja's blood and a cup of his son's blood. On these conditions I approve the request of the Raja of Malaka."*** After she had thus spoken she vanished from sight. According to the account we have received the old woman who spoke with Tun Mamad was the Princess of Gunong Ledang herself in disguise.

Tun Mamad then went down from the place and returned to the Laksamana and Sang Stia to whom he told all that the Princess of Gunong Ledang had said. The Laksamana and his companions then descended Gunong Ledang to return to Malaka, which they reached after a while. ***Then the Laksamana, Sang Stia and Tun Mamad presented themselves before Sultan Mansur and related to him the message that they had received from the Princess of Gunong Ledang. And Sultan Mansur Shah said, "All that she demands we can provide, save only the blood of our son; that we cannot provide, for our heart would not suffer us to take it."***

God knoweth the truth. To Him do we return.

(The researcher has added emphasis to highlight the pursuit of the princess by the King and her refusal by making impossible demands)

The following section provides background information on the translator and the selected target texts (TT) in this study i.e., Mat Dollah's batik paintings.

Mat Dollah and His Batik Paintings of "Puteri Gunung Ledang"

Popularly known as Mat Dollah, Mohamed bin Abdullah was born in 1959 in Singapore. He later moved to Malaysia with his parents and went to Indonesia to continue his studies in the fine arts. He graduated from the Institute of Fine Art (ISI) in Yogyakarta and subsequently participated in many group exhibitions throughout Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, and Canada. Mat Dollah's favourite medium is batik, and he specialises in batik painting. Dollah sees batik as a creative medium which symbolises both art and craft. Batik painting has its roots in Java, Indonesia, where batik art was practised for centuries using wax and dyes as major techniques and applications. It is a unique process which allows the artist to experiment with a range of techniques as exemplified by Mat Dollah. The technique he uses is the hot wax dots technique. Batik painting is a labour of passion for Mat Dollah; he spends about 8 hours each day working on a painting, taking a time span of 4-6 weeks for each work. In general, Mat Dollah's batik paintings focus on everyday life, relating to his personal life experiences or depicting the local folktales.

The series of batik paintings, which is based on the narrative of "Puteri Gunung Ledang", spans nearly two decades. It was inspired by his real-life experience of being lost all alone in the jungles of Mount

Ledang for two weeks during a hiking trip there with his friends. He states that these paintings are a visual recording of his experiences at that time and what he believes to be his personal encounter with the mystical princess. These artworks highlight the flora and fauna of the mountain with the focus always being the princess. The entirety of each batik painting has intricate details and is filled with multi-coloured hues, lending his artwork a quality of fantastical surrealism. In this article, six of his batik paintings will be analysed as the intersemiotic target texts (TT) depicting the folktale in different ways. The batik paintings are: "Sembah Salam" or "Paying Respects", "Ku Bawa Lari Puteri Gunung Ledang" or "Eloping with the Princess of Mount Ledang", "Puteri Gunung Ledang Melukis Potret Ku" or "Princess of Mount Ledang is Drawing my Portrait", "Menghibur Puteri" or "Entertaining the Princess", "Aku Dan Dia" or "Me and Her" and "Puteri di Pinggir Gunung" or "Princess at the Mountain Edge".

In 2015, Mat Dollah had to temporarily stop painting as he underwent surgery due to oesophageal cancer. Two years later, he started painting again. In 2019, he participated in a show organised by the Maybank Group's art exhibition, "Painting Batik: An Exhibition and Tribute" (Maybank Foundation, 2019) to honour the late batik pioneer Wan Nong Abdul Rahman, his close friend. It was also aimed at reintroducing the uniqueness of Malaysian batik to the public. His works that were displayed at the exhibition were "Desa Di Pinggir Rimba" or "Village at the Fringes of the Forest", "Puteri Di Pinggir Gunung" or "Princess at the Mountain Edge", "Puteri Duyung Pulang Senja" and "Tuah and Teja". Mat Dollah is one of the last remaining artists who is dedicated to keeping the art of batik painting alive in Malaysia.

Theoretical Framework and Methodological Approach

The data for this study were analysed using a multimodal approach. Using this method, the ST and TT were compared solely to identify aspects of the tale that the translator has chosen to retain, amplify, omit, or add. These parameters were set to identify the variant (i.e., features and themes that do not exist in the original tale) and invariant core (i.e., features and themes in the original narrative) in the *translatum*, i.e., the batik paintings. An interview via email correspondence was also carried out to understand the translation process and the translator's purpose in creating these paintings, which relates to Vermeer's Skopos Theory, first introduced in 1978 (as cited in Vermeer, 1989b).

The Multimodal Approach

Intersemiotic translations which employ a range of either singular or mixed visual semiotic modes require different methods and tools to analyse translators' mediating behaviour, intent, and decision-making processes. In their groundbreaking publication, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006 [1996]) offer a method of social semiotic analysis of visual communication termed multimodality. In their follow-up seminal book, *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) explain multimodality as "the use of several semiotic modes and their combination within a socio-cultural domain which results in a semiotic product or event" (p. 20).

The roots of multimodality lie in Halliday's (1978) systematic functional linguistics, an approach that considers language as a social-semiotic system. For Halliday, language is functional as it has evolved to primarily help human beings to fulfil specific functions in specific settings and situations. He postulates that language has three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. In multimodality, these metafunctions, which are mainly for verbal language, has been extended to include other modes of communication, such as music, advertisements, plays, still images and sculptures. All modes are, therefore, treated as being similar in their meaning-making strategies in multimodality as "common semiotic principles operate in and across different modes" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 2).

In this study, Mat Dollah's paintings have been analysed in correlation to the three aspects of metafunctions as defined by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006 [1996]). Firstly, at the ideational level, image analysis includes "identifying both the participants in the image and the circumstances between the participants" (p. 42). Secondly, at the interpersonal level, image analysis is done by "identifying the

presumed relationships between the creator of the image, its viewer, and the participants in the image... this will be examined at three levels which are eye contact, size of frame (close shot, medium shot, long shot) and perspective" (p. 42 - 43, pp. 116 - 129). The final analysis will be compositional analysis which will "identify the composition of the image, the colour(s) and the relative sizes of the participants and their positioning (up, down, left, right, centre) in relation to the other participants" (p. 43, pp. 177 - 179).

Using the multimodal approach as an analysis tool aids especially in understanding the role, visibility, and to some extent, the intention of the translators. This adds another level of depth to translation studies, especially where non-verbal translation work is involved. However, as this study uses a combination of theories and frameworks, multimodal analysis is applied only in relevance to the two main objectives of this study, which are to identify the variant and invariant features in Mat Dollah's representation of the folktale and to identify the translator's skopos or purpose for recreating the folktale in his batik paintings. Hence, only selected dimensions of the multimodal approach related to the research objectives are used to answer these queries.

Vermeer's Skopos Theory

Vermeer's key contribution to translation theory centres on the Greek word "skopos", which is "a technical term for the aim and purpose of a translation" (Venuti, 2012, p. 191). He postulates that the act of translation is in itself an action (translational action), and an action is propelled by an aim or purpose. Furthermore, as "an action leads to a result, a new situation or event, and possibly to a new object", Vermeer clearly indicates that the "target text or the resulting translated text, also known as a *translatum*, can be non- verbal" (ibid). This statement confirms that Skopos theory applies to all forms of translation – interlingual, intralingual and intersemiotic.

Vermeer's Skopos theory is founded on the combination of action theory, communication theory and cultural anthropology; the underlying principle is that translation is an act of communication. There is a shift where importance is moved from the ST and placed onto the TT; the function or purpose of the TT is the criteria that determines the trajectory of the translation. Vermeer's definition of function refers to "what a text means or is intended to mean from the receiver's point of view" (Nord, 2001, p. 28). Thus, the intended audience is given primary importance as Vermeer states that every translation is directed at an intended audience, since "to translate" means "to produce a text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstances" (Nord, 2001, p. 12). Munday (2016) concurs with this, stating that "the form and genre of the TT must be guided by what is functionally suitable in the TT culture, rather than by merely copying the ST profile" (p. 125). Nord (2001) further surmises that by following these terms, the translation process then becomes irreversible since the ST and TT are seen as "offers of information" (p. 32) whereby translators select certain information and process them to provide a new offer of information, and the target audience in turn selects what they think is meaningful for them, in their situations. Intersemiotic translations are, therefore, representations of information purposefully selected by translators and creatively reconstructed to be functionally suitable for the intended target audience.

Vermeer also postulates that the basic rule in Skopos theory is that translation methods and strategies are determined by the purpose of the target text. From this, he comes up with the "Skopos rule", which is, in his words, stated below.

The Skopos rule thus reads as follows: translate, interpret, speak or write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function (Nord, 2001, p. 29).

Apart from the "Skopos rule", there are two other general rules: the "coherence rule" and the "fidelity rule". The former states that the target text must be translated in such a way that it is coherent enough to allow the target audience to understand it based on their background knowledge and the situation they are in. The latter pertains to the intertextual coherence between the source and target text, which

maintains that there must be some degree of intertextual coherence that has to exist between the source and target text after the "Skopos rule" and "coherence rule" have been fulfilled.

Skopos theory is not without criticisms, which range from not enough attention being given to the linguistic aspect of the source text to the fear that the importance of the source text has been downgraded or "dethroned" as termed by Vermeer himself (Munday, 2016, p.128). The maxim "the end justifies the means" is also seen as a leeway in justifying translators' arbitrariness which propelled Nord (1997) to introduce the concept of loyalty to Skopos theory to balance the arbitrariness. Despite the disparagements, Vermeer's Skopos theory still stands today as a functional approach and tool that provides insight into translators' working processes and strategies while immersed in complex and dynamic cultural environments. One main achievement of Skopos theory and functionalism is to take the translating and interpreting profession seriously. It has made academics rethink the act of translation and the role of translators in the translational action from new angles.

The main strength of Skopos theory lies in its validation that a text can be translated into multiple versions based on a range of translational purposes serving specific functions. Depending on a translational purpose, any written work can be represented in the form of still images, artefacts via varied modes of art and technology and contemporary performances or in the reverse. Intersemiotic translation, like the conventional interlingual, is carried out as per the purpose and commission negotiated between the client and the translator (if it is a commissioned work) or as a self-initiative driven by a certain purpose with a factoring in of the audience's culture, their expectations, and communicative needs in the translation process. As exemplified in this article, Mat Dollah's batik paintings depict an artistic transformation that differs from the original written narrative in several aspects and maintains a degree of semblance to the folktale. Thus, intersemiotic translations, which markedly operate on the tenets of Skopos theory (a specific translational purpose and the selection of information relevant to fulfil that purpose), go beyond the limitations of traditional translation approaches, making it a rich source of interdisciplinary research.

The following section of this article analyses and discusses Mat Dollah's selected batik paintings using the framework explained above.

Analysis

The Princess

Out of the six batik paintings selected, only one painting is closely linked to the ST. Figure 1, titled "*Sembah Salam*" or "*Paying Respects*", is the only artwork in this series where the princess is portrayed regally in her full attire as befitting a princess.

Figure 1

"Sembah Salam" (Paying Respects)



Note. Courtesy of Mat Dollah. From *The batik paintings of Mat Dollah* [Facebook page], by Mat Dollah, n.d. <https://www.facebook.com/matdollahbatik>

She is the main social actor in action, granting an audience to the king's emissaries who are kneeling in deference to her. At the ideational level, the social gap between the participants, i.e., the emissaries and the princess, is evident. Her role is that of a powerful princess while the emissaries represent the common man. The verbal cue in the title of this painting, "Sembah Salam" or "Paying Respects", further signals the audience to the power play between the participants in this painting. At the interpersonal level, the social distancing is a long shot as the image of the princess is shown in full figure. However, the angle of the figure is facing outwards towards the viewers, but the gaze is directed towards one of the emissaries, not directly at the viewers of the painting. This is an offer image showing the participants as objects of the viewers' scrutiny.

The importance of the princess in this visual episode can be deciphered by applying compositional analysis. The placement of the princess is in the centre against the golden hues of the foliage and the lush greenery of the forest, making her look resplendent. The other two participants are placed in a submissive position, paying obeisance to her, thus disempowering them. Their gaze is fixated only on the princess, and their body position is turned away from the viewers. With the combination of all these features of the deep-toned green and sharp gold background, her regal standing position as well as the formal costume and headdress, the princess exudes a sense of supremacy and authority. This idea is further enforced by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006 [1996]) who state that at the interpersonal level, the vertical positioning of the main figure signifies power. There is also a clear distance between her and the viewers, reinforcing a sense of detachment. The translator's message, i.e., Mat Dollah's, to the viewer is understood: the princess is at a level where she is beyond the reach of mere mortals.

In the ST, the beauty and regal air of the princess, although not mentioned in words, is alluded to when the sultan states that he desires "to have a wife who shall surpass the wife of any prince in the world (lines 4-5) ... what I desire is a bride such as no other Raja possesses (lines 10-11)". This event is linked to the ST as the moment in which one of the sultan's emissaries successfully scales Mount Ledang despite many obstacles and ends up in the garden on top of the mountain. However, in the ST, he does not meet the princess but an old lady (who is believed to be the princess in disguise). Here, Mat Dollah, in the role of a creative translator, has taken the liberty to change the plot of the original tale and has also amplified the image of the princess to fit the idea of a woman who far surpasses any other woman as a choice of bride for a king.

Romancing the Princess

Figure 2

"Ku Bawa Lari Puteri Gunung Ledang" (Eloping with Puteri Gunung Ledang)



Note. Courtesy of Mat Dollah

Figure 3

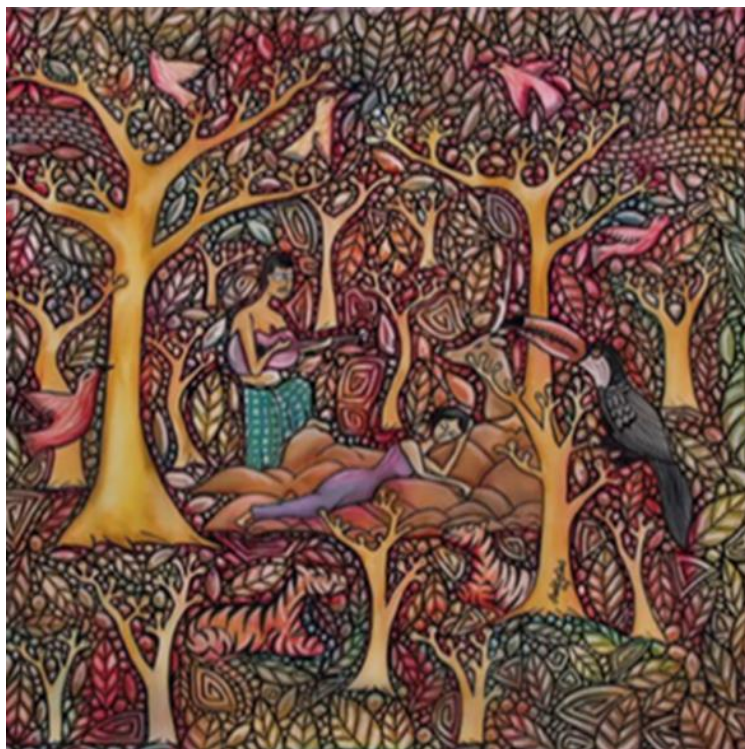
“Puteri Gunung Ledang Melukis Potret Ku” (Puteri Gunung Ledang is Drawing my Portrait)



Note. Courtesy of Mat Dollah

Figure 4

“Menghibur Puteri” (Entertaining the Princess)



Note. Courtesy of Mat Dollah

Figure 5

"Aku Dan Dia" (Me and Her)



Note. Courtesy of Mat Dollah

In the four batik paintings above, "Ku Bawa Lari Puteri Gunung Ledang" or "Eloping with Puteri Gunung Ledang", "Puteri Gunung Ledang Melukis Potret Ku" or "Puteri Gunung Ledang is Drawing my Portrait", "Menghibur Puteri" or "Entertaining the Princess", and "Aku dan Dia" or "Me and Her", the artist has interestingly included himself in the narrative of the artwork. Sanusi (2003, slide 7), in the catalogue slideshow presentation of Mat Dollah's work, expounds that these paintings are representative of "the universal theme of male adolescence fantasy as the artist harbours profound longing (*kerinduan*) for the object of desire, namely "Puteri Gunung Ledang", who embodies the attributes of perfection and beauty". There is also an autobiographically element here as the artist reminisces the period in his life where he was lost in the jungles of Mount Ledang for two weeks. This explains his inclusion in these paintings.

The verbal cues given in the title highlight the shared activities that both the social actors are engaged in. Figures 2, 3 and 4 are long shots, as the full figures of the participants are visible. There is no eye contact with the viewers, thus implying a social impersonal connection with the observers. This also makes it an offer image as none of the participants gazes at the viewers. These paintings narrate a tale of a lover and his beloved being engrossed in their personal activities, and we, as the observers, view these events as outsiders. In Figure 2, the princess and the artist are depicted sitting on an animal, most probably a buffalo, making their way through the thick undergrowth, protected under a canopy of trees with crooked, ribbed bodies in a dense green jungle. The romance element is clearly depicted in the title as it is made known that the artist and the princess are eloping, hinting that this might be a forbidden romance. The figures are small, enveloped by the trees. The choice of monochromatic colours, muted green with hints of yellow interspaced with white, allows them to blend into the background as they make their escape – this perhaps is symbolic of an escape from reality for the artist.

In Figure 3, although the artist is absent in the frame, upon close observation, the viewer can see that the figure on the easel whom the princess is drawing is Mat Dollah. The positioning of the princess at the right represents new information, a novel idea that the viewer is unfamiliar with. This information value raises disbelief in the viewers at what appears to be a surrealistic situation. The princess is the sole social participant here, sitting cross-legged at an angle where only a side view of her body is presented to the viewer. The princess appears engrossed in painting the artist, suggesting that she is as besotted with him as he is with her. Once again, the curved trees offer her protection, with the addition of an entourage of animals, such as a white elephant and birds. She is in her element, and the forest is her home and ever-protective guardian. The setting of this painting suggests late evening, transitioning to night as the background is black, but in terms of modality, the bright colouring of the trees contrast against this background. Painted in varying shades of yellow, brown, and white, the trees emerge to the forefront, enveloping the entire scene with a golden light and thereby evoking a magical, mystical sense of the forest.

In "Menghibur Puteri" or "Entertaining the Princess" (Figure 4), viewers are presented with a surrealistic scene where the artist has painted himself as a lover serenading his beloved to sleep as she rests undisturbed under the shade of the soft multi-coloured foliage in her beloved jungle. Pink birds are seen perching on the branches with the exception of a large-beaked black bird positioned at the bottom-right, which according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006 [1996]), represents real and factual information. Viewers' attention is brought to this particular object which is nearer in proximity as opposed to the social actors who are presented in a long shot. In terms of modality, the pragmatic depiction and placement of the bird contrasts sharply with the fanciful scene presented in the background of the artist clad in a *sarong* (a garment consisting of a long piece of cloth worn wrapped around the body and tucked at the waist), wearing spectacles, and playing the guitar. The entire scene evokes a sense of disorientation as the realism of the bird imagery is juxtaposed against the surrealism of the romantic scenario in the background.

In "Aku Dan Dia" or "Me and Her" (Figure 5), an aptly named artwork which was painted more than a decade later, the social actors are depicted in an idyllic setting. Contrasting with his earlier works, this is done in a medium shot where the participants are depicted from the waist-up, indicating social distance. Their positioning is at the frontal angle. Although they are sitting in the boat and their bodies are facing the front, their faces are turned fully to look directly at viewers. This type of gaze makes this a demand image with the aim to send a message to the observers. It can be interpreted as a gesture that draws the reality of the outsider's world into the surrealistic world of the artwork. The relationship between the loved and the beloved is under scrutiny for all to see. In terms of modality and salience, the contrast of sharp, vivid colours in shades of blue-green, brown, yellow, and purple of the perfectly shaped trees and undergrowth results in a psychedelic explosion of colours. In all the six paintings, the jungle remains as a majestic kingdom and the enthralling abode of the princess surrounding her with watchfulness. There is a burst of abundance that fills this painting with not only the rainbow-coloured trees but also the plentiful fish that swim in the river the princess is travelling on. The two white elephants aligned in position with the princess and the artist in the boat presents a striking image in comparison to the other animals in the painting. The elephant, regardless of its colour, is regarded as "a symbol of greatness and nobility", "magical and mystical" (Ismail et al., 2016, p. 149) in the Malay culture. In South-east Asia, the white elephant signifies royalty and good fortune. Mat Dollah's choice of white implies purity and rarity of the relationship he imagines with the princess in this painting.

The Princess Alone

Figure 6

“Puteri di Pinggir Gunung” (Princess at the Mountain Edge)



Note. Courtesy of Mat Dollah

Figure 6 is a long shot where a miniature size of the princess is dwarfed by the trees that surround her. She is standing at a distance, merging into the background while gazing at viewers. The colour saturation is heavy; the jungle and the princess are painted in varying tones of brownish-yellow. The bright, blue sky which contrasts with the muted light green background offers an illusion of hope in an otherwise dull and disheartening situation. One of the last paintings in this series, the princess is bereft without her beloved. The jungle and the inhabitants, which have been a source of comfort in the earlier paintings, are now depicted as a place of entrapment. As highlighted by the title, the princess is standing at the edge of the mountain; barren trees engulf her while piranha-like fish bear their teeth at the lower end of the painting. Cutting a forlorn and lonely figure, her presence in this artwork may even be missed as her image blends in with the earth-coloured hue of the jungle. Viewers are drawn into the princess's world and cannot help but wonder about the reason for her predicament. This batik painting evokes a profound sense of loneliness, which leaves viewers feeling disturbed. It also strongly suggests the artist's feelings of helplessness; it projects Mat Dollah's frustrated inability to break through a formidable archenemy, the jungle, which jealously guards the princess against the outside world.

The inclusion of fantastical elements in the visual translations of this folktale, such as the presence of the artist in the paintings, in close proximity with the princess as her companion, is in direct contradiction with the narrative of the folktale. In the ST, the princess has no male companion on Mount Ledang and is not interested in any suitor as shown in the manner she spurns the king's marriage proposal by setting the seven preposterous demands. She is the personification of that which is unattainable. However, by depicting her to be like any other woman in the company of her loved one in Figures 2-6, unlike his earlier work in Figure 1 where the princess is presented in a position of power,

Mat Dollah has made her seem less magical and mystical. In terms of modality, this makes viewers rethink if these visual representations are real or fictional, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) theorise that in visual communication, something can be represented as if it exists although it does not, which is that fiction can be presented as fact.

In his interview, Mat Dollah (personal communication, August 12, 2022) states that the aim or *skopos* of translating this folktale into batik painting stems primarily from his need to visualise his personal experience of being lost on Mount Ledang. He explains, "The idea of painting this 'Puteri Gunung Ledang' series started when I got lost while hiking with my two other friends. I was lost alone for two weeks with some mysterious and strange things happening to me. Even though I could hear people calling my name, I couldn't answer their calls as if something was blocking my voice from being heard". He continues, "The strangest thing I experienced was seeing the natural beauty of Puteri Gunung Ledang herself". Since then, it was "the awe and beauty of that experience" which was a life-changing event that led him to paint all that he had heard and seen in those two weeks on Mount Ledang. He then decided to depict folk tales into batik art to "to tell everyone about [the] many mysterious things that we do not know exist in this vast world".

Mat Dollah's creations are done without any specific audience in mind, and neither is it a commissioned work. He reiterates in the interview that these series of paintings are driven by a personal intention "to fulfil my own demands in translating my experience of staying for two weeks in a mysterious world that I myself did not understand, [they are] an expression of my soul that drives me to do it and share my experience with others". His translational work, therefore, is an avenue for him to make sense of and come to terms with his experience on Mount Ledang. Given the fact that his translations are tied with mysticism and the surreal, he is aware that there are as many critics of his work as those who support him. However, this does not daunt him as he says that he does not care about the critics. He reiterates his stand that "he doesn't make art for them, but he makes art about what he has experienced in life".

Mat Dollah maintains that Figure 1 is painted based on, in his words, "my conscious vision of the communication between Puteri Gunung Ledang and one of the Melaka *hulubalang* [warrior] who came to convey the news to Puteri Gunung Ledang about the desire of the Sultan of Melaka to propose to Puteri Gunung Ledang. The colour scheme was like what I saw at the time". He further states that he uses the batik medium as it is "widely used in the mysterious realm...almost all their clothes and art are made using the batik technique with beautiful colors from leaves and tree roots". His batik paintings are detailed, vivid and filled with colours, especially the background; however, none of this is found in the ST which is non-descriptive of the colours of the environment the princess was a part of.

The modality of Mat Dollah's paintings is almost child-like, simplistic, and naive in nature which subscribes to the stylistic expression of what is termed as Outsider Art. This type of art is often associated with children's art, folk art, and primitivism. The history of this art style goes back to 1945, when Jean Dubuffet founded a new art category which he termed as Outsider Art or Art Brut, "a unique art niche characterised by supposedly authentic art objects created outside of the cultural influence of an academic art tradition" (as cited in Dapena-Tretter, 2017, p. 12). Thus, the work of the artist who chooses to use this style is "pure or authentic artworks born outside the clutches of cultural influence" (ibid). It comes from a personal reserve deep within them as the worldview of the "Outsider" artist differs from the conventional perspectives of the world.

In terms of the invariant core, the one constant aspect of the ST which is retained in the intersemiotic versions of these batik paintings is the figure of the princess. She is one of the main characters in the ST. The other aspect of the narrative which has been kept by Mat Dollah is the richness of the flora and fauna of Mount Ledang, which is alluded to from lines 23 – 27 in the ST in the form of "singing bamboos" and "a garden" (C.C. Brown, 1952) which the king's emissary hears and sees when he reaches the mountain peak. As for the variant features, in terms of characters, all other characters in the ST, i.e., the king, courtiers and people of Malacca, have been omitted in the visual representation. Mat Dollah, in the role of the translator has taken the liberty of adding a new character in the visual representations, which is himself in the role of a lover who is besotted with his beloved. Thus, with the exclusion of the king and the addition of a new love interest, a new narrative has been created. The theme of desire

which pervades the original tale is repeated here, the difference being that the princess has now become the object of desire of another in an entirely different time and space. While in the ST, Puteri Gunung Ledang is the hard-to-be won princess whom the powerful Sultan of Malacca seeks to make Queen, in the batik paintings, she is a woman in the jungle who has become the artist's fantastical passion as he imagines eloping with her in Figure 2, being the object of focus for the princess as she draws him in Figure 3, soothing her with songs and watching over her as she sleeps in Figure 4. Due to this, the viewers of Mat Dollah's paintings possibly oscillate between belief and non-belief as the new narrative with the additional element of romance with the artist indicates that reality and fantasy are continuously interwoven in the visual representations of the tale. The setting which is the jungle on Mount Ledang is also another invariant core as it is highlighted in both the ST and TT as the home of the princess. The mountain and the princess are inseparable in both the ST and the batik paintings of Mat Dollah.

When compared to other notable intersemiotic translations of the same folktale, such as Sharmiza Abu Hassan's series of three-dimensional works from the exhibition *Alegori Ledang* (2004), Syed Thajudeen's mural, *Eternal Love between Hang Tuah and Puteri Gunung Ledang* (2016) and Foo May Lyn's artworks and exhibits titled *10 000 Mosquito Hearts* (2019), Mat Dollah's work differs from the rest as he is the only artist to include himself in the paintings. He presents a translated narrative of the folktale where his visual imagery mimics language as it "serves a particular set of purposes (recording or construction of histories, myths, interactions, etc...)" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006 [1996], p. 19). Thus, from his perspective, his series of artworks is a document which records his experience, events, and things that he saw in the two weeks that he was lost in the jungle. This distinctiveness sets him apart from the other artists who have produced translations of this folktale.

Conclusion

An aspect that stands out in the comparative analysis of this study is that there is an identifiable motif in both the ST (the written account of the folktale in the 1612 *Sejarah Melayu* or *The Malay Annals*, as cited in Leyden, 2012) and TT (the batik paintings), which is the theme of desire. A parallelism can be traced; in the ST, the princess is the object of the king's desire, and in the TT, there is a shift as she becomes the artist's object of affection. The three invariant features, which are the presence of the princess or female protagonist, the presence of the mountain forest as the main setting and the theme of an unappeased desire in the original prose narrative and Mat Dollah's batik paintings, fulfil the fidelity rule of Skopos Theory as the batik paintings express a degree of loyalty to the original tale in preserving three core aspects of the folktale.

As for the variant features, the intersemiotic representations in Mat Dollah's batik paintings dramatise the encounter between the lover (the artist) and the beloved (the princess). The fusing of reality with fantasy suggests that internally, the artist is grappling with that which is unattainable. There is a constant craving for a fantastical embodiment (the princess) which is impossible to be fulfilled in reality. The princess of Mount Ledang continues to be the symbol of the unreachable dream of perfection in love, beauty and power expressed with subtle implicitness in the ST and with emotional incision in the last batik painting (Figure 5) where she stands alone, only to be possessed by her mountain and none other. In the ST, the princess is triumphant in spurning the king's proposal, thereby establishing her own sense of identity and power. In Mat Dollah's rendition (Figure 5), the princess appears to stand as an ordinary woman (as opposed to her regal form in Figure 1), small, lost and defeated by the overbearing force of the mountain forest. It also implies the defeat of the artist to release her from the powers of the mountain.

Essentially, Mat Dollah uses his role as an artist-translator to create intersemiotic translations of the "Puteri Gunung Ledang" with the sole purpose to comprehend a mystical experience that he once had. The experience of standing on Mount Ledang and roaming its jungle was real. The clash between the real experience and the fanciful in the artist creates a dissonance which is then bridged in the paintings. Through the act of translation, the artist is momentarily able to be with the object of his desire, achieving a resolution for his needs and cravings, which is a cathartic healing.

On a broader scale, this research has given insight into the role translators play in intersemiotic translations and the reasons for the translation strategies opted by translators. This then ties in with their aim or purpose of producing the translated works. Furthermore, as there is insufficient research which

has used Skopos theory in literary translations and almost non-existent studies pertaining to intersemiotic translations of Asian folktales, this study adds on to the existing studies on Malaysian folktales from a novel angle using both translation theory and interdisciplinary methods for systematic analysis. Additionally, this work also contributes to creating an awareness of the importance of local folktales as a cultural and historical legacy. From an academic perspective, this study further demonstrates that there is a rich source of untapped data that can be used by future researchers in the form of local folktales. These folktales have the potential of not only being studied from a translation approach but also from various interdisciplinary aspects, thereby contributing not only to the linguistic field but also to other areas of studies.

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